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*Servolution*

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# THE BEGINNING OF A SERVOOLUTION FORTY-FIVE TONS OF TEA

I wonder if they knew they were about to spark a revolution. Did they realize that this one evening of action would ignite the fuse for the American Revolution? Did they have any idea that what they were doing would alter history as they knew it and change the world forever? On December 16, 1773,<sup>1</sup> three hundred Sons of Liberty marched onto several tea ships docked in Boston Harbor. As a protest against unfair taxation, they methodically dumped over forty-five tons of British tea into the water. As thousands of colonists cheered them on, I wonder if they understood the significance of their protest.

The Boston Tea Party is a great example of what it takes for a revolution to begin: a clear mission that everyone believes in, people who will not stand for oppression, and leaders who are willing to lay down their lives to initiate change. We see examples of revolutions all throughout the history of the world and hear the testimonies of the brave heroes who gave their lives for their cause.

This book is about revolution. But this is a different kind of revolution—not one fueled by anger, violence, and revolt but one of compassion, love, and service. This revolution has a clear mission to answer the cries of the poor, the hurting, and the forgotten and is made up of revolutionaries willing to lay down their lives to reach out to people in their cities, in their

# SERVOLUTION

nations, and throughout the world. This is a revolution aimed at initiating change, but not by overthrowing a government; this change comes by bringing healing to a hurting world and by loving people to Christ.

We call it a servolution: a significant change in the course of history sparked by simple acts of kindness.

## **What Is a Servolution? (surv-uh-loo'-shuhn)**

- 1. A complete and radical change of a person's life caused by simple acts of kindness for the glory of God.**
- 2. God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.**
- 3. A church revolution through serving.**

I cannot speak for the Sons of Liberty who jump-started the American Revolution, but when our servolution began, DeLynn and I didn't know what kind of impact it would have or the number of people that would be affected. It didn't have a name, and there certainly weren't thousands of onlookers cheering us on. We were just two young people who had an intense desire in our hearts to demonstrate Christ's love to people and to serve hurting families in our community. We believed if we could lead a church with a heartbeat to reach the world by serving one person at a time, something amazing would happen,<sup>2</sup> but we had no idea just how far God would take us.

The purpose of this book is not to lay out a formula for pastors to grow a church or how a Christian can revolutionize his or her life. There is no easy ten-step program to start your servolution. Everyone's path will be unique. And while we have done many things right at Healing Place Church so far, we also have experienced our share of act-now-and-figure-it-out-later moments. There is no perfect equation for anything God calls us to do, but it's always exciting to pursue our destiny in Him!

### SPARKS FLY

One of the initial sparks of this servolution was also one of the most humbling experiences of my life. DeLynn and I had been married just a few years and we were visiting Houston during a major crossroad in our lives. We had recently resigned our position as youth pastors at the church where we met, and had spent several months speaking to churches and youth camps across the country. Although we had been offered quite a few ministry opportunities, we were not settled on exactly where God wanted us to go.

In October of 1993, we found ourselves in the living room of Pastor John Osteen, the founder of Lakewood Church.<sup>3</sup> Pastor Osteen was a legend for many people—including DeLynn and me—and here we were, privileged to visit with him in his home with the family he loved so much. I was asking questions left and right, wanting to learn from this man I respected so much. Then he floored me with a question of his own: “Son, what do you want to do? What has God placed on your heart to do?”

There were so many thoughts and dreams DeLynn and I had been trying to process. At first, I didn’t know what to say. We didn’t have it all sorted out, but I wanted so badly to be able to explain what we were feeling in our hearts. So when I started to answer him, it all just spilled out. It was one of those moments when you don’t even know what you are saying. You’re so full of dreams, ideas, and questions you can’t hold back, and like a dam bursting, the words keep flowing. Finally, I ran out of words to say, having put it all on the line.

I didn’t know how I really expected him to respond. I honestly wasn’t too sure what I had just said, but somehow I hoped he would have some great advice to share with me. Instead, Pastor Osteen simply looked at me. The silence was deafening, and I began to replay it all in my head. *Did I say all that out loud?* Suddenly, I had that bad-dream feeling like I was standing in a spotlight at center court during the opening of the NBA finals wearing only my

boxers. *Oh, man. I don't even want to imagine what Pastor Osteen is thinking right now.*

Then he stood up and walked out of the room. He just got up and left! So I did what any good husband would do in this situation; I passed the buck to my wife. “DeLynn, why didn't you stop me? Give me ‘the look,’ kick my shin, pour your drink on me—*anything!*”

*Man.*

After a three-minute eternity, he came back and surprised me by handing me a check for four hundred dollars. He said, “Here's what you need to do. You need to start a church in Baton Rouge to reach the poor and hurting. Here's the first tith: I'm giving you your first offering.” He had listened to our hearts and had the wisdom to tell us that what DeLynn and I knew deep inside was what God wanted for our lives.

And then, in his own kidding-but-not-really way he told me, “Now if you *don't* start that church, I'm going to come and have you thrown in jail because you stole my money.” I took those words very seriously as I carried that yellow four hundred dollar check signed by John Osteen back to Baton Rouge.

And that was that. DeLynn and I drove home to start a church, not because John Osteen told us to but because he had helped us recognize what God had already put in our hearts, and he had helped us muster the courage to step out and do it.

That simple act of handing us a check changed the course of our history. Looking back, it was one of the sparks that ignited our servolution. It was a God-moment for us. We knew our mission. We had our mandate.

We knew we had some enormous challenges ahead, but we were determined to succeed. Baton Rouge was a community with countless hurting people. It was 1993, and the city was still reeling from several high-profile ministry scandals.<sup>4</sup> Many people had given up on church and, even worse, had given up on God. In addition, Louisiana typically ranks as one of the top states in

nearly every negative category: poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and quality of life.

Our first challenge came the first time I spoke at our new church and twelve people showed up. After I preached, five of them quit. I did the math and figured out if my preaching continued to drop our attendance by 42 percent each service, I had only two more weeks until the place would be empty.

**I did the math and figured out if my preaching continued to drop our attendance by 42 percent each service, I had only two more weeks until the place would be empty.**

Nice.

Needless to say, we were very discouraged, so DeLynn and I decided to drown our sorrows by partaking in each of the thirty-one Baskin Robbins' flavors. Our discouragement didn't last long, though, because somewhere around flavor twenty-seven, we remembered why we had gotten into this in the first place. We knew God had called us to love and help the poor and the hurting, and we resolved that no matter how many people came to (or left) the church, we would not throw in the towel. We were not going to care about the numbers; we would simply do our part to love and serve people, and leave the church growth up to God.

We made a game plan for the week ahead that consisted of one major play: do whatever we can to help the people of our community. It sounds simple enough, but where do you start with something like that? We began to scour the newspapers to find out what was going on in our community. We tried to identify the people no one else was serving or thinking about. What needs were there? Who was being overlooked? Who were others unwilling to serve or just unable to help? As soon as we began looking, it was easy to find people who were ready for a servolution, and we started serving them in any way we could. We contacted organizations

that were having big events and asked if we could help them clean up afterward. We found couples who had just become parents and brought them diapers and formula. We visited elderly people who were sick, and cooked meals for the families of people who were hospitalized. And soon one thing began leading to another.

## SERVE SOMEBODY

Since the church was new and very small, there wasn't much office work to be done. One day, it was only 10:00 a.m. and both items on the day's to-do list were already completed: I had cut the grass at the church and run the weed eater. Instead of simply sitting there, I decided to get to work serving somebody. I read through some cards that visitors to the church had filled out and learned that one of the ladies was a widow and was dying of cancer.

I went to a grocery store, bought a pack of flowers for seven dollars, and then a couple of us drove to her house so we could visit her. We gave her the flowers and told her we loved her. It wasn't anything elaborate, but this simple act of kindness meant the world to her. We sat and talked for quite a while, and as we were leaving, she said, "I have a few friends who are also widows. Would you visit them too?" So the next week we visited four widows, then ten widows the following week, and the number of widows being visited has continued to grow ever since.<sup>5</sup>

Here's what I discovered. Each one of these ladies had a family with needs, ready to be helped. "Can you call my son? He needs to be in church." "Can you call my daughters? They would love to be a part of a church like this." As we served our way into these widows' lives, their worlds opened up to us, along with more people and more opportunities to demonstrate the love of Jesus. The next thing we knew, there were a hundred people in our church, then two hundred, and the number is still growing. The preaching, the music, and the singing were all the same, but we grew because we were committed to serving the people of our community one by one. Our attitude