



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

BALANCE

**Giving God Room to Work:
A Regional Equipping Center
for Christ-focused Life-Transformation
for the Unconnected 1000s.**

Joshua 1:6-9

Dr. Matt Hook

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Yes, there are crazy things happening in the world: politically, militarily, economically, some hitting close to home, some smack dab in the middle of our homes, but while we're in the middle of it, I also believe we're on the edge of something. In some ways, the same place the ancient Israelites found themselves after living 40 years in the wilderness, just after Moses died, and Joshua was appointed leader. God spoke to him, in Joshua 1:6-9:

"6 Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. 8 This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. 9 I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

It was the biggest moment of his life. Moses was dead. The entire nomadic nation of Israel was watching. (Remember they were slaves in Egypt, then nomads in the wilderness for 40 years). And now, God has promised Joshua the land. But it was seemingly impossible. And God says "Rely on My Law, and be strong and a courageous." What do you do? You could say "Hey, I didn't ask for this job!" or "I didn't know I was signing up for this!" or "This is too hard!" or "Pick somebody else, God!" "It wasn't MY idea—it was Moses' faith that got us here!" That's a part of our stories as well.

Do you realize *you* are here in large part because of the faith of others?

Someone, somewhere, had enough courage to give God room to work.

- in their life, in their choices, in their time, in their finances, that enabled this church to begin, to grow, to reach out, and to care for their community.
- None of us are here because we decided to take a walk or we came looking for the Boy Scouts or something.
- I bet some are here because of something that happened 8 months ago.

Who started coming here since last May? Would you stand? How about in the last 2 years? Since 2000? 1990s? 80s? 70s? 60s? 50s?

So what happened last May? On a Tuesday evening, we gathered leaders here in the Sanctuary who prayed and committed themselves to Giving God Room to Work. The following Sunday, the whole church body gathered and made prayerful commitments. Over \$1.5 million dollars was committed. The exciting news is, 8 months later, the church has already received \$631,000 for Giving God Room to Work. (Hallelujah!)

Do you know what that means? In addition to people faithfully giving their gifts and pledges to the church, close to half a million dollars have gone to the retirement of the debt! The building committee is meeting, and a master site plan is being worked on.

Successful people make right decisions early. The tough part is over! Really, like Joshua, our direction was settled several times over, beginning back in 1831 in an early Methodist Class Meeting in Judge Dexter's home, (Gordon Hall). Incorporating in 1832, rebuilding after a fire, building a Christian Ed. Building that's now the Dexter Library, buying Camp Newkirk Boy Scout Camp in the mid-'80s, renovating it, moving out to the camp, building the Education Building and then the sanctuary.

Yes, we're talking about a beautiful, open, fellowship atrium-type building between the two buildings. Yes, we're talking about major space for the youth ministry here. Yes, we're talking about some additional parking. But there's so much more! Things like missions to local people through Alpha House, Habitat, Faith in Action, and others, Gulf Coast people, Haitian and Costa Rican people, and more. Missions to reach out to youth who desperately need to know. So many good things have happened as a result, but the number one reason is the people.

As we've looked at balance in our lives, we've realized our true rest lies in Jesus Christ. We've also realized our future is in Christ, and we believe when we "get it right," our church will look like a "regional equipping center for Christ-centered life transformation, for the unconnected 1000s." That's the vision God's given us. We'll be gathering people and equipping people, reaching out to the 1000s in our region who are Unconnected. We'll introduce them to the inside-out transforming love of Jesus Christ. And it'll only grow, because it's practical. If you've ever noticed, the Bible is not a list of ideals and principles. It's writings and accounts of real people in real life with real problems. It shows us Christianity isn't just another religion. It's about having a relationship with God through Jesus Christ—not just because you might die tonight, but because you probably won't, and you'll need His strength and courage for tomorrow.

One of the reasons for a whole sermon series on "Balance" is because we're unprepared for the moment before us, because we're stuck in the schedule and pace we've set for ourselves—a schedule that we may have created devoid of God, forgetting His goodness. Yes, He's given us the blessings to do everything we're doing, but how easily we bask in His blessings rather than basking in Him! And we find ourselves so tied down that we can't do anything but blow through our busy schedules, blow up at the people around us, and blow off what's really important. And we call THAT success?

So this morning, even as we celebrate, I believe God is asking us:

Are you courageous enough...

- to give God room to work by saying "no" as well as "yes?"
- to give God room to work by coming to Jesus and putting your day in His hands?
- to give God room to work by having margin in your life for a relationship with Him, let alone more time for the people God's placed in your life?

When you give God room to work, when you strive for balance, you're not just *saving* your sanity or your energy or getting rest from the pace of your past. *You're creating a whole new future.* You're giving God room to work—not just on your past, which Jesus Christ has already redeemed, but you're giving God room to work today.

That's what our church is about: God is creating a whole new future. Like Joshua, He'll help you get past your past. But even more, God is inviting you to step out and lead, in strength and courage. Which will you choose? Will you give God room to work? What would you dare to try that you knew would fail apart from God's intervention? How about a church that invests in youth? What if we showed people in our communities how much God cares for them in a way that they'll experience Him too! Think about reaching out to the people all around us who feel too lonely or trapped or afraid to think that they too can make a difference through Christ? Here's how you do it:

First, choose to enter the battle for somebody's soul:

1. People will feel your struggle.
2. Listen to their story until you don't know what to do but trust God.

Develop a vision:

1. What would that person look like if Jesus totally invaded his or her life?
2. Let those people know what it looks like! When you do,

The energy of Christ gets released:

1. We get a taste of the love between the Trinity.
2. We experience Holy Spirit, sacrificial love
3. There becomes a flow from me to them of Christ's love.

Scared of the battle? Of course! That's why God is telling you and me to "*be strong and courageous!*" If we didn't need it, He wouldn't be saying it! (Duh!) Unlike most of us, God doesn't talk to people just to hear Himself talk. He speaks with a purpose. He says "Be strong and courageous because we're *supposed* to be in this position beyond our comfort zone." Sacrificing is scary! Joshua was a military leader, and though he bought into Moses' vision, though he knew God's future for the people, though he had experienced God in the past, Joshua was scared! He *needed* strength and courage *for the future of the Hebrew people*: In order to be the leader God wanted, in order to bring God's people into the land, in order to stop the Canaanite snake pit of child sacrifice and sacred prostitution, practices ruthlessly devoted to using the most innocent and vulnerable members of the community (babies and virgins) to manipulate their gods for gain. You bet Joshua needed strength and courage! "Sometimes following your fear leads you nowhere."

"Be strong and courageous". We're on a precipice...the brink of a new day...standing before a wide door of opportunity. Our vision is simply to do what God would have us do. We desire to be a people through which Christ impacts and transforms the lives of unconnected 1000s. Through "Giving God Room to Work," we will pay down the debt, build a wonderful connecting building, and a center for youth ministry. We will build staff, programming, and parking to support it.

It's scary. To follow Christ is to take up your cross, which means sacrifice. It's scary to talk about sacrifice, but when you think about it, sacrifice is as fundamental to our Christian values as anything! Remember guys, Valentine's Day is Tuesday. I'm not a skilled counselor, because I want to say to most people (and myself sometimes too), "You need to be unselfish: grow up." Because of God's strength, life really can be about sacrificial love, with no strings attached. But have you noticed how your focus shifts after we get married? Before marriage your focus is "What can I do to please you?" That's called dating. After you get married it's "Get it yourself!" What happened? There was a shift in focus. And church, we're reclaiming the Christian life-skill called sacrifice. Believe it or not, no strings attached sacrifice and balance fit together perfectly. Giving God more room to work in our communities, our church, and our own lives will require the same thing it always does: sacrifice. And that takes strength and courage.

We're working on being an "inside-out" church. But it's not regularly done. So we as a church need God's strength and courage. The people of Dexter Methodist are reaching out to their friends, neighbors, and families in so many ways, I think God's loving it! And folks here are being energized by being the hands and feet of Jesus so much, we're wondering, "Do you think it's supposed to be this way all the time?" Do you suppose this is the way we're supposed to live all the time?

Maybe we're realizing it's not so complicated after all. Love God, love people. That was Jesus' game plan for life. We do have a long way to go and there are a lot of wrongs to be made right. (After all, we've *all* been wounded by sin.) There is a lot of raw human need out there, (and some in here). But from my view, because of the love of God flowing through the Body of Christ and this church, in a lot of places,...it's a wonderful day in the neighborhood! Enjoy it, and let's be sure to give God the credit. Amen!