



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### **40 DAYS OF COMMUNITY, Week #2. . .**

~ Scripture: Philippians 1:27-30 (NLT) ~

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### REACHING OUT TOGETHER

#### INTRODUCTION

During the next 40 days, we're looking at two things:

1. One is deepening the sense of community & love within our church family. . .building stronger relationships.
2. At the same time, we're going to reach out in love to the community around our church family. This will keep us from becoming too ingrown.

We sent out fliers to 8000 homes in this area. Many of you received one. Some of you may be here this morning as a result. We're glad you're here if that is the case. Truth is, we want there to be as thin a boundary as possible between our church and our community.

- We want people to feel welcome to come in—whether it be for a “look-see” (curious), to ask questions as a seeker, or to jump right into the flow of body life.
- But we also must be a people who reach out and go out to make a difference.

We want to draw people in. But before that can happen to any significant degree, we have to reach out and connect with people. We have to be DETERMINED + EQUIPPED to do it.

And that's what I want to focus on this morning. One of the purposes of your life & mine and of our church is MISSION. You & I (“we”) were made for mission—to reach people for Christ. God wants us to share His love with one another and with those who don't even know Him yet.

WHY does He want us to do that? Because God wants everybody in His family. God has never made a person He didn't love or didn't have a purpose for. God has never made a person that Jesus Christ didn't die for. Talk about *inclusive* (i.e.: popular buzz word). I know of no one more inclusive than God. His Word says that He **“does not desire anyone to perish, but for everyone to come to (faith in Him through) repentance” [II Peter 3:9].**

He wants us to share that Good News. I can almost hear you saying back to me: “Well, does that mean I need to go out on the street corner and start preaching to everyone who passes by? Does that mean I should corner everybody at work and somehow get them to listen to me (even though I'm not so sure I'm grounded spiritually myself)? Does that mean we go out and *force* or *convert* folks?” NOT AT ALL! It does mean, however, that we can *invite*, we can *introduce*.

You see, we love people into the Kingdom; we don't coerce them. We don't beat 'em up and drag 'em in here. The world will do that. People will come to us beaten down by life, having lost purpose & meaning and hope, racked with deep spiritual hunger. BUT, the Bible seems to suggest (in many passages) we are to go out / reach out—not wait for them to come to our door. AND, we are to do that together. . .in partnership with others.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Last Sunday, we did the CROP Walk. It wouldn't have made much impact if just one of us collected a little money and walked around Chelsea all afternoon. It was much more powerful—and visible (to the community)—that 132 of us (40+ from our church alone) were out there walking together with signs and stickers. Bearing witness together—that's what He cares about!

That brings us to the Scripture for this morning – **Philippians 1:27-30 (NLT)**:

***<sup>27</sup>But whatever happens to me, you must live in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ, as citizens of heaven. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing side by side, fighting together for the Good News. <sup>28</sup>Don't be intimidated by your enemies. This will be a sign to them that they are going to be destroyed, but that you are going to be saved, even by God himself. <sup>29</sup>For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. <sup>30</sup>We are in this fight together. You have seen me suffer for him in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of this great struggle.***

There are two main ideas here:

1. The first is stated three times: “you are standing side by side” (v. 27)  
“we are fighting together” (v. 27)  
“we are in this together” (v. 30)
2. References to “fighting” / “suffering” / “struggle” (esp. in vv. 28-29)

Putting them together, WE ARE IN A BATTLE. . . AND WE ARE IN IT TOGETHER. Now, Paul was in prison, struggling not only for the Gospel to be heard and accepted, but struggling for his very life. He felt a great kinship with the body of believers in Philippi. He couldn't make it through without their support and their help.

**A.** The mention of “fight” or “struggle” suggests you've given (committed) your life to something. People don't fight for something they don't believe in and feel strongly about. The battle we're in today is a battle with our culture—it's a battle for the hearts & minds of our young people; indeed, of ourselves. So, we contend for the faith—together. We're not alone.

We reach out—NOT because we want to conquer or triumph over them (i.e.: sounds so confrontational), BUT because we care about others (not just my self, my way of life).

We want others to know the joy we've found—NOT because we're better and want everybody to come up to us, BUT because we are beggars who've found some fantastic food and we want our fellow beggars to find it too. We've happened onto the “*pearl of great price*” and want others to find it as well.

Do you have a passion for others—others that you know and perhaps love—to know Christ this morning? This would be the first action point I would suggest—to start PRAYING for that *passion* (i.e.: “fire in the belly”) + the *opportunity* to witness for Him.

**B.** Even as we come to an understanding that we are called (by God) to share the Good News. . . to witness to others of His great mercy / power / love / goodness, it is important to note that we do it in partnership with other people. Our MISSION is to *reach out together*. Our Scripture says “*you are partners in spreading the Good News about Christ*”. How do we go about doing that? I'd like to use the word PARTNER to show us how. We'll look at it as an acrostic. . . . .

### P = Pray together.

The first thing you can do in your small group is pray for friends, neighbors, co-workers, people you know who don't know God in a personal way.

You can't force anybody to love God. But you can pray for them. Prayer can melt hard hearts. Prayer can

warm up a cold heart. Prayer can activate and arouse an apathetic heart. Prayer can change a stubborn heart.

People can reject your arguments. They can refuse to listen to your logic. But they are power-less against your prayers! Because in praying, we are “giving God room to work”.

When you start praying, you know what happens? You start seeing opportunities everywhere. Prayer makes you aware. You start seeing the needs of your family, the needs of your friends. So, make a group prayer list. There’s power in having a lot of people praying for the people you know & love, the people you want to know Christ.

### A = Appeal to common interests.

Before you can share the Good News with anybody you have to establish a relationship with them.

People like to “hang out” together. Not just kids, but all of us. Why? Cause there are things we have in common (e.g.: common interests, experiences, needs, causes & concerns). Maybe it’s a sport. . .kids. . .watching movies. . .shopping. . .eating well-prepared food. . .crafts. [I noticed that a whole lot of people enjoyed working together with rummage this past week.]

That’s one of the best ways to reach out to people—find out what their interests are, and pursue them together. There are 2-3 book clubs among the women of our church. . .and crafts. . .and making Chrismans. It’d be great if we had more sports teams for guys who like to play sports.

### R = Reach out in love.

We need to have the right motive in reaching out to our friends & neighbors. It’s a cliché, but it’s true: *“People won’t care what we know until they know we care.”*

So, why are we doing all this “reaching out”? Why don’t we just focus on us. We’ve got enough people in our church. We pastors are plenty busy. Why don’t we just concentrate on making the fellowship in our church warmer & stronger? Why focus on the “*unconnected 1000’s*” around the church?

We certainly DON’T do it – out of guilt or duty (as though we’d better or else)  
-- to make God like us (because He already loves us)  
-- because we’re better than anybody else (we’re not!)

Why then do we DO it? Because we have the greatest news in the world to share. If I had the cure for CANCER, I’d be shouting it in the streets. If I had the cure for AIDS, I’d be telling everybody I could. But we’ve got something better than that; we’ve got the key to purpose in life and eternal life.

What is this GOOD NEWS we have to share anyway? Here it is in a nutshell. . .

- We’re not in this universe alone, adrift in empty space with no one to care or direct.
- We’re made by God. We didn’t invent Him.
- We’re made in His image. . .not the other way around.
- That being the case, you’d think the world would be a better place than it is.
- The reason it’s not is because we tarnished the image / we broke covenant. Not the serpent (Satan). His influence was felt, but Adam & Eve made the choice.
- But since we were made by God, He had a plan & purpose for our life. He provided a way in which we could re-connect to Him.
- Jesus Christ, His Son, came to earth and died on a cross to pay for all our sins.
- When you accept Him, you are instantly forgiven. . .all you’ve ever done wrong is wiped out & forgotten. He gives you a purpose for living in the present. . .and a home in heaven with Him for all eternity. In other words, when we die, we don’t just drift out into outer space (into nothingness).

If you don't know Him this morning, wouldn't you like to? You can, you know. And wouldn't you like others to as well? That's why we *reach out in love*.

### T = Tell your stories.

The most effective way to let others know about the great things God can do in their lives is to tell them the story of what He has done in your life. Jesus said: *"You are my witnesses."*

Think of a courtroom. It's a perfect picture of what God is asking us to do:

- You're not the attorney arguing the case.
- You're not the judge pronouncing a verdict or a sentence.
- You're a witness. You're just saying, *"Here's what I've seen. . . heard. . . experienced.* You just tell the story of what God has done in your life.

ASK: How do I start into it (so it seems natural, not fake or phony)?

- Listen for problems that God has helped you with. When one comes up, you can say: *"You know, God helped me with that. Maybe He can help you too."*
- Relate to a current event or something going on that everybody's facing. *"You know those awful killings of children in schools? I don't know how I'd face something like that if it weren't for a God who cares....."*
- Maybe you've known someone a long time but never talked to them about God. Maybe an apology is in order. Then: *"I've never told you the most important thing in my life—about my relationship with God, with Jesus Christ."*

Psalm 66:16 says: *"Listen and I'll tell you what God has done for me."*

### N = Nurture friendships.

A friendship builds the bridge between your heart and the heart of another that Jesus can walk across. But it takes time and effort. Unfortunately, our busy schedules tend to isolate us.

I wonder, what "acquaintances" do you have that could be elevated to "friendships"? I'm talking about nurturing relationships with people who will be there for (and with) you when you need them most. And *vice versa*.

God has put people all around you; He's put people in our life specifically so we can share the good news with them. Every week I pray for those in my family who do not yet know Christ, and my prayer is always that God will put someone in their lives that will draw them unto Him.

I'd love to see us use our homes more. Have people over (e.g.: people in the congregation or your neighborhood or your work setting whom you don't know very well). We're trying to institute "*Dinners of 8*" type gatherings to spark this kind of outreach.

### E = Expect God to act.

On more than one occasion, Jesus said: *"According to your faith it will be done unto you."*

It's a waste of time for us to enter these 40 days of community building without expecting God to do something. What are you expecting God to do in these next 6-7 weeks? I don't know how it all works, but I can tell you that not much is going to happen if *I* don't expect it to happen. . . and then wait on God (in prayer + faith) for it to happen.

Some of you have been waiting and praying a long time. ILLUSTRATION> Leslie Strobel, wife of Lee Strobel (who wrote *The Case for Christ* and *The Case for Faith*), prayed for years for her atheist-husband to

become a believer. Now look at him!

Never give up. No one is hopeless. Nobody is beyond the reach of His love. Keep praying. It's OK to say: *"Lord, I don't see them warming up to You. But I'm going to continue to pray and expect You to be at work in their life even though I can't see it."* Keep coming to church—even if you have to come alone. Keep living the life in front of that loved one who's not yet saved.

### R = Represent Christ with your life.

When Paul wrote: *"Whatever you do or say, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus"* [Col. 3:17], he meant *"let it all be done as a representative of the Lord Jesus"*.

We need audiovisual Christians who *walk the walk and talk the talk*. . .who *do it and say it*. . . who *live it and share it*. We need to be *"show-n-tell Xns."* We need to live it + share it with our mouth. Both are needed, not just one or the other.

### CONCLUSION

The most dangerous prayer anyone could pray is these two words: *"Use me!"*

Are you willing to pray that prayer with me during these 40 days: *"Lord, use me! Use me to show Your love to someone who doesn't know You. Use me to show Your purpose to people who don't know that You love them and have a purpose for their life."*

God has given this church a great big heart to change the world. We can change the world with the love of God. But it starts in our own community. . .in our own small groups. . .and with those around us whom we know & love. They're not going to know unless WE show them.

So TOGETHER, let us take these SEVEN STEPS of love and pray in faith that God will use our PARTNERSHIP with one another to reach others for Him in the next 40 days.

Let's PRAY. . .

*"Father, You have given us a mission in the world to share Your good news and Your love with other people. Thank-you that we don't have to do it alone. Give us Your words and Your love for others. Raise us up as an army with a heart to change the world. I pray in the name of. . ."*