



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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**CONSISTENCY—CONSTANCY, STEADINESS**

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**1 Peter 5:6-11**

On Christmas Eve, we talked about how heaven must have looked down on the messy manger and said “That was church.” And whether today when heaven looks down on us, the angels would say the same. As we launch into our 175<sup>th</sup> year, is this going to be a great church in earthly eyes...or heavenly eyes?” We want heaven to see our church and say “Now that’s what we had in mind!”

I said how recently God’s been bringing people to this church who have the same vision: to reach out to people far from God and make them disciples of Christ. We’ve felt the call of God to build a church *here* that’s a beacon of light, so those lost and hurting could meet Jesus.

And there’s one way we can stand out: Consistency.

I said to the Christmas Eve crowd that this church isn’t the inward-looking little band of keep-their-hands-clean believers we picture in churches who only talk about it. And we’re not into a self-serving, anonymous, flashy church either. Because the people here *have* dreamed: to see our sovereign God rock this place to its core. They moved the whole operation 20 years ago from Central Street to have more room for their dream of seeing a church where 1000s of people who are far from God could find hope and be connected to God and to one another. They want to see Christ-followers who are *not* mature *grow up* in this church. They want true community here. They want to see people who have been spectators on the sidelines *get engaged* in the needs of the poor in our area. Those without hope would find God, and isolated and lonely people would find friends. And this is the year!

And while that’s sounds exciting and flashy, (and messy and challenging), the way we’re going to get there isn’t. God’s dream will never happen without one of the most overlooked, quiet, seemingly unexciting and under-the-radar qualities of God that we’ve got to talk about: consistency. And it couldn’t be more relevant to us today in 2007, both for our church and for your personal life and mine.

Chuck Swindoll writes: “The questions are different, but each answer is the same.

- What will guard us against foolish extremes?
- What characterizes those who are habitually successful in sports or sales or music?
- What single quality in a business builds respect for a product deeper than any other?
- What brings security in relationships?
- What makes us choose a particular brand name in the grocery store over all others?
- What’s needed most by parents in the home?
- What draws you to the same restaurant time and again?
- What will add more weight to your witness for Christ than anything else?

CONSISTANCY. That’s the answer to all nine questions, and you know it’s true. Steadiness. You can count on it. It’ll be there tomorrow just like it was yesterday...free from silly moods, sudden changes, or fickle

fads. Early in the day or late at night, consistency stands firm. When pain hits, when bad news comes in the door, consistency doesn't walk out. When everyone around you is tired and irritable, consistency is stable and resilient. Now don't confuse consistency with apathy, or indifference, or being lethargic. It's not insensitive, or boring...but reliable, and faithful. Consistency is not opposed to change or reason or action! But it's trustworthy. Not stubborn, but solid. Consistency is solid.

My hope today is that by naming this invisible quality, God will call to your mind and mine ways we can apply all our energy and creativity toward it.

Why do we have such problems with consistency?

- Because it's such hard work! And we want an easy fix, or an easy excuse. So we let ourselves get swept up in the frenetic pace of life just so we can have an excuse not to be. Consistent, that is.
- Because we're a little lazy. We don't want to have to challenge ourselves too much. If faith is a journey, and we truly want to get to the adventure God is calling us to, we've got to keep putting one foot in front of the other until we move further from home than we've ever been! Otherwise, we can just run around in the little circles we've made for ourselves and never grow. And consistency is the only way we're going to work ourselves out of the box we place around ourselves.
- Another problem is, consistency takes time! And we live in a culture that runs at Mach 2 speed with quick and easy solutions.
- We're trained to consume. Our throwaway society means we don't have to stay consistent. We can use the amazing amount of resources we have to buy new stuff and throw away the old when we get tired of it. Many of us can just shop around. We'd rather "reinvent ourselves," rather than having to do the work of consistent living that builds our character.

The problem is, we apply it to everything, from faith to relationships. It's about us and our ability to pick and choose. So we fill our lives to capacity, we leave no margin in our lives. We have more things to do than we have time, and we wonder why we struggle with life and faith.

- I think we're afraid. We're afraid if we consistently follow God's plan, we're going to change. And most of us prefer the hell of a predictable situation rather than risk the joy of an unpredictable one.

What does a consistent Christian witness look like? Probably often plain, day-in-day-out. Flashes of excitement about our faith can come and go. But a flash of excitement combined with a consistent witness can change the world. Alpha House...Habitat for Humanity...the whole Methodist Movement that now includes 75 million around the world...working through and forgiving that longtime friend that really hurt you...would all be great ideas never acted on, were it not for the persistence and inspiration and difficult times you have to work through when you choose to consistently follow God's Word. Consistency takes time. We can't buy a fiddle today and expect to play at Carnegie Hall tomorrow! Consistency has nothing to do with a lack of creativity. Consistency has a lot to do with creating a pathway by which your creative juices flow.

It's the same with our faith: it takes time. It's what comforts you, but it's also what takes you beyond your comfort zone to places you've never been. When you're consistent, James tells us, you won't be like the wave driven and tossed about by the wind. (James 1:6).

Consistency. Patience, determination, and strength—regardless of shifty, rootless, or crazy times. Critics may attack it—but consistency stands and takes it. One poet calls it “a jewel,” another “an anchor or iron.” Consistency hates tardiness and absenteeism. It thrives on sacrifice and unselfishness. It's an obvious mark of maturity. It's hanging in there day in and day out in spite of everything that could get you sidetracked. And without consistency throughout the centuries, the message of Jesus' live and death and conquering death would never

1 Peter was written to Christians who were experiencing harassment, being singled out because their stand for Jesus Christ made them aliens and strangers in the midst of their society. Peter encouraged them to remain consistent in their attitudes and actions.

I hope that you and I don't ever feel too comfortable with our culture here. Yes, there's a lot to enjoy. But

“the good life” can lure us into forgetting how much of the rest of the world needs help. Even right here...or in Ypsilanti...or Detroit. And I don't think God wants our church to be so comfortable that we're nothing more than a yuppie church all about self-actualization and comfort. God wants us to be equipped to serve, to reach out, to let people know they're loved; that they matter. And nothing will do that like consistency.

5:6 *Humble yourselves, therefore, (Peter's just quoted Proverbs 3:34 "God opposes the proud, (literally "sets himself against") but gives grace to the humble.") Humble yourselves under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.* Imagine living humility with consistency. Humble yourself...It's exactly what we don't like to do as Americans. Take the focus off of you and place it on folks around you who need it. It's the right thing for all of us who've allowed Jesus Christ to rule our hearts. So many issues would be avoided if we would live out humility in all our relationships.

“7 *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*” We trust in a sovereign God, who created all that is, and also cares about you intimately. Knowing that God is GOD, we can cast all our anxieties on Him, because He does care for us. Every worry—His. When you're fishing, you know the motion of a good cast? Let that be your worries. Let 'em fly to God today.

“8 *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.* 9 *Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*” Satan would like nothing more than for us to live out what the world thinks of us: we're irrelevant, ineffective, boring, and really no different from anyone else in our world. But we are equipped to resist. One of the results of God's Spirit in our lives is “self-control.” We are always under attack, most often by our own way of thinking. For example, why should I worry about the folks who don't have enough? It just makes me sad. So I'll put it out of my mind. And Peter says we need to resist for the sakes of believers throughout the world who are undergoing suffering. The Greek word for resisting him is a defensive word. And we can only do that when we stand firm in the faith. Think about what our brothers and sisters in places like Darfur and India are facing. We can surely stand firm against his attacks of lethargy and self-serving comfort and actualization...

“10 *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.* 11 *To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.*” It's tricky. Because the way to becoming “Strong, firm, and steadfast” yourself is to not make it all about yourself! Peter says it: in the midst of suffering and trials: Be humble. Cast your anxiety on Him. Be self-controlled and alert. The only way is by standing firm in your faith. Why? Listen to the promises: God will lift you up in due time...God cares for you...even in suffering you won't be alone...and “10 *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.* 11 *To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.*”

How can faith in Jesus Christ consistently do this in you? Because of Who He is: Hebrews 13:8 “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*”

One of the most attractive, magnetic characteristics of Jesus is His consistency. When you need Him, He is there. He's there even when you don't think you need Him! You're never too early or too late. He's never in a lousy mood nor will He ask you to call back during office hours. He's available...because He's immutable. With Jesus, there's no new year or old year. He's “the same” regardless.

- Whatever happens this year, Jesus comes to show us how to love...consistently.
- Whatever wrongs you or I do, Jesus' blood still pays for our sin, once and for all.
- Whatever overindulgence I choose this year, Jesus is patient.
- Whatever good we do, whatever problems there are, there are no solutions except Jesus Christ.

So what if, this year for you, was marked by your consistency? What if, in your decisions, in how you spend time, in how you treated your family and friends, 2007 were known as the year you got consistent? Let's pray.....

1. Show up early at work every day this week. And then, be home early every day this week.

2. Be positive every day. Work at being consistent.
3. What's something you consistently do that irritates other people? Is it something you could change? Focus on God...
4. If you and everyone in our church prayed or read their Bible on average 10 minutes a day consistently, and lived "outside yourself" one hour per week, that would be over 8 years-worth of volunteer time devoted to serving God in that way.

For 2007, it's time to be consistent in our church and in our lives. You think that wouldn't to rock our communities and make God famous?