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Giving God Room to Work

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1 Chronicles 28, 29

3 years ago, when we started, a lot of people wondered where we were headed with this campaign... Let me repeat what I said 3 years ago: **Our journey is NOT about becoming a big church.** I am NOT interested in being just another large church. I'm not interested in being a yuppie church for self-actualization. I am interested in being the Lord God's church. But to be God's, **we must be a transforming church**, a faithful church, a healthy church. Not a hotel for saints, but a hospital for sinners. The *problem* is, when you find people being authentic, helping each other, and really connecting with one another and with God, you will have to lock the doors to keep people away!

I honestly believe eternity is on the line, and it's the greatest challenge and adventure you will ever face, no matter what your occupation. Why would you invest anywhere else? Change what people worship, you change their passion. Change their passion, and you change a life. Begin changing lives, and you change a community. Change more and more people, and you'll change the world. When the church prevails, everybody wins! I can see it! I get it! *I'll* use my life and my resources and my talents for *that!* So we set out 3 years ago with **Giving God Room to Work**. And our vision to become a transforming church for Christ led us to do 3 things: **Pay off** much of our debt we had been carrying on the sanctuary. **Add staff** to help us reach more people with the faith, hope, and love of Jesus. **Add to our facilities:** a place for youth, creating more room for children, an atrium to create a gathering place (and a dry walk to the bathrooms), a covered drop off, and more paved parking. (here soon!) And people came forward and gave. You gave over \$1.3 million dollars! And we're just weeks from finishing. There's more to be done, the challenge is still there, but so we don't miss it as each thing is being completed, we're going to start celebrating today! (Let us pray...)

The Power of our Final Words can outlast us. See if you recognize these:

- "After all, tomorrow is another day." (Gone with the Wind)
- "I used to hate the water." "I can't imagine why." (Jaws)
- "My momma always said 'Life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get.'" (Forrest Gump)
- "Louie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship" (Casablanca)
- "Live long and prosper." (Star Trek)
- "Rosebud." (Citizen Kane)
- "There's no place like home" (Wizard of OZ)
- "Remember, the force will be with you always" (Star Wars: New Hope)
- "God bless us, everyone" (A Christmas Carol)
- "Look Daddy, teacher says 'Every time a bell rings, an angel gets his wings'" "That's right, that's right. Attaboy, Clarence!" (It's a Wonderful Life)
- Hey, Stella! (Streetcar Named Desire)
- "We're always watching" (Angels in the Outfield)
- "I'll be right here" (E.T.)

Final words. Some shallow, some filled with depth of meaning, some filled with false hope, some filled with

genuine hope. We've been looking at the life of David, and we're skipping forward to his final words. (We're not through. We will look at David & His Rebellious Sons, David & Bathsheba, and finally David & his Psalms). Why? Because we want to stop living a life of skimming; and David lived a passionate life, with a heart for God. From shepherd boy to hero to fugitive to king, we still have a lot to learn. But for today, because of the legacy of our GGRTW campaign, we're looking at David's final words and his final act. David was 70, nearing his own death, and he is now reflecting and summarizing everything that is important to *him*. His son Solomon is sitting there frightened, in his late teens or early twenties, about to become the king. He needs his father's wisdom at this moment and he is listening carefully. David, even at the end of his life, is still giving God room to work in his words. David says "*Be strong, Solomon, and courageous. Don't be afraid. Obey the commandments of the Lord your God. Walk in his ways. Take charge of the commandments that he's given to you and continue to follow them. And then, and only then, can you be assured that God will bless your kingdom.*" 1 Chronicles 28:20.

I wonder what your final words will be. What is it *you* want to say? Have you written your exit script? Maybe you've thought about what your funeral would be like. What will be really important then? What is the most important thing you could say and pass on to your friends and family if you knew you were about to die? The truth is many times **we don't have the opportunity to write our exit script.** In fact we never do. We never know exactly how we're going to die. Sometimes we don't even have the *chance* to say our final words. When a family is dealing with death, sometimes they say to me "You know, there was so much I wanted to say, and I never had the chance to say them. I wish I had more time to say those things."

If there's one thing I've learned during those times, it's this: **Don't leave anything unsaid that's important.** Instead, say it now. If it really matters, if it's really something you wish you could have said, then be sure and say it today. When you go home, pick up the phone and call that person and let them know if there are things you would have liked to have patched up before the end, don't wait. Don't assume that the end is going to be 10 years from now or 20 years from now or a week from now. Say it today.

Ideally this is what it looks like: Even if your loved ones *don't* have a chance to say goodbye to you **they already know all the things you would have said, because you said them over and over and over again.** They don't need one last time to say "I love you" because they KNOW that you love them because they saw it, and heard it, and felt how deeply you love them. They don't *need* to hear they're to follow the Lord God. There's no need for you to pass on your faith to them, because you've been passing on your faith to them for years and years like a broken record. They already know because you already said it. That's the ideal. Don't wait till the end. You may not have the opportunity to write that script. – do it now! **So here's the first thing: the way to keep giving God room to work is to say what's important today and regularly.** Give God room to work in your words. That means use good words God can use. Don't leave anything unsaid.

The Bible not only gives us David's final words, but it gives us his final acts. Before David died, he made a planned gift. More than anything else, David wanted to build a temple for God. A great temple, a place of worship. Up until David's time, Israel's place of worship was a tent, or a tabernacle. The people would gather together and they would worship and meet God. But by now the people had become stationary and David longed to build a temple where generations of people would come and they would worship God and they would see God. They would be inspired by not just the architecture but by the experience of gathering together in that place. God, though, said to David "No. Instead I'm going to let your son build it." So Solomon built the Great Temple in Jerusalem. So David, knowing *he* could not build the temple, brought together the leaders of Israel and all the people of Jerusalem. Then he brought from his storehouse *all* of his treasures, and laid them before the leaders. And listen what happened next: 1 Chronicles 29:6-7 "*the leaders of families, the officers of the tribes of Israel, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, and the officials in charge of the king's work gave willingly. 7 They gave toward the work on the temple of God*".

The effect of his gift was to inspire generosity in others and to enable the building of the temple. Imagine if they could say that at your funeral! "She inspired me to be generous." Or "He inspired me to live generously." When the people looked at what David did so close to death, the leaders said if this is what's really important to him, maybe it should be important to us too. And they began to bring their offerings to the

Lord to build a temple to his name. And the people came and they gave generously. Finally they had to tell them to stop, they brought so much. And David in that moment captured the essence of what it means to be stewards of what we have. David, who, at the end of his life, recognized he couldn't take it with him, said this to the people of Israel. 1 Chronicles 29:14 *"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this?"* (Then he looked at God and said) *"Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. 16 O LORD our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you."*

I'm almost sure that David saved something behind for his children, grandchildren, and others. He passed something on to them, but what he is remembered for is that He bequeathed something to the work of God that would touch generations to follow him. He turned what would have been a terrible blow for Israel in his passing into a day of triumph. So here's my second question for you: When you die, what will people say when I ask "What will this person be remembered for? What do you want them to say? And what will you *do* this week to keep giving or start giving God room to work? Because that's what will last.

When we set out on our campaign to Give God Room to Work, many people took God at his word and made commitments...not to the church, but to God. I want you to hear about one of them.

(BERT OLTON): "When I heard Pastor Matt's proposal to give God room to work, to commit to something I could not fulfill without God's intervention, something leaped in my heart and I heard a small voice within saying "Well, DO you want to see Me work? Do you want to experience Me?"

I knew our family couldn't afford to do this. We had a child in college and two at home (one with special needs) and my wife was about to lose her job. Again. And I hadn't had a raise in four years. But I could make craft items and sell them...after all, people seemed to like my wooden pens! So Jesus and I had a conversation. I told Him that I'd like to commit to give more than I thought I could possibly make, and if He would bless my commitment I would donate \$100 per month or half of what I made, whichever was greater. I didn't know how in the world I could consistently raise that much but I really felt Jesus said to me, "you did well, Bert".

I wrote the first check with a sense of excitement, anticipation, and a little trepidation...I used my birthday gift money, and it was all I had.

Soon something strange began to happen. People started coming to me wanting me to make them things! Ten and twenty dollars at a time that first hundred was repaid, and that meant I had enough for the following month! The same thing happened the next month, and the next, and the next...and then it stopped. Although I was still writing that monthly check, nothing was selling and I was \$300 in debt. Now what? What was happening? Could it be that God was not honoring His commitment to me? Could it be that I didn't hear Him right? Did I somehow make all this up?

No, I decided that I wanted to see God work; I would trust Him regardless of how circumstances appeared. I had made a commitment to Him (not the church!) and I would honor it no matter what. I would keep up my monthly donations and He would simply have to make it work.

He did! As I got busy again I realized that this had been a test--a test of my faith in Him. By His grace He showed me, again, that faith in Him is never in vain. After all, how could I see Him work if I could do it all myself? It is faith that pleases Him and faith which is the basis of our relationship with Him. I recalled so many verses: "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see;" "the just shall live by faith;" "without faith it is impossible to please God..."

Orders started coming in--a salad bowl, a vase, small items, larger items, artistic work, every

month enough. By the time of the 36th payment (none of them late!) I realized just how much business God had provided me. Not only that but my skill level has improved dramatically! I now have pieces in Artistica, a local gallery, and will soon have work in the gift shop at Cranbrook as well as the new gift shop at the University of Michigan Museum of Art when construction is completed next spring.

(Prayer): Thank you, God, for showing me--again--just how faithful You are; and that You can be trusted no matter what; and that You love and honor those acts which are prompted by faith!"

What about *you*? How will you impact people's lives for Jesus Christ? What will your final acts *be*? And as Bert showed us, what will *God's* impact be in *your* life as you Give God Room to Work? **David was an ordinary man with a genuine heart for God.** He had mistakes and failures as well as success. Hundreds of years after David's death, the Apostle Paul describes David in Acts 13:22 "*David fulfilled God's purposes for his generation.*" What better could be said of us?

Study Guide

Monday—2 Samuel 9. David's Kindness Toward Jonathan's Son. Remember that David loved Jonathan and David promised both Saul (who was his enemy) and Jonathan that he would not destroy their offspring. Years later, David seeks to discover if there are any of Saul's kin that he can show kindness to. What does this teach us about David's character? Promises? Follow-through? How do you respond to the children of those who have wounded you? Are there any people that God might want you to minister to or care for by virtue of your friendship with their parents?

Tuesday—2 Samuel 10. David & Joab Defeat the Ammonite Armies. The land of Ammon was in modern day Jordan (whose capital is Amman). Notice again David's character in 10:1—2. Notice the faulty assumptions the Ammonite nobles had regarding David in v.3. These assumptions and fears led to a terrible war in which the Ammonites were defeated. When have you assumed the worst about someone, only to find out you were wrong? Have nations done this in our day? Notice Joab proves himself a skillful warrior.

Wednesday—2 Samuel 11. David & Bathsheba. Notice in verse 1 that David is now powerful enough and established enough as king that he no longer goes out in battle. He has authority, power, and wealth. This story is masterfully told. It is not difficult to place yourself in the text. How could David, the man "after God's own heart" commit adultery? What does this tell us about David? Bathsheba does not seem to resist. What factors may have motivated her to accept the king's overtures? What did David do once Bathsheba discovered she was pregnant? What would you have done if you were David? What do we learn of Uriah in this story? Verse 26 tells us that Bathsheba mourned and grieved the death of her husband. Do you think she knew what David had commanded? How did she feel? Read the last line of the chapter again—"The thing David had done displeased the Lord." Have you ever felt God's displeasure?

Thursday—2 Samuel 12. Nathan the Prophet reprimands David. Powerful stuff. Notice how easily David is drawn into Nathan's story. David didn't yet recognize the weight of his sin. Do we ever? God sends Nathan to help him see the gravity of the crime. Read verses 8 & 9. God would have given David anything, but David chose to take the one thing that was not his to take. Do you feel the grief of God in these words? What were the consequences of this sin? What was God's punishment? Read Psalm 51, written by David after Nathan confronts him. It helps us understand the true grief and repentance that David experienced at this time. What does this story teach us of our own sins? God's grace? Murderers and death row inmates? Notice that the union of David & Bathsheba brings the next prince, Solomon, who was a child called "Loved by the Lord." How does this story speak to you?

Friday—2 Samuel 13. The Sin Continues: Amnon & Tamar. David sinned with Bathsheba and murders her husband. Now notice that David's son Amnon falls in love with his half-sister, ultimately committing rape. Notice that the warning of the prophet Nathan has begun to come to pass; that the "sword will not pass" from David's house. David's sexual sin followed by his violent way of covering it up is mirrored and amplified by his children who have now raped and murdered one another. Notice David's grief over what has happened. In what ways have you paid the price for your parents' sins? Rape is a great evil in the sight of God.