



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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Unless **The Lord** Builds The House. . .

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~ Scriptures: Joshua 24:15 & Psalm 127:1 ~

INTRODUCTION

We're shifting this week. Transitioning into a series on what it means to be a *disciple / discipler*. But we are NOT leaving behind the *Faith At Home* theme.

In fact, we're going to continue to become more & more a *Faith-At-Home Church* in which:

- HOME is seen as the primary place where faith is nurtured;
- CHURCH is the equipping center to help families & parents do what God called us to do.

One of the ways we're going to do that is through an occasional *Faith-At-Home Event* like:

- 1) "Family Blessing" == how to bless your child;
- 2) "My Bible" == parents will attend Sunday school with their children, do a Bible Study with their child and write in the Bible that will be presented to them on November 15th.
- 3) We will continue to add "events" until every age group is covered.

Today our Scripture comes from two places in the Old Testament:

- ❖ [Joshua 24:15](#) — "*But as for me and my household, we will serve **the LORD**.*"
- ❖ [Psalm 127:1](#) — "*Unless **the LORD** builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted. Unless the Lord protects a city, guarding it with sentries will do no good.*"

Do we know WHO it is we're proposing to serve this morning? WHO it is that we want to build our households? He is:

- The LORD our God
- The LORD Most High
- The LORD of all Creation
- God of Wonders
- God Most High
- Almighty and Everlasting God

He is so much more than the world portrays Him to be...so much more than:

- The force
- The embodiment of *love* (which, by our definition, is usually pretty self-centered)
- The philosophical *first cause*
- The opiate of the masses
- A psychological crutch (that *we* create in our own image)
- A host of other impersonal titles

God is a God of perfect balance: fairness & justice with mercy & pardon. He is a God of love.

Images in the Bible are personal, not impersonal (as in the above) --- e.g.: FATHER.

Our understanding of God has grown over the centuries, as God has continued to reveal Himself

and as the eyes of our understanding have opened wider. Many think of God as the projection of an idea in our mind...an image we have created...a bigger-than-life “imaginary (pretend) friend”. Not so! HE is the creator (i.e.: He created me; I didn’t create Him). And as the eyes of my mind and heart open wider, I am better able to see the bigness and grandeur of Who He is.

So, when Joshua declares “*As for me and my household, we will serve **the LORD***” and King Solomon speaks out (in Psalm 127) “*Unless **the LORD** builds the house*”—we should take note.

Joshua and Solomon were really sounding a warning to the people of their times. . .and it comes to us as well. A warning against our divided allegiances and segmented lifestyle. If God is not at the center of your life and your family’s life, all that you go through to provide a “comfortable lifestyle” or “gain the whole world” (as Jesus puts it) may not produce what you ultimately want.

Let me put it this way. One of our mantras around here is: “We’re perfectly aligned to get the results we’re getting.” That’s true in our households and in the household of faith. If we are not truly serving the LORD and if HE is not the One building the house, then we are aligned to get results that come from that, which among other things might include:

- Fragmented households, mixed marriages;
- Kids “dropping out” spiritually;
- *Cultural Xns.* who just go to church but have no real, living faith.

Some of that is going to happen no matter what. But I believe if we follow God’s pattern, then there will be fewer disappointments and failures. I hope this morning that God is at the center of your life and your family’s life—and if He is not, that you will put Him there (before you leave here today). I hope this morning that HE is the One building your house—and if He is not, that you will get a new contractor. That doesn’t mean you stop all the good things you are doing. It means you put all of it under His charge—so that your loyalties are not divided (i.e.: serving “God” + “mammon”).

When you do, you will begin to see “family” as God sees it == as the basic building block of humanity. It’s actually in the very nature of **God** Himself. The three Persons of the Godhead (the Trinity) are a family of persons closely connected. Then along came **civilization**, which He started with a family (cf. Genesis 1). The Bible makes it clear that the family is the basic unit, the most important “institution” of society. Weaken the family and you weaken the social order. **We dare not RE-define what God has already defined.** Family is God’s idea!

ALLOW ME A MOMENTARY DIGRESSION.

Why, you ask, can’t marriage be between two people of the same sex? Why must it be between “one man & one woman”? Because that’s the way God set it up. **Genesis 1:27** tells us that in the beginning GOD created human beings, “*male and female He made them*”. Then in **2:24**, God says: “*For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.*” JESUS reiterates all of this in Matthew & Mark.

There are three things I would have you note about the sexual differentiation of male- -female:

- 1) Complementarity. I know I’m stating the obvious, but men and women were made to “fit together” biologically. The completion of the one is found in the other.
- 2) Equality (or balance). Comes from the fact that each is made for the other. Yes, the woman came from the man; but all subsequent men have come from women! ☺
- 3) Purpose. There must be both to continue the race—which was God’s purpose from the beginning: for them “to be fruitful and increase in number; to fill the earth and subdue (govern) it”.

Who are we to take that on and try to re-structure it!¹

So, the family was God's idea. It works best when it's done according to His plan and when He is at the center of it. That why we say **faith begins at home**. Faith and the knowledge and understanding of His ways are to be nurtured at home (other places too; but first & foremost there)—through a process called **discipling**.

- Parents / Husbands & Wives / Everybody: We are **disciples**!
- Let me take it one step further: We are **disciplers** of our families (i.e.: everyone under our roof).

Discipling is the model JESUS used to bring God's truth to His people, to spread His Gospel, to keep it going through the centuries—so it wouldn't flicker and die out.

How discipling is done has changed over time, but it is still God's designated way to implant His Word, and to transmit the faith from one generation to the next. Let's look at DISCIPLING this morning: Exactly what is it? And how might it be carried out in our day & age?

IN THE DUST OF THE RABBI

When Jesus came to earth to bring the good news of the Kingdom of God and to offer himself as the perfect sacrifice to redeem the whole human race, He also chose disciples who would continue proclaiming His message and making disciples long after He returned to heaven.

To some, Jesus' disciples would seem like an unlikely group. They weren't the brightest and best. They hadn't been to seminary. They were fishermen. They didn't know their way around the huge, sophisticated cities of the Roman Empire. They came from small, rural villages. But they had what Jesus needed: commitment...passion...desire to be His *talmidim* (pl.).

That's the Hebrew word for disciple == **TALMID**. The *talmid* willingly left home, family, and occupation to be with the rabbi because he wanted more than anything else in the world to be like the rabbi.

Now a **RABBI** was an honored teacher (not necessarily the head of a synagogue, like a pastor or bishop; that came later). He was highly respected for his knowledge, understanding, and teaching of Scripture + his personal righteousness. A rabbi would look more like a *cult leader* in our eyes—because he had people following him closely day in & day out...for years...in order to learn to be like him and live in obedience to God as he did. **They followed the rabbi so closely that they were, in the words of Ray VanderLaan, covered by the dust kicked up by his feet!**

But it's not that way today. Although I will say the FAMILY affords the best venue for Biblical discipleship to take place (given the description above). Aside from that:

- We don't leave home;
- We leave the teaching pretty much in the hands of the "professionals" (seminary trained);
- We don't follow closely for a period of years (to hear, know, and do as the Master);

¹ Though not spoken as part of the sermon, the following is quoted from the *Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, 2009-2012*, ¶161B on p. 18:

*"We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant that is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment and shared fidelity **between a man and a woman**. We believe that God's blessing rests upon such marriage, whether or not there are children of the union. We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage. We support laws in civil society that **define marriage as the union of one man and one woman**."* [emboldened phrases mine]

- Our driving passion is less about becoming like our Master, and more about making a living and advancing in the world.

So, how does discipleship get done today?

Well, there's another Hebrew word for disciple—***HAVER***—which refers to deep social bonds between people. It is translated as “friend” but means much more. It denotes a relationship that is stronger than death itself. It can be used in reference to a close-knit group of people==like us here==or to a disciple + a discipler who are deeply committed to each other. It is what we mean in our day when we use the term “*intentional friendship*”.

Let me bring this home with a couple questions:

- Can you think of one person (or a handful of persons)...that having some kind of connection with that person(s)...whether or not you call it an “intentional friendship” ...has drawn you closer to Christ?
- Is there someone in your life with whom you share a mutual love for and delight in the Scriptures...someone who encourages you...and whom you encourage...to learn & study the Word of God? In other words, someone you are drawing closer to Christ?

CONCLUSION

I know we do a lot of things around here. Let me say as one of the pastors that everything we put out there to do, everything we announce from up front here, everything we plan and put on the calendar has one ultimate purpose: TO MAKE DISCIPLES. . .WHO IN TURN WILL GO AND MAKE OTHERS DISPLES (i.e.: to make disciplers).

- Even the ***Rummage Sale*** (i.e.: raises \$ which support missions which make disciples) ☺
- We've been talking about ***Operation Christmas Child / China Outreach Missions / Gifts Unto Others / Stephen Ministry*** over the past few weeks. Why? Not to overwhelm you with more stuff to do. But to provide more opportunities to make disciples, to lead people into (toward) being a follower of Jesus—whether they be children in global villages, people from other people groups (e.g.: Chinese), the people who are touched by the mission endeavors our gift giving supports, or the people we give individual care to.
- We ***worship Sundays + attend Bible studies + participate in various groups***. Why? So we can grow in our relationship to Christ and His Word—and become stronger, more fruitful.
- We have ***times of fellowship*** (e.g.: Thursday Night Suppers, Fall Fest, Men's breakfasts, Women's soup & salad). Why? To draw people closer to one another, and together closer to Christ.
- We're going to be focusing on ***stewardship of time-talent-treasure*** this next month. Why? So we can do even more disciple-making (here, in the community, and around the world).
- We get excited about ***issues of social justice*** (e.g.: walk in a CROP Walk, sell fair-trade coffee, provide GUO to support things like the Heifer Project) because in so doing we become better followers and disciples of Jesus Christ. That's what He would have us do.
- We ***bring faith home***. That's where it all begins. Making lifelong disciples of every member of our family—to glorify God in all we say & do.

Making disciples who in turn make other disciples—it's at the heart of everything we do.