



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### Treasures of the Transformed Life: The Power of Your Presence

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Colossians 3:9—17

STORY: During my sophomore year of college, I experienced what it's like to have the power of someone's presence in your life; to have someone "bear with you," when I spoke in front of our fraternity Monday night chapter meeting against a group that wanted to bring in strippers to our fraternity, which they had done till a strong group of guys that included a number of Christians voted it out. I thought it was a stupid idea, but I thought "What can I do, (other than vote against it)?" Nevertheless, I'd been elected house critic, so I had a right to speak in front of the Monday house meetings. So I did. But I sure wasn't used to speaking in front of people then. And though I was a Christian, I was pretty quiet, and I wasn't used to speaking out. Especially in front of 72 of my fraternity brothers. The meeting was really, really ugly. And the vote was literally 50/50, till Ed Zimmerman changed his vote, because it was splitting the house. The seniors and the others that wanted it stormed out of the meeting, (heading for the bar, I'm sure), and for the next several months I would see "Hook-buster" signs up all over the house. After that terrible meeting, I returned to my room to find my roommate Eric Braun weeping...for me. He said "Didn't you hear what they were saying about you?" And I thought "Ignorance is bliss." But he had heard them, and it broke him. And it was like God had him there for me, because God knew what I would face. And Eric was fully present to go through all the aftermath with me. He was willing to bear that burden with me. How powerful and how much more strength I felt, having him walk with me through that tough time. It reminds me of the promise God gave to His people when Moses' leadership was replaced by Joshua: "*Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.*" Deuteronomy 31:6

When funeral director Karl Jennings shares at funerals, he often shares with the people: "Often people ask me, 'What is it that I can do?' You're doing it," Karl says. "We only give our time to those things we love. And your presence here is letting the family know you love them. Just being there is enough to let people know that they matter. Don't worry about what to say or what to do."

**Your presence is one of the most powerful treasures you've been given.** But like prayer, this treasure can be overlooked by our society, because it's so easy to take people for granted. We underestimate what God can do through you...by the power of your presence.

- If you ever wonder about the power of presence, just ask someone who's alone for the first time on the holiday.
- If you ever wonder about the power of presence, just ask someone who's moved to a new town and knows that there won't be anyone stopping by.
- If you ever wonder about the power of presence, just ask the young adult trapped in all the promises of movies and the internet, wondering if anyone cares whether they live or die.
- If you ever wonder about the power of presence, just ask the grieving family what it means to have that first someone walk into the funeral home visitation or the church.
- If you ever wonder about the power of presence, just ask those in the underground church where Christianity is illegal: Ask those Christ-followers living under dictators or extreme Islam or communism. Imagine the power of someone standing beside you as you face that.

Yes, but how? God must've known we'd underestimate ourselves, and take for granted what a treasure it is

to give ourselves to a cause greater than ourselves. He gets specific, in Colossians 3:9—17. Here's how:

*Colossians 3:9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.*

9-11 Don't lie to one another. You're done with that old life. It's like a filthy set of old clothes that don't fit any more. They're gone. Now you're dressed in a new wardrobe, every item of your new way of life custom-made by the Creator, with his label on it. All the old fashions are now obsolete. Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ. (And God has already given us this new, freed up way of seeing people.)

*12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

12-14 You were chosen by God for this new life of love. So dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offense. Forgive as quickly and completely as the Master forgave you. And over all this, wear love. Love holds the whole new outfit together. Never be without it.

*15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

15-17 Let the peace of Christ keep you in tune with each other, in step with each other. (You see, it doesn't matter how in tune or in step we are if we're never present with each other!) Paul says, none of this going off and doing your own thing. And cultivate thankfulness. Let the Word of Christ have the run of the house. Give it plenty of room in your lives. Instruct and direct one another using good common sense. And sing your hearts out to God! Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way.

And we get to practice this here, at church. I do have a confession, though. I never thought about being a senior pastor of a church until about a year before I arrived here. You want to know one of my biggest fears? Who would lock and unlock the doors. One of my first questions and experiences of awe when I arrived here was to find on my first Sunday that I didn't have to unlock or lock all the doors to the church. (of course at Saturday Worship, only 3 people didn't have keys to the church!) But the trustees and other people chose, long ago, that they would give their presence to this church. I say to you, do the same. MAKE the decision to support the church by your presence, then MANAGE that good decision!

(I know it's a bit like preaching to the choir, because you're here. But I want you to never forget the power of your being present in this place). *Because* we're actively trying to live out the kingdom party of God right now, because we're actively trying to worship God corporately and publicly, I fully believe there is nothing more important that anyone could be doing right now in this moment than opening the Word of God, sharing God's love with one another, praying for one another, and simply being present for this and other ministries of the church. We get messed up when we start thinking the church activities are ends in and of themselves to keep the organization alive, rather than the advancing Kingdom of God.

**THERE ARE 2 SECRETS TO PRACTICING THE GIFT OF PRESENCE:**

First, You already know how to do this. You know how, because you wouldn't be here had someone not given YOU the treasure of their presence. It could have been your grandma, your mom or dad, a friend, or a teacher. Take just a minute and thank God for that person... So, for you to be fully present for someone else, simply do what you remember that person doing for you.

Second, Jesus modeled this, theologically. Our whole Christian worldview is based on this: That God, the God of the universe, didn't remain aloof like "the force" or the unnamed spirit that infuses all things, but came and lived among us through the Son Jesus Christ, taught us, and healed many people...and we killed him. But He rose from the dead, and He made a way for us to live with and in him. It's the basis of all we believe as Christ followers. All because He came to be present with us...

This explains why being fully present with someone is such a potentially spiritual thing. And why we need to begin giving the treasure of our presence today. Sometimes procrastination is a legitimate response to a trivial task. But because giving our presence is such an expression of love, and love matters so much, love takes top priority. Why is now the best time to express love by your presence? Because you don't know how long you will have the opportunity. Circumstances change. People die. Children grow up. You have no guarantee of tomorrow. If you want to express love, you had better do it NOW.

With your presence, you endorse certain things. If each of us were to review our schedules last week, would our presence be endorsing the things we want? BE AWARE of where you are present!

A CHALLENGE FOR HOME: When I get home, I will pull out my calendar, or laptop, and make time now... to be present with my family, present with my friends, and present with the church.

#### A CHALLENGE FOR THE CHURCH:

- DO YOU THINK it's important to be a witness for Christ here? Give your presence to worship. Your presence is that important.
- DO YOU THINK it's important that the men of our church have a way to grow in prayer? Give your presence to the Tuesday 6:30am Men's Prayer Breakfast. Your presence is that important.
- DO YOU THINK it's important for kids to have a safe place to learn that God is wild about them? Give your presence in the nursery, or Sunday School, or Jr. Church. Your presence is that important.
- DO YOU THINK it's important for our church to reach out to our communities in new ways? Give your presence to supporting those ways, whether it's supporting Saturday Worship, or one of our many classes. It's that important.
- DO YOU THINK your friends and neighbors and children need encouragement and a reminder that God is present for them? Give them your time. It's the best expression of your love you could give. It's that important.

Imagine the world where you intentionally practice the power of presence: in friendship; in marriage; in a child's life. Don't leave them alone! Take time to tuck them in, no matter how tired you are, or how old they are. And with your presence, you can accomplish many things. Sometimes it's simply changes the tone of a meeting. HOW MUCH MORE was accomplished last week at the Webster Township Planning Commission with 25 of us there, than the month before, when poor Bob Sly and our architect were there by themselves! You have so much to give, simply by giving your presence to God's mission!

**What a magnificent treasure your presence is!** I believe what God wants Dexter Methodist Church to be known for is not our size, not our sermons, not our singing, not our strategy, not even our beautiful surroundings, *but for our love*. We've been present for 175 years reminding people of the message of Christ. What else could we offer our communities than our presence for another 175 years?

And with your presence, you can remind people: God's truth is usually the exact opposite of the way the world thinks... MEDIA CLIP—the Truth.

This is the truth  
If you turn things upside down  
You can't hope for your life to change.  
I would be lying to you if I said  
That you have a great future ahead  
That you can recover from your past mistakes

That your life could be filled with joy  
That your children could be safe and healthy  
More than anything you must know that  
Human being cannot accomplish these things  
And I am convinced of this because I know you  
All you are capable of if failure  
You have made a complete mess of your life  
And I refuse to believe under any circumstances that  
You can turn things around in the coming years  
You may think your life is bad now but  
But there is more to come  
You have only one destiny  
And whether you like it or not  
This is what is real  
I am the Lord your God  
**You should know I believe exactly the opposite...**  
I am the Lord your God  
This is what is real  
And whether you like it or not  
You have only one destiny  
There is more to come  
You may think your life is bad now but  
You can turn things around in the coming years  
And I refuse to believe under any circumstances that  
You have made a complete mess of your life  
And I am convinced of this because I know you  
Human beings cannot accomplish these things  
More than anything you must know  
That your children could be safe and healthy  
That your life can be filled with joy  
That you can recover from your past mistakes  
You have a great future ahead  
I would be lying to you if I said that  
You can't hope for your life to change  
If you turn things upside down  
This is the truth...

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We need to be present for all those trapped in the world's thinking, to bear with them through the first half of their thinking, and help them experience God's Truth.

PRAYER: You know, Father, next to salvation, the greatest gift you have ever given us is to literally be present with us, by Your Holy Spirit. Your word has told us you will never leave us nor forsake us. Thank you for this truth. You've given us everything we need to practice it