



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

The Stall

December 7, 2008

Dr. Matthew J. Hook

2 Corinthians 4

We talk about Advent as a time of waiting, and make it all “spiritual,” with this time of darkness and candles. And we like to think our lives are that: and we’re waiting for God to break in once again to the darkness... But the fact is, we’re not *really* waiting. We’re stalling. Or we’re stalled. Waiting implies you’re there looking forward to something. Waiting implies a purpose. Waiting implies you’ve planned ahead, and you’re there with a purpose. But we forget our purpose. We just stall... Even when we know God is moving in the world or in our lives.

You may be stalled on the highway...having run so fast. You may be reeling from “life in the fast lane with white lines.” You may be wondering why life is passing you by so quickly, cause all you feel is stalled. Some people get stalled in their driveway. And often times, that’s just fine with them. It’s more comfortable. Especially with all the media entertainment options you have available, right in your own home! “Hey, I’m totally stalled, but at least I’m happy!” Or I might say Anesthetized. Or living life as a spectator, experiencing everything second hand. You don’t even get out of your house.

You may be stalling because you’re waiting for January first, and your new year’s resolution. You’re just stalling this whole month; and yet another one is getting by. Are you waiting on God, or are you just stalling?

If you’re stalled, I have good news, you’re in the right place: Listen to what we believe God is calling us to do and be, right here. Listen, because it might be just what you need to turn over or ignite your life the way your car sometimes needs a new battery.

What God’s calling us to do is our mission. It’s simple: Go make disciples. Jesus’ final words to His disciples. But what’s a disciple? Is it just someone who prays a prayer to ask Jesus in to their heart? No. That reduces faith to mental ascent and a formula. Is it someone who goes to church on Sundays? No. that would be like saying going to a garage makes you a car. (stalled or otherwise). Is a disciple being a “good person?” Hopefully, but not exactly. I was challenged in our staff meeting to say it in a way that Kimberly and Jeremy could take with them to the youth and kids. The words God brought to my mind were simple: Your whole life. You can trust Jesus with your whole life. Being a fully-committed disciple means following Jesus with YOUR WHOLE LIFE. Have you given “your whole life?” You may say “But what about unrelated stuff, like my job? What about that other stuff I like to do so well? What about this relationship I’m into?” Yep. Don’t you know that the Lord of life will do better managing it than you ever could? Kids, that’s what Jesus invites you and me to. And it will never be any better than when we give Him our whole life. Every breath. Every thought. Every action. It’s like this: If God is really God, the center of the universe God, then our lives will only be the best when we make God the center of our lives. Every area of your life radiating out from Him. And that’s our mission: Go make disciples. Go: you can’t just do it here. Go. God is leading you somewhere in order to bring people to Him. They’ll come not just because of what you say, but because you, being who you are, living it out as best you can. And that’s the beginning of the adventure God calls you to. Everything else... EVERYTHING else, is just a means to that end. Your career, your family, your mind, what you read, your recreation, every sport, every program you participate, is just a means to the end of giving “your whole life” to Christ.

And that's where this church comes in: Hopefully you've heard the church's vision. When we get it right, we will look something like this: **A regional equipping center for Christ-focused life transformation for the unconnected 1000s!**

Most of us can recall the "regional equipping center" part. But I want to talk a little about what we're equipping *for*. And that's life transformation! Life transformation isn't just for the mystic, spiritual people among us, or elite few believers who "get it." It's for *all* people, as they encounter Christ. When you and I quit stalling, and begin opening ourselves up, following Christ, allowing Him to live in us, it affects every area of our lives: relationally (how we treat people around us), physically (how we care for ourselves), mentally (what we read, watch, and dwell on), even financially (what we use our money for).

In other words, you can be equipped...

- To relate to people.
- To take care of yourself physically.
- To handle your finances.
- To be a better parent or spouse or neighbor.
- To pray. To live. To love.

Listen to how Paul described this new way to the Christ-followers in Corinth, beginning in 2 Cor. 3:16:

2 Corinthians 3:16-18 *"Whenever, though, anyone turns to face God as Moses did, God removes the veil and there they are—face-to-face! They suddenly recognize that God is a living, personal presence, not a piece of chiseled stone. (I hope you take this home and dwell on it. Let it sink in).*

And when God is personally present, a living Spirit, that old, constricting legislation is recognized as obsolete. We're free of it! All of us! Nothing between us and God, our faces shining with the brightness of his face. And so we are transfigured much like the Messiah, our lives gradually becoming brighter and more beautiful as God enters our lives and we become like him."

4:1-2 *"Since God has so generously let us in on what he is doing, we're not about to throw up our hands and walk off the job just because we run into occasional hard times. (That's stalling). We refuse to wear masks and play games. (That's stalling). We don't maneuver and manipulate behind the scenes. (That's stalling). And we don't twist God's Word to suit ourselves. (That's stalling). Rather, we keep everything we do and say out in the open, the whole truth on display, so that those who want to can see and judge for themselves in the presence of God."* The Message

That's why it's Christ-centered life transformation. Because we seek to center our lives on Him. Don't you know that that can't help but transform us? We want to be a place where you can get outside your comfort zone.

- Paul says since God has let us in on it, we have this ministry—we don't lose heart. If you've lost heart lately, check and see in what area of living this one and only life of yours you may be stalling.
- If you're operating in secret or shameful ways, you're stalling.
- If deception and manipulation are a part of your thought process, do a stall check.

There may be some major parts of your life that have yet to be touched by Christ. We think we're only supposed to give Him our best. But He has asked for our whole life, best—and worst.

We stall when we get that backwards.

- Not just your Sunday schedule, but your week.
- Not just your "now I lay me down to sleep" prayer time, but in the car.

Our relationship with Christ isn't just for Sunday mornings, or for looking good, or for doing the right thing. It's not about being "programmed." It's about "Walk with Jesus. Give your whole life over to Him, and be prepared to live an adventure. When you begin living like that, even a trip to Subway can be an adventure. I was talking with Greg on Thursday, who would "How can you say my life as it is right now could be an adventure? I'm no Indiana Jones or Billy Graham. It's His adventure not ours. But the other day he was in a

hurry—okay, mad dash, and was at Subway. And after his sandwich was done, the girl behind the counter left it in front of the cash register in order to finish making the sub for the person behind him, who then proceeded to pay first! Which delayed Greg's leaving to the point that he could go nowhere due to the wrecker driver and other cars who pulled in front of him to get out of the lot. Stalled? Maybe. But instead of losing it, he was equipped with a new perspective that allowed him to say "Okay, Lord. What's the deal?" And Greg would say it's God's story, not his.

We get it backwards when we think this Christ-focused life transformation thing is a program of the church; when in reality it's the church itself that is a program of God's transformation of the world! Personally, we get it backwards too. I have the tendency to think God and His church are a part of my world, and me changing my life when in reality I am a part of God's world! And I can be a part of the church's mission: to bring the world to glimpse what God's preferred and good reality really could be! And that's the really cool thing: **the church needs you**. God has chosen to tell His story through your story. And we need you! It's why Paul wrote in our passage that "*we keep everything we do and say out in the open, the whole truth on display, so that those who want to can see and judge for themselves in the presence of God.*" God has chosen to work through people. That's a part of the whole incarnation: God in the flesh. That was the prophets. That was Mary and Joseph. And today that's you and me. And it's why Jesus Himself said "*Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*" *John 14:12*. Think about it. That's Jesus speaking. And because He says it, know this: You are more than you think you are. You are more than you think you are.

This week, don't stall. As you look at the various areas of your life, if there is a question in your mind about whether or not you've given that part over to God, there's your answer. Trust Him with it. And know that this church is here to help each of us through that process, as we seek to be a regional equipping center for just that: Christ focused life transformation for the unconnected 1000s.

We're going to look at stalling and being stalled as we move through Advent leading up to Christmas.

STUDY GUIDE

Monday: Reread 2 Corinthians 2:16-18. Claim the living God for this day. Envision one step you could take today that would line up with your life becoming brighter and more like Christ's. And do it.

Tuesday: Read all the way through your bulletin, as a prayer. Start with the prayer page! Pray over each name, and all the lives each name represents. Then pray over each ministry listed. Pray not only for the events, but pray that God would use each one to equip people for discipleship.

Wednesday: Read 2 Corinthians 4:3-18. Paul calls this message "treasure in earthen vessels" or clay pots. We are the jars of clay, and yet we contain this treasure of Christ's Holy Spirit in us. Look at v6. How did the light of Christ first break into your life? How do verses 7-12 help you cope with troubles or anxieties? Pray for God's wisdom to be lived out in your life, as you face each day.

Thursday: Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-11. This is Paul writing a letter to the believers at Corinth. They were not just stalled, but sidetracked by many things. What has you stalled? What seeks to sidetrack you from growing in your discipleship of being like Christ? Give those over to God.

Friday: Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. Here Paul is sharing what our "ministry" should look like. Focus on v17. Did you ever consider yourself an ambassador for anything? (a product or hobby?) Pray that God would help you break out from being stalled. Find a way to get started today!