

“Don’t Stop”
Philippians 3:7-14

Dr. J. Howard Olds
June 29, 2008

Philippians is one of my favorite books in the Bible. In this book is a text that I have always admired. *“But one thing I do, forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”* I believe there is a sermon in here somewhere that I want to leave with you. Maybe it’s contained in two words. DON’T STOP

DON’T STOP THINKING ABOUT TOMORROW

Some people see things as they are and ask why; I like to dream of things that never were and ask why not?

There are workers and there are whiners, producers and pouters, positive thinkers and there are naysayers. There are winners and there are losers.

I think about my first month in this congregation. You had been through a lot of transition. A strong team of lay people had moved this church as far as possible. They had studied the community, projected the needs of the church, and even designed a new education building. But they had a problem. They needed 700 new parking spaces to implement their plans. We met. We prayed. We struggled. Finally one night I said, “I believe every problem is a possibility. Look around here on Sunday morning and we have solved our parking problems with kind neighbors. Why not ask the city to embrace what we are already doing?” Believe it or not they did.

We looked at the designed building and it was not enough. It would cost about 4 million dollars to build. What we needed would cost 10 million dollars. We came to you, the congregation. Some laughed at our lofty dreams. A few got angry. When it was all said and done a new 50,000 square ft. building was erected and another 40,000 sq. ft. including the Chapel was renovated. And all of it was paid for upon the completion of construction. God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.

There are “can do” churches and there are “don’t you dare do” churches. This is a “can do” kind of church. You build castles in the air and put foundations under them. Don’t stop dreaming about tomorrow. Our Council Chair stopped me at Annual Conference and said we need 40 more acres to be the church we need to be. I said you are in real estate, why don’t you write all the residents in Meadow Lake and see how many home owners what to contribute their property to the cause.

Or we can think outside the box. There may not be 40 available acres of land on Franklin Road, but there are 40 acres in Williamson County and the time has come for this church to follow current trends and become a multiple campus – in Spring Hill where it is happening now, in Nolensville, in Fairview, on Hillsboro Road and in multiple places in the heart of

the city. Don't stop thinking about tomorrow.

DON'T STOP LOVING PEOPLE RADICALLY

They'll know we are Christians by our love. You don't have to be around a place long until you discover if it's a loving church or not. Some churches welcome outsiders, other churches ignore them. Some churches know how to settle conflicts. Other churches don't. Some churches stand in judgment of those who are different. Other churches major on inclusion. "If your heart is with my heart in love and loyalty to Christ," come on in.

God is love. That is why we believe in the Trinity. The Trinity is a reminder that God is relational by nature. The three persons of the Trinity are known for their love. There are no power struggles in the Godhead. There is no need for a boss. When people live in love and harmony together there is no need for a dictator. It is enough to be in relationship. That's what God desires for his Church.

Somebody started telling me a parable the other day and then couldn't remember the punch line. They were embarrassed, but it set me free to tell the story my way. A regular church member drove into the church parking lot only to discover a bearded man, of Middle Eastern descent had taken his parking place. "That is where I park every Sunday" announced the church attender. The visitor apologized and moved his car. A few minutes later the church member got to his regular pew only to discover the same visitor was in his seat. "That's my pew," said the church member. "I apologize," said the visitor as he got up and moved. At the close of the service the pastor invited people to pray at the altar. As the church member reached the altar— you guessed it— the visitor was kneeling at the member's usual spot. "I'm sorry," said the visitor, "I have obviously disturbed your worship. See that cross above the altar. I usually hang from it out of love for you. But today I thought I would come down and see if it made any difference."

Love one another radically. Jesus said it is not enough to love those who love you, even the pagans do that. Christians are to love their enemies, pray for those who persecute you so that you may be the children of your heavenly Father. Don't stop loving people radically.

DON'T STOP MAKING DISCIPLES INTENTIONALLY

The Great Commission is still the Great Commission. "*Go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*" The Church has no higher calling that to dive deeply into the disciple-making business.

The first church I served had 16 members on the roll and an average of 8 in attendance. It was obvious to me as an 18-year-old kid that we needed a revival. They agreed as long as I preached it for free. I agreed. Believe it or not that little country church was filled by the final night. Mr. Alex Penn, who sort of ran the place, pulled me aside and said "Preacher, you got to open the doors of the church and invite people to join." The thought had not entered my mind. But the following Sunday I baptized two 70-year-old men and a 16-year-old boy. Last year there were 231 professions of faith in this congregation. That is why my soul gets restless when I think that 40% of Methodist churches in the United States have no

professions of faith each year. How will pastors and lay persons explain themselves to God on judgment day?

Of course, there are all kinds of ways to make disciples. Sunday School Children's Ministries, Youth Groups, Christ Care Groups are essential to every church. These groups need to remember why they exist—to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is a lifelong walk with the Lord. Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? Are you going on to perfection? Are you earnestly striving for it? Those are questions Wesley used to ask his members?

DON'T STOP SERVING OTHERS COMPASSIONATELY

In the words of Robert Schuller "Find a need and fill it."

We are sending two Hispanic persons to be trained as local pastors next month. We already have a Hispanic band. We are now offering classes in English as a Second Language. In September we will begin a Hispanic Worship Service. God has sent us leaders. Now we need to find followers.

In the Wedgewood-Houston neighborhood we have traded a crack house for after school programs for children and positive ministries for young people. Our missionaries, Brian and Courtney, are living in the area building relationships and assessing community needs. The opportunities are limitless. Volunteers have been plentiful and resourceful. Soon the time will come for Brentwood to build a Community Life Center for children, youth, and adults where this crack cocaine house once stood. And when the time comes, I hope this congregation steps forward boldly. You can make this dream a reality in the very near future.

The Brentwood United Methodist Oldsmobile is now in service. The dream of Rev. Wynn Batson is now a rest stop on wheels. I want Wynn to tell you about it himself. Wynn just became a Licensed Local Pastor at this Annual Conference and assigned through Brentwood Church as Chaplain to the Tennessee Federation of Chaplains.

1. What does this mean for you Wynn?

Receiving my Pastor's License was the greatest event of my life. It allows me to go into the field in disasters and tragic circumstances, as the hands and feet of Christ, ministering to His people at their time of greatest need. I have the full authority of the church to baptize, celebrate Holy Communion, and perform marriages. Many of our emergency services workers are unchurched and I am their only contact with organized religion. It is a way for the Church to meet them halfway.

2. Describe for us the Brentwood United Methodist Oldsmobile.

The Oldsmobile is amazing. It is heated and air conditioned, it carries 100 gallons of fresh water and enough fuel to run the generator continuously for four days without refueling. It has a full kitchen, a full bathroom, a communications center that allows us to coordinate with all emergency agencies, and computers with high-speed internet. I am an EMT, and it carries a full set of medical supplies and equipment and can observe and treat

up to four patients simultaneously. It is loaded with bottled water, Gatorade, and snacks, to allow us to keep emergency workers and families hydrated and healthy. It is a quiet and comfortable place of refuge in the chaos of a disaster.

3. How has this vehicle already been put into service for others?

Our first call for the Chaplain's Emergency Response Vehicle (CERV) was to a West Nashville rock quarry where a 16-year-old had drowned. It was hot and dusty and we supplied emergency workers with cold water and Gatorade and a cool place to rest before returning to the search. The ladies from the emergency services were especially interested in seeing the bathroom. They have a distinct disadvantage in the field, and the Police, Fire, and Emergency Management trailers don't have a bathroom. Ours is the only one.

4. Tell us your dream for this ministry in the future.

My dream for this ministry is that it might be used to the glory of Christ and that it might also motivate other Chaplains to build similar units. I'd like to see a fleet of these units with one in every community, meeting both the physical needs and the spiritual and emotional needs of emergency workers and victim's families. No one should have to suffer tragedy alone. The Oldsmobile is a visible reminder that in a time of intense pain and suffering, God and His church are there, serving His people.

Thank you, Wynn, for your ministry to God's people.

Time does not permit me to go on. Don't stop being the Church. Become so engaged and passionate about the ministry BUMC is doing that your new pastor will have to succeed, because you, through the Holy Spirit, will make him a success. I believe from the bottom of my heart that the best is yet to be for Brentwood United Methodist Church. God still wants you to touch hearts and transform lives. And I can't wait to hear what God may choose to do next in this great congregation. In our Church, Lord, be glorified, be glorified now and forever more. Amen.