

# Pressing onward together – for transformation

February 2007

*By Pastor Dave*

*“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect,  
but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.*

*<sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it.*

*But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,*

*<sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which  
God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.” Phil 3:12-14 NIV*

**Change.** Mention change and immediately ears perk up and heart rates increase –for some out of excitement, and for the rest, out of trepidation. My personality is such that I like the tried and true. I tend towards being pragmatic and a realist. I like routine and knowing what is coming next. I tend to value change only when I understand the risks and how it benefits me, but I am learning that to be one of Jesus’ followers we must embrace and pursue change – to take a chance, a risk. Walking by faith is in a sense, a series of decisions based on what I believe He is saying to me (these directives always align with scripture) and “going for it.” Some would call this risk or chance, the Bible calls this faith. I am not proposing change for the sake of change – like when we rearrange furniture in a room because “variety is the spice of life”; but the posture of embracing purposeful change as we believe directed by Him for the sake of spiritual growth.

Embracing purposeful change is like the necessary adjustments we are “forced” to make to our “normally” traveled route from home to work when the highway department closes a street or a bridge for the sake of making improvements. At first this change is inconvenient and calls for adjustment, it’s mostly a “negative” and the hope of “improvement” helps us accept the situation and move on; eventually the “new” route becomes “routine.” In the nine years of living in Frederick, we have experienced three changes to the Jefferson Street/Route 15/340 interchange. Each change brought with it the need to adjust, and each promised relief in the traffic congestion. The first two changes seemed to be failures in that the traffic congestion remained an unsolved dilemma. You could say that the changes were a failure, or you could say that they were “steps of faith” that revealed “what won’t work” and the need to make another change. The third change has resulted in a solution that relieved the congestion at the current level of traffic demand.

**Changes and our Sunday Morning Format.** Dr. Mark Labberton, a keynote speaker at the National Pastor’s Convention hosted by the Journal of Pastoral Leadership, said the following about leaders as learners in a recent article, “*Key to our roles as pastors and teachers is the call to foster in our leaders and congregations a spirit of learning for a*

*lifetime.... What we as pastors and leaders need is an adrenalized humility –an eager acknowledgement and ready admission that all of us are learners.”* As I recently led the members of our pastoral and ministry staff through a discussion of this article, I sensed the voice of our Master confirming two lessons for me. The first is that He is indeed calling out to the New Life family to renew our quest for personal spiritual growth. Paul’s statement above, from Philippians, 3:12-14, is a statement that sums up the heart of a lifelong leader/learner, *“Because I have much more to learn about Christ, and to experience of His grace – I am pursuing Him with an all-out effort.”* Every follower of Jesus Christ is called to intentionally and passionately pursue spiritual growth – that call is a call to an ever deepening relationship with Him. The second lesson has to do with my call to lead as a learner.

Serving as the Lead Pastor means that I am called to lead as one who is also “in process” and learning throughout daily life on the planet. My call to lead doesn’t exempt me from the learning curve of being human. With the call for us to pursue spiritual growth and the responsibility to lead our congregational response to this directive, I initiated the recent changes to our Sunday morning agenda with a confidence that I was following our Master’s directive, but not without some reservations too. No follower of Jesus hears Him correctly 100% of the time, and pastors are no exception. The reservation I felt was due to this sense that I hadn’t prepared “us” for this change as well as I could have. This article, weekly updates, along with a forth coming letter from me will hopefully, bring us all up-to-speed on the reasoning behind these changes.

As a fellow learner in this faith-walk of following Christ, I have sought counsel before I initiated the change to a dual format of holding LIFE training classes at the same time we are having a celebration service in the auditorium. This change in format has incredible potential in facilitating spiritual growth, but it also means challenges as well. But having initiated and implemented this change, doesn’t mean that we’ve achieved the objectives – no, it means we’ve taken a step of faith. Like the highway department learned in making the changes to the traffic patterns I mentioned above, achieving an objective may take more than one adjustment before we achieve our objectives. We have taken an initial step of faith and further adjustments will be necessary, but that is where we have the privilege of functioning as a community of faith.

While we go through the growing pains of this change I’d ask you to do this for me. Would you give me your input about what is working and what isn’t working in regards to our dual formal on Sunday mornings? Knowing what isn’t working along with an idea about how to adjust (change direction), will help us all make progress on our pathway to spiritual growth –together. Together we can become the church family that Jesus has purposed for us to be: a grace empowered community of healing and hope.

Like Coach Grant Taylor, in the movie, “Facing the Giants, who challenged his players to live out their God-given purpose by declaring that “he (personally) was going to give God his best.” He asked them, “Will you join me?” I ask you as one who is learning too, “Will join me in living out our Savior’s purpose for giving us life by giving ourselves 100% -will you join me?”