

Freedom - Week 1

Revelation 2-3, Ephesians 3:10

Dan Hamel

Jan 6, 2019

It is so, so good to be back with you all. Most of you know that about three weeks ago, Keren and I welcomed our first child into the world, Daniel Hudson. We are in love and our hearts are bursting with more joy and gratitude to God even more than words could describe. We dressed him up and brought him to church last week. I'll try to take just a moment to answer the main questions I'm asked the most:

1. How did it happen? Keren's due date was Dec 17. On December 17th, Keren was in Buy Buy Baby, and there in the store, right after making her very last purchase to prepare for our son, her water broke! From that point on the labor took about 24 hours.
2. Is everyone healthy? Yes! Mom and baby are doing great.
3. Are you getting much sleep? I'm not trying to be disrespectful, but I'm sleeping great! Keren is of course getting less sleep than usual. She is an incredible mom and watching what moms do for their children is one of the most inspiring things I've ever seen.

We want to thank the nurses and doctors at Community South who were wonderful to us! And we want to thank you as a church family. You have been so kind, so generous, and it means so much to have you share in our joy. For new parents who don't have family in town, you have loved us like family. We are so grateful!

One more update: on Friday we had our All-night prayer event. We had 200 people show up and pray from 11 until 6 a.m. and worshipped, read Scripture and really sought the Lord with all our hearts.

So there is this question I've been asking myself my entire adult life. This is the question that when I lay awake at night I can't stop thinking about. When Keren and I were dating, this is the question we talked more about than anything and read dozens and dozens of books about. What kind of church does God want? Think about that for a moment. When God was planning on creating the church, what did he hope for? How did he want it to look? In Ephesians 3:10 we read this: God's intent was that now, through the church, his manifold wisdom would be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms. What does that mean? It means that every once in a while God gathers all the angelic creatures of heaven together and says, "Do you want to know what I've been planning from all eternity? Do you want to know why I created the world in the first place? Do you want to see my wisdom and power and love and creativity on full display?" They all nod. And then God says "Look!" And points at the church.

At the deepest level in my heart, I want the Creek to be the kind of church that God can point to and say "Look at that place; look at those people. That's my wisdom, love, my grace on full display. That's what I've had in my heart from all eternity." In the book of Revelation, Jesus speaks to the churches in Seven different cities. You can read about this in chapters 2 and 3. To

four of the churches he spends time recognizing areas of faithfulness and then turning his attention to where they need to improve, to one of the churches, Laodicea, he has nothing good to say, only rebuke, and to two churches, Smyrna and Philadelphia, he has no critique. He simply esteems them for their faith and love and then promises to reward them. As I reflect on that reality, that Jesus stands in our midst as a church, he knows everything that is going on - I so desperately want to be the sort of church where Jesus says: "I've got no critiques. You listened to my words and have done exactly what I wanted! Well done, good and faithful servants." As I talk to more and more people around this place, I know that's the heart of so many. And I believe that by the grace of God, we will get there!

There is a life group in our church that is really getting at the heart of this. Over the summer, one of the ladies in that life group was diagnosed with cancer. This fall, she underwent a double mastectomy, and afterward had to receive several doses of chemo, the kind that causes your hair to fall out. These are incredibly difficult things for a woman to endure in the prime of her life. But she had faith in Christ, and she had her community. After her chemo treatments began, she invited her friends over to do a hair cutting party. One of her friends she met on Facebook knew about it and so kindly said she'd like to come and take pictures. Here are her friends and family joining together to pray. Here's the hair cutting, and here's her group rallying around her. Can I tell you something? She and her family moved here two years ago for her husband's job. They didn't know anybody in town. They came to this church; they got plugged in; and this happened. They didn't have to carry that weight alone. The friend she met on Facebook who took the pictures you are looking at said "How did you all become friends? What's the connection?" She said, "We go to the Creek." Her friend said, "That's the kind of church I want to go to." And she's joined us for worship several times since. As a church, we are learning more and more what it means to sacrificially love one another. And that love is a witness to others.

There are some absolutely incredible things taking place all around here at this church. And I want to bring you up to speed on something our elders have been praying about for more than a year now. And this all comes back to that question: What kind of church does God want? A little more than a year ago, our elders went away for a retreat to give attention to that question, and to make sure we are doing everything we can to lead the church well.

While we were away, our church was just about to have its 40th birthday, and we were so thankful as we looked back over those 40 years for the ways God has been at work through this church. Over the last 40 years, this church has seen more than 5,000 people baptized and introduced to a saving relationship with Jesus. We've been able to give away tens of millions of dollars to local and global organizations who are helping people in need. There are tens or thousands of people who have been able to hear the gospel for the very first time because of the support this church has provided. We were so grateful for the way God has worked. Then as we looked to the future, we know there are specific things God is calling us to. Specifically, we believe God is calling us to:

Healthy succession. (As Gary steps down from his role as being our lead pastor and I step into that role, we wanted to do this in the most God-honoring way possible - In a way that not only maintains the unity of our church but also in a way that actually increases our momentum.)

Make disciples. (This is our number one objective as follower of Christ. The last command Jesus gave his followers was this: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me...therefore go and make disciples.” We have invested heavily into this for 18 months, and with more than 200 leaders trained, we are now equipped and prepared as a church to help everyone who calls this place home grow and deepen their relationship with Christ and deepen their relationship with others.)

Invest in the next generation. (We have about 1500 young people who worship at this church and call The Creek home. I believe, without a shadow of a doubt, our children and students are the most precious gift God has given to us. And as a church, we want to do everything possible to radically invest into the next generation, to help them know God and love God with all of their hearts. When it comes to faith, we want our ceiling to be their floor.)

Advance God’s work internationally. (We have partners all over the globe who are serving some of the most under-resourced people on the planet. They are doing the work that we can’t do. And we’re not just helping with food and education and healthcare. We are sharing the gospel with people who have not yet heard of the message of Jesus. We want to be great partners to those organizations and continue to support their needs.)

Honor God with our resources. (God’s word says, “Those who have been faithful with a few things will be entrusted with many things.” So for every single dollar that is given to this church, we want to have absolute integrity. We want to be disciplined and wise, and we want to make the greatest impact in the kingdom that we can.)

So this is what we’ve been talking about as an eldership for the past 15 months. We have been praying consistently, as well as fasting, asking God to show us how, through pursuing these priorities, we can become the kind of church that God wants. And as we have been praying and seeking God’s heart, the word we kept coming to again and again and again: Freedom. This is an important word in the Bible. In John 8:31-32 Jesus said, “If you hold to my teachings, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Galatians 5:1 says, “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” We want to be a church that experiences complete freedom! And we’ve articulated that freedom in two specific ways: freedom from debt, freedom for impact.

Let’s begin by taking a moment to talk about freedom from debt. Gary is going to talk more about this next week. This church currently has 3.5 million dollars of debt. That debt is our remaining mortgage that we took out nearly 17 years ago to pay for the worship center here at our Franklin Road campus. The original loan was 8.1 million dollars; we have been slowing paying it down. I want you to know that for the past 17 years our church has not taken out any new debt. We have paid for everything in cash since 2002, but we still have this 3.5 million dollars remaining. And our leaders have become increasingly convinced that it does not honor God for us as a church to be in debt...It distracts us from our mission, it takes \$600,000 dollars a year to service our mortgage. So every single month \$50,000 is going to the bank rather than being invested into ministry. The Bible says, “Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another” Romans 13:8. We want to honor this Biblical principle!

We also want to look at our building and technology and see where we can invest to have an even greater return. Over the last two years our youth group has doubled in size. We have nearly 500 middle school and high school students meeting here every single week. And the reality is they are out of space! When they gather together, they are literally sitting on the floor Indian style. We had hoped to build an entire new building for them, but that was going to cost between 4-5 million dollars, and the more we prayed about it, the more we became convinced that was not a fiscally responsible decision. Instead, for about 1/10 the cost we can renovate the chapel area where they meet. We're going to knock out walls, create outdoor meeting areas, and give them room for another 150 students, so they can continue to reach their friends for Christ.

We also want to see renovations here at Franklin Road. As you look around, most of you see is 17 years old. Hasn't our team done a wonderful job keeping this place looking nice! But it's time for some renovations...painting, carpet, seating, and the biggest ticket item of all—technology. I don't know if you're anything like me, but most people upgrade their phones every 2-3 years. We can't imagine still using an iPhone 1 or 2 - that's 10 years old. We have a lot of technology around here that hasn't been upgraded in well over 10 years, and we need to make some necessary improvements. We expect campus-wide building and technology upgrades to run roughly three million dollars.

And we don't simply want to invest in what God is doing here, in our own neighborhoods. We have asked our mission partners around the world what their most pressing needs are and what we can do as a church to help. We are dreaming about what it would look like to be able to help plant several churches in Japan, which is the second largest unreached people group on earth, more than 126 million people, less than 1% Christian. We are dreaming about helping to complete the construction of a hospital in India that will provide life-saving treatments and blood transfusions to people in desperate need; helping to renovate a school in Kenya to provide education to orphans; helping to provide sustainable, long-term care for young girls in Cambodia. With more support, they will actually be able to rescue more girls from brothels and bring them into safe houses.

So as we come back to this question: "What kind of church does God want?" We believe that for us, the next step is to experience freedom: complete freedom from debt, and renewed freedom to make an impact for Jesus as never before, both here in greater Indianapolis and around the world. At a financial level, in order to experience this kind of freedom, here are the numbers we are looking at:

\$3,500,000 Debt Elimination.
\$3,000,000 building and technology upgrades.
\$500,000 mission partnerships.

\$7,000,000 (in addition to our normal giving)

We have two major goals in terms of seeing this number realized. Here's the first: 100% participation. We know that in terms of resources, some people have comparatively less, some have an average amount, and some have an exceptional amount. No matter where you might fall on the spectrum, we have been praying and hoping that everyone who calls this church home

would be a part of this vision. (For those who are our guests, for those who are new here, I want to say this as clearly as possible: we are not making any ask of you. We just want you be able to come here, be blessed, and receive.) But goal number one is for every person who is a part of this church family, who calls this place home and is committed to this church, to participate.

Here is goal number two: Our annual budget is 6.5 million dollars. So without an increase in our budget, in order to be fully funded over the next two years, we will need to see:

\$6.5 million (2019)

\$6.5 million (2020)

\$7 million FREEDOM

\$20 million by the end of 2020

This is a big vision. This is a God-sized vision, but I am certain that if we see this vision realized, our church will be in a healthier financial place than we have ever been in our 40 year history, and we will be more poised and equipped to make an impact for Christ than ever before.

We have a lot of people whom have been consistently, generously, and sacrificially giving to this church for years. We are so, so thankful and humbled. We also have some people who have been around here for a while who are still considering what it looks like to put God first with their finances and get in the game. No matter where you are at on the spectrum, I hope you hear our heart on this: We are not trying to twist any arms. We are not trying to put guilt on anyone's lap. All we want to do is ask for you (and perhaps you and your family) to prayerfully consider how God might be leading you to participate in this vision and see this goal realized.

We hope to see a number of families who God has uniquely blessed commit to giving in truly exceptional ways. We also hope to see dozens and dozens of families who have discretionary income or appreciated stocks, or resources in savings, be able to give in significant ways. Clearly those gifts make a huge impact. But we also hope to see hundreds and hundreds of people at our church give at this level, where over two years, the additional giving might total \$1,000, or \$3,000, \$5,000. Ultimately, the total we need is for well over 1250 families to join together, and see the entire goal realized. If we work together, not toward equal amounts, but toward equal sacrifice, we will be poised to experience genuine freedom as a church. And I believe we will continue to see God work around here in life-changing ways.

Just a few months ago, two of our high school students got to be a part of the work of God in the lives of one of their friends. Jack and Stephen are seniors, and they have been praying for their friend Adam, who wasn't a Christian, since they were in the third grade. Think about that. At the age of 10, they started asking God to help their friend know his love. They reached out to him again and again and again. Finally, their friend came to church. And then this last summer, Jack and Stephen paid for his deposit to go to our CIY summer camp. Their friend made a decision for Jesus, and just two months ago, after praying for Adam for more than eight years, Jack and Stephen got to join him in the water, baptize him, and then celebrate new life!

We want to do everything we can to invest into this place, to see this church become all that it can be, so stories like that can be told again and again and again, hundreds or even thousands of times over. This is the church I am going to be raising my son in. This is the church many of you are raising your children and your grandchildren in. And we want to do everything we possibly can, not just for ourselves, but for the next generation, to see this church become all that it can be--to be the kind of place God can point to and say, "Yes, that's the kind of church I want."

We are going to be continuing to share this vision for freedom over the next couple of weeks, and we'll unpack more of the details, but we also want you to know that the elders and myself are going to be available at the front of our worship center at the end of each service for the next several weeks, so if you have any questions about this, or anything at all on your mind you want to talk about, we would love to be able to connect with you.

Prayer.