

**“For the City: a City within the City”**  
**Hebrews 13:12-16**

Today I want to help us reflect on what God has done in and through our church, while simultaneously considering how we can keep our foot on the gas and experience an even greater next 5 years. Let the hashtagging (#rhcnxt5years) begin!

**Check out this incredible Story Art piece** created by Mrs. Lauren Sanders who makes our Arlington church planting apprentice, Kevin, famous, by being his wife. Thank you Lauren!

It's hard to believe we moved to Medford in June of 2010. God deposited a dream in my heart to start a church in one of America's largest, most influential cities. A trip to Boston to watch my (and *your*) beloved Red Sox sealed the deal for me in the summer of 2005 (that's 11 years ago, crazy!). God was clearly working in the city as the year before he helped Papi, ManRam, Beckett, and Tito break the curse of the Bambino! Over time, God located that same dream into the hearts of six other adults, 6 kids were drug along for the ride (the really had no choice!).

We moved to Medford, got acclimated to the culture (which is still happening! Because the city is dynamic not static), started meeting people, finding ways to serve, and launched our first group that met in our homes, and our primary goal was to not look like a cult. Seriously. Pretty tall task. People started coming. We started a second group in September, a third Group in January of 2011, and then we said: "Let's go for it!" And we launched our weekly Sunday worship services on April 10, 2011 at the Springstep building beside City Hall. Here are a few stats that help tell the story of Redemption Hill.

We have gone from...

- 13 people in that first gathering to 324 a couple of weeks ago at our Easter service.
- 1 to 12 Groups meeting throughout the city;
- 0 to 124 members, and seen
- 41 people declare they are "all in" with Jesus through Baptism.
- We have seen 2,000 Unique Sunday Guests come through our doors on Sundays.

We believe God ignited something here that is going to burn for a realllly, realllly long time. But please hear this: our goal is not to simply see something great within the people who make up Redemption Hill, because we measure the value of a church by how dramatically it impacts life out there and contributes to Medford becoming a greater city. That's why we're going to consider what it looks like to...

**The Point: Continue building a greater city by living as a city within the city.**

What on earth am I talking about? 3 components here.

1. We dwell in "the city." We are citizens of Medford or a surrounding city.
2. But we are also "a city" Jesus is building within the city of Medford and Greater Boston.
  - In some of the opening words in his longest and most famous recorded sermon, Jesus said: **"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." (Matthew 5:14)**
  - We have dual citizenship: Citizens of God's city while also being a full-time citizens of this great city.
3. What we want to do is build a greater city!

T: But How? I believe Hebrews 13:12-16 has some clear guidance for us!

*Introduction:* Pg. 1010. If you need or would like a new Bible, that's our gift to you. **Read 12-16**

I want to give us 3 encouragements as we consider 5 great years and open the blueprint for what can lead us to an even greater next 5 years as we live as a city within the city.

## **I. Continue building a greater city by seeking the greater city (14).**

Why would anyone want to start a church in a city like Boston? Consider two strategic considerations.

- **Cities are marked by population density and diversity.**
  - Urbanization, the reality of massive amounts of people moving into the city, is here to stay! 54% of the world's population lives in cities. By 2050, the # will rise to around 66%!
  - You could make the argument that God loves the city more than rural areas because God loves people more than cows! :) Yes, it's true. I mean God loves cows too, but not as much. Be encouraged! I'm here for you. Just trying to raise your self-esteem by a few micropoints! :)
- **Cities are centers of regional and global influence.**
  - "As the city goes, so goes society." - Keller
  - The city is a place of great potential. When you put people together in close proximity, creativity & productivity are the natural consequence. Culture is made in the city.
  - The ambitious *and* marginalized come together to pursue a better life in the city.
  - And, as we saw tragically experienced three years ago with the Marathan Bombings: the very best and very worst of humanity is on display for all to see in the city.

### **PT: I. Continue building a greater city...**

We have a GREAT City!

- I may be a little biased, but we walk on hallowed ground: this *is* the Athens of America, this *is* the Cradle of Liberty, this *is* Titledtown, this *is* The Hub [of the universe] (thank you Oliver Wendell Holmes)
- Boston is a global city with global influence.

But why Medford?

- When most people think about Boston, you have it all right here: rich history, the arts, really good food, really quick access to the Garden and Fenway Park, wicked funny accents!
- We have wicked smart people, ambitious types working in medicine, engineering, technology, and education, as well as the "I'm gonna change the stinkin' world types" (I have Ivy League friends who earn well below median salaries to make this world a better place).
- But let's not forget your straight-up hard-working, family-loving, blue-collar, no-nonsense, what you see is what you get Meffa people.
- Medford is rich in diversity. Blue-collar, white-collar. The socio-economic spectrum covered. Kids from 68 different birth countries walk the halls of Medford High School. That's no joke.
- We have a great city! I absolutely love Medford!

But I'm telling you: there is a Greater City. *Verse 14*

- There is a city on the horizon that goes way beyond your greatest utopian dreams.
- People will dwell with one another (and with God!) in uninterrupted harmony. No longer will we tear one another down. No longer will we seek to be better than someone else because of our pride and insecurities.
- Neighbors will help and love their neighbor.
- No more sickness, sorrow or even death. All addiction will die.
- In *that* city, Problems are ovah. Perfection is forevah. (Ck. Revelation 21)

- We're talking about complete *shalom*: a place of universal flourishing, peace, wholeness, fullness, brightness, adventure and abundance in every sphere of life.

So are we just supposed to sit back and wait for that city in the here and now? Unh-uhn. Nah. We are to seek that city, and the best way to go about that is by embodying that future city today.

*T: But how? Check verses 15-16. Not only should we continue building a greater city by seeking the greater city. #2*

## **II. Continue building a greater city by performing generous deeds (15-16)**

This is not about a few random moments of kindness, though those are important. We are talking about a way of life.

- We build a greater city by being the very best citizens of this city. The greater city happens when we...
- ... seek the good of others through a good day's work,
- ... give of our time to be a good neighbor,
- ... extend financial generosity to help those in need.

The greater city happens when we...

- ... do our part to make Medford a safer and more beautiful place. (Medford Square cleanup on April 30th. Let's bring about 100 people. Why not?)

The greater city happens when we...

- ...pray for & work toward unity among residents, justice for the marginalized and poor, better health care, better education for children, economic progress and much, much more.

Generally speaking, people will either use the city or build the city; they will take from the city or do something for the city. They will say: "Boston is my ticket to a greater life," or they will say: "I am part of the solution to make a greater Boston."

### **(STORY ART)**

We have been going after the greater city by...

- Revitalizing 25 Medford Parks and...
- Putting on 18 (major) Community Events like Soccer Nights, Egg Hunts, Fun Nights in the Summer
- We've hosted food drives, clothing drives, and taught ESL classes.
- We've served Thanksgiving Dinners to nearly 400 Families. How much fun was that?!
- We've invested 1000s of volunteer hours here at the Boys & Girls Club: improving the facility, serving as Club volunteers, and assisting with programs and events.
- In fact, I have a little news I've been holding out on you! The Boys & Girls Club of Middlesex Co. has named Redemption Hill their 2016 COMMUNITY PARTNER of the YEAR. That is HUGE honor, very big deal! [That's Q-uge!]

And you know what? We're just getting warmed up! [Know what I'm saying? (Stretch a little bit)] *not because we are great; but simply because we are working toward a GREATER Medford.*

### **PT II. Continue building a greater city...**

So just in case anyone mistakes this for some kind of self-congratulation session, let me be clear on two points...:

- 1) We would not be where we are apart from the huge investment of 100s of people, organizations, and churches. To you, we say THANK YOU! (CLAP) Let them hear it!
- 2) But more importantly, we are who we are and we do what we do because of Jesus!
  - Look back at *verse 15*.
  - If we have anything to boast about, it's because of him. Jesus get the cred around here!
  - In light of how Jesus has loved and served us, how could we not be compelled to love and serve others
  - This story is about Jesus. We are the footnotes, (You heard?) the little microscopic blurb at the back of the book that 0.04% of the population ever reads.

Do you see the rhythm? We perform generous deeds *and* we want to let people know what Jesus has done to change us. It's **words and deeds**.

- Because Jesus modeled it, AND because he teaches us that...
- **Words without Deeds is hypocrisy, but**
- **Deeds without words is insincerity.**
  - Can you imagine Mystic Coffee speaking in code about coffee beans?
  - Can you imagine the Boys & Girls Club doing all they do and never talking about the kids?
  - Can you imagine a church striving to live like Jesus but never talking about Jesus? That's sideways.

T: Seek a greater city; perform generous deeds, but don't miss this last ingredient...

### III. Continue building a greater city by going beyond your comfort (12-13).

What did *verses 12-13* say? I want to end where everything begins. This life and love of Christ as made known in the cross.

#### CROSS

- There was a practice in Ancient Israel on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, when priests carried the remains of the sin offerings of a bull and goat, "outside the [city]" to have it burned in the place of rejection, exclusion & shame.
- And the writer of Hebrews sees a picture of what Jesus did when he died on a Roman cross next to two Death Row criminals outside the gate of Jerusalem, bearing our rejection, our exclusion, & our shame.
- Perhaps you are curious why Jesus chose to offer his life for us.
  - Jesus bore our rejection that we might be received.
  - Jesus experienced exclusion that we might be accepted.
  - Jesus was shamed that we might be honored.
- Have you received the rich gift of life that Jesus offers all people? Have you become a citizen of God's city?
- *Jesus went out beyond his comfort to bring us in! That's why we go beyond our comfort for the sake of others. He is our motivation.*

To continue building the greater city, we must... *Forsake our fascination with comfort and embrace sacrificial love.*

- *It is hard.* Comfort is the oxygen of our culture. We wear nice, comfortable shoes, sit on nice, comfortable furniture, eat comfort foods, and even fly in planes that allow us to maintain our addiction to entertainment while we fly the friendly skies.

- *It is worth it!* Starting anything from scratch is uncomfortable and risky business. This is true no matter what the endeavor and particularly in a city where churches are being turned into condominiums. That's why people often ask me why Redemption Hill has seen such great progress in such a short period of time.
- One of the reasons I cite every time is that we have so many people unafraid of sacrifice. I see this in our....
  - Sunday morning Serve Teams, a few of which arrive at 7:30am. I see this in our...
  - Part-time "volunteer" staff members who give of their time and gifts.
  - I've seen a young(er) church become a multi-generational church because some people were willing to get uncomfortable and build friendships with people half their age.
  - We've seen multiple young women go and care for sex trafficking victims overseas.
  - Together we have sent \$216,741 beyond the needs of RHC.
  - There is a consistent willingness to disadvantage ourselves for the advantage of someone else, and that is beautiful!
- **Tim Keller, a pastor in NYC, says: "There is no more practical index of whether your church has movement dynamics [we're going somewhere] than examining whether you have a culture of sacrifice. If the top leaders of the church are the only ones making all the sacrifices, then you don't have a movement culture."**
- Thank you!!

Self-sacrifice is the essence of love at its purest form. We take what belongs to *us* and give it away for the good of *others*. We are never more like Jesus than when we go beyond our own comfort to display sacrificial love.

## TITLE SLIDE

*Conclusion:*

Let me ask you this: What happens when we embrace discomfort and perform generous deeds with sacrificial love? We point to the greater city.

- We actually give people a preview of "the city that is to come."
  - When we tell the truth, we tell the story of a city where there will be complete transparency.
  - When we put a meal on someone's table, we picture forth in advance the city where no one will hunger or thirst.
  - When we love our neighbor, we tell the story of a city where hate cannot be found.
- We are a city within a city, picturing forth the coming city of God in the city of man.

And our hope is this: We hope people move from saying: "Hmmm... that's appealing... I don't know why these people are so generous, so kind, so loving, so patient, so forgiving, so responsible..."

to

"I'd really love to live in that kind of city."

To which we respond: what are you waiting for? Come on in."

There is a greater city. Let's be a church exemplifies that city as we live as a city within the city.

PRAY.