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Steer for Open Water

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EMMANUEL BIBLE INSTITUTE

ORADEA, ROMANIA

“STEER FOR OPEN WATER”

May 31, 1998, 5:00 p.m.

We come here today as students, parents and friends to worship together and to celebrate this time of commencement.

It may be the last time that you as the class of 1998 will be all together. Your studies here at Emmanuel Bible Institute are over. There are new challenges, new opportunities before you. You have found here men and women dedicated to the Lord and dedicated to investing themselves in your training and expanding your knowledge. Many of your parents have sacrificed for you to be here and now it is time to go forth, it is time to move on.

If I were to give a title for my message today it would be “Steer for Open Water.” I love boats. I was born and raised around water. I especially enjoy sailing. The wind is your only source of power. There is a special thrill and expectation when you are sailing and pass that last channel buoy and see open water ahead. There still needs to be a careful watch for the occasional uncharted shoal or rock ledge, but the wind is up, you feel it in your face, and it’s time for a full sail with a firm hand on the wheel.

But who has set the course and where are we going? Is it a journey we must take alone?

The life before you presents a sea of opportunity, but it is not time to throw away the charts or ignore your bearings. There will be changing winds and currents, some storms, and some uncertainties but the Master, our Lord and Savior, has a course, He is with you and you can experience the reality of His presence, the knowledge and sense of His direction.

Our text today comes from the 33rd Chapter of Exodus. The subject is Moses and his leadership of the children of Israel. There is the open water of the wilderness before him. God has told him to move on to that distant but promised land, but he is hesitant. Just where is he going? Will God be with him? Will he know the reality of His presence?

You remember the background to this passage. Moses had completed 40 days and 40 nights on the mountain communing and learning from God. It was a time of teaching and training. He had received God's law written on tablets of stone in God's own hand. He was prepared to go forward, and then, as he came down from this mountain top experience, ready to move on, what does he find: the children of Israel, with Aaron in the lead, dancing and worshipping a false god, a golden calf. How could this be? How could he ever apply his learning from the Lord to lead these unruly, sinful and rebellious people? Where was he to go from here? The evils of sin and blasphemy had to be dealt with but there was still the question of a future direction.

It was the fierceness of the storm of uncertainty so soon after the time of preparation that caused Moses to doubt, to hesitate, and then to dialogue with God. Listen as we read of his discussion with the Lord.

(Here read Verses 12-23)

Moses needed assurance and in this passage he dialogues with God and asks him three very direct questions. God, is it your will? God, will you be with me? God, can I see you? God's answer was specific and direct, **yes, it is my will. Yes, I will be with you, and yes, you can experience the reality of My presence. Although you cannot see Me directly, I will put you in the cleft of the rock and you will see My glory as it passes by.**

Now no one can predict the times or intensity of the future storms or uncertainties of life, the disappointments or difficulty of the decisions yet before us. But they are out there just as certain as the weather barometer going down as well as up.

Many of you have already felt some uncertainty about that next step after Emmanuel. For some it may be additional schooling. Will you measure up to that added academic pressure? For others it may be a job or looking for a job, but where, doing what? Is the right job out there? For others, it may be a special ministry assignment. Or marriage may be on your mind, but is he or she the right partner?

The questions that Moses asked are the same basic questions we often ask: what is Your will God? Will You be with me? Can I know the reality of Your presence?

The benefit of gray hair provides the opportunity of looking back. Over 36 years ago I sat in your chair at a commencement service, ready and prepared to graduate, but also very uncertain about the future. For me, the open waters seemed more frightening than pleasant. I was married, our first child Julie had just been born, I did not have a full time job to look forward to, I had the opportunity to go onto law school with a full scholarship but also knew the reality that scholarships don't put food on the table or support a family. What was God's will in these conflicting currents? Was there a right course or direction? Was it possible for me to make the wrong decision?

I am here tonight to affirm with Moses that God does answer these basic questions of life and He is there as we steer for open waters.

Now there are times in life that one has the opportunity to muse and reflect on just how God has provided the answers. Such a time occurred for me in the last few weeks as I had the opportunity to visit and share with one of my classmates from college. David had graduated from Wheaton in 1959, I graduated in 1960. We were friends in school and had maintained a relationship over the years, especially the last ten years. Recently David and his wife were visiting with us as they were attending the graduation ceremonies at Wheaton for their two children. They were our house guests.

During our time together we had a chance to share about how God had worked in our lives over the years; how He had revealed Himself and His way to us after we had left the safe shores of school and steered for the open waters of life, opportunity, and service. Although our experiences were different, there were some common themes, including a period of storms and crises during our 30's. After Wheaton I went to Northwestern Law School and David went to Cornell Law School. After law school I went to work at a large law firm in Chicago and David went to work at a large firm in New York city.

Within a few years David left the law firm and went to work for the President of the United States as a special assistant to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

David's office was in the White House close to the oval office of President Nixon. David found himself involved in many top secret meetings.

It was also a time of great domestic turmoil in our country. There was little trust even among friends. The time came when David was called into the President's office

and was asked to do something in the interest of national security, but also something that would change his life. David became involved in the Watergate scandal. Soon his life was in a crisis. He lost his support from friends and the President. He was entangled in complicated legal issues. When it was all over, he moved his family to England. He secured his Ph.D. at Oxford University, wrote his thesis on Watergate and then joined the faculty at Oxford and started a company called Oxford Analytica.

David had been on what we call in sailing a **fast tack**. It took him to the highest positions of power in our country. The storm of Watergate had been all consuming. It resulted in a dramatic change of direction, but through it all God was with him. It was all part of His will and the process of what David was becoming in the likeness of Christ. As part of this traumatic experience, David and his wife continued to grow in their relationship with the Lord. They now have a significant influence for God at Oxford and have had a ministry to many from this platform of service.

The storms or changes of direction in my life have not been so public or so dramatic. After law school I did not go to Washington, I was not one of Kissinger's aides. I just began doing the job of practicing law. It was exciting for me. It was stimulating and I started making what I thought was a lot of money but something was also happening in the process. I describe it now, as I look back, as if the law or my profession was becoming a jealous mistress in my life. It was consuming most of my time and effort, separating me from my family and from my church, from my spiritual growth and development. As I was striving for success, God's voice had become distant and dull, but He was still there. Then He decided to talk to me through the shout of a crisis. One morning, my wife Judy found me out cold on the bathroom floor with a bleeding ulcer. My recovery involved stomach surgery followed by an extended hospital stay. It was a time for me to stop and reflect.

There were lessons to be learned about the priorities in life, priorities that would involve my family and my service to God. A regular visitor to the hospital was the President of my alma mater. God used him to encourage me in my faith and my desire to serve Him. During those visits he also encouraged me to consider joining him at Wheaton for a specified time and assignment; it would be a big change, reduced income and giving up my role as a partner in the law firm. As he talked and I shared and prayed with my wife Judy, it was clear that God was pushing me through this open door. It was what He wanted me to do. I left the practice of law and spent five years at Wheaton in the Administration and part of the teaching faculty. I did not realize it then, but God was preparing me at Wheaton for yet another area of service. When my assignment was over, I thought I was ready to go back to the practice of law but it was at that point that God intervened once again. Not through a crisis, but through the direct involvement of two Christian friends, mentors of mine who cared enough to get involved in my life and recruited me to join the leadership team at ServiceMaster.

We are in the service business and our business has grown very rapidly over the last 27 years, doubling in size every three to three and a half years. We are now more than over 25 times larger than when I first joined the firm in 1977. We employ and manage over 230,000 people and our services stretch from Karachi, Pakistan to Tokyo, Japan. We are a public company, listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Yes, I live and work in one of those pressure cooker environments where revenue and profits must be reported quarter-by-quarter, where our profits have been up every quarter for the past 27 years. The shareholders to whom I am responsible as a leader vote everyday on my leadership. They have a choice to buy, hold, or sell.

But the measure of my success as a leader, as a follower of Jesus Christ, is not just in the value of our shares or the profit we produce. The answer must come from the people I work with and serve. You see, I have a day-by-day opportunity to witness, to

live, and implement my faith in the marketplace. I can either be a beacon of light and truth for the Lord I love, or put my light under a bushel basket.

The objectives of our company are simply stated ...

- to honor God in all we do
- to help people develop
- to pursue excellence, and
- to grow profitably.

The first two objectives are end goals. The second two are means goals.

In a diverse and pluralistic society, some may question whether our first objective belongs as part of a public company's purpose statement, but few can argue with where it leads us and that is to the dignity and worth and potential of every person.

For those of us who profess faith in Christ, it provides a wonderful opportunity to walk the talk. Yes, not only to integrate our faith with our learning, but to integrate our faith with what we do, with our speech interactions as we work with our colleagues and serve our customers. It has been, for me, a wonderful place of ministry.

God is with us. We can experience the reality of his presence. He is at work in us to will and do as He pleases. Knowing his will and experiencing His presence is not like a game of hide and seek. He has made His will known to us in His Holy Word. It is His will for us to love and obey Him, to be set aside for His service, to be filled with His spirit and to be servants as we show His love to others. To so submit our will to His that we may be transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we may be able to test and approve His pleasing and perfect will. To be witness to our friends, associates, and the world moved by the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God's will involves what we are becoming in Christ. Where we work, where we live, what we do, are relevant only to the extent of their contribution or lack thereof to the process of what we are becoming.

Remember the important lessons from Moses. He received God's assurance. It was God's will to proceed to the promised land. He would be with him and He provided that special confirmation of the reality of His presence as He passed by the cleft of the rock. However, also remember as Moses went forth, he did not realize that there were still 40 years wandering ahead of him before he would reach the promised land; nor did he realize that the day would come when somebody else would actually lead the children of Israel into the promised land and he would never set his foot on the soil. Changes were yet ahead of Moses and I am sure they were quite different than what he anticipated as he went forth. Even with these unanticipated changes, God was still with him. God's will was accomplished and Moses realized the continued reality of his presence.

So be confident about the future. Be as confident as Moses was. Together let us continue to be assured by this lesson from Moses' life and know that the future is in God's hands no matter what the storms or currents of life may be. Forgetting what is behind and striving for what is ahead, let us press toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called us heavenward in Christ Jesus and so to seek together a mind of Christ.

There are wonderful opportunities to serve in this great land of Romania. This county needs Christian young people to help transform the society for Christ and His Kingdom. Some of you will be in Christian ministry – others may be in government – in business or in a profession – wherever God calls you He will be there. My encouragement to you today is to steer for open water, to go forth. The world needs you

-- Christian young people who have been grounded in the Word, prepared to serve the Lord you love, and committed to witness and apply your faith in such a way that others will be attracted to the Lord you love. May God be with you.

I close with these words from 1st Corinthians:

I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the Gospel that I might share in its blessings. Do you not know that in a race all the runners run but only one gets the prize. Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown of laurel that will not last but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly. I do not fight like a man shadow boxing.

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone to win as many as possible. May God be with you.

* * * * *

May 14, 1998