



August 19, 2020

Dear Friends,

## “KILL THE HILL.”

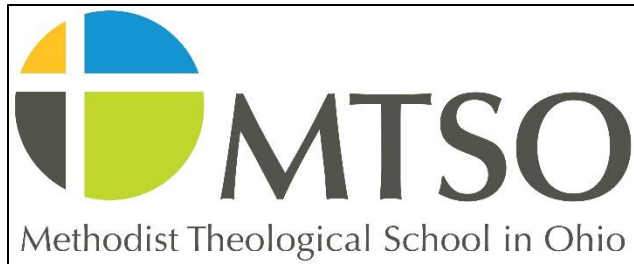
I can still hear those three words echo through my head. These words became a daily mantra from my Drill Sargent during basic training twenty years ago. Drill Sargent Allen — a man I feared and respected more than any other person I have ever encountered in this life — hammered this into the minds of the thirty trainees that he was shaping to become soldiers of the United States Army.

This three-word mantra instilled in each of our minds and attitudes that **once we start an objective, we do not rest until it is complete.** It did not matter if the goal was mowing grass, painting a wall, cleaning the barracks, or removing the “enemy.” We knew that we would not stop, we would not rest, until we finished what we started.

If I am honest, I think this mantra was a part of my life even before I joined the Army. I hated doing any projects, not because I did not want to do *anything*, but because I would focus only on the project until it was complete. **I would put things off or not do them because I knew once I started, I would be consumed.** I would have a laser focus on a task to the point that I could neglect other things that needed my attention. I could even neglect those who truly needed me. Most often I would neglect care for myself, all in the name of KILL THE HILL.

**This time of global health pandemic has given me the opportunity to rethink this three-word mantra.**





As many of you know, I am nearing the end of a journey toward my master's degree at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio. I have enjoyed school and learned a lot since starting my program in the fall of 2018.

This past spring semester I was just under halfway through my final full-time semester when, due to the increased spread of COVID-19, all classes would shift to an online format and the library would be closed indefinitely. We were in our time of spring break, and we were told that we would be given an additional week off as the school, like many others in March, reevaluated how to proceed with the rest of the semester.

Meanwhile at Hilliard UMC I was tasked, in partnership with our friends from Hilliard Kiwanis, to create a system of giving away bags of groceries to any who were in need. Within 5 days we were up and running: a weekly food sorting, bagging, and distribution ministry to any family who found themselves in need of non-perishables.

At home we were attempting to understand school for our college student, who suddenly and unexpectedly had to stay home after Spring Break, along with our other five kids, who were students in Hilliard City Schools.

**Like every one of you, I found myself in uncharted waters, and my default was to KILL THE HILL.**

I wanted to kill every hill that was in front of me. Some tasks were accomplished, such as the grocery giveaway and the settling of kids into their new school routines. My own schooling, however, had ground to a halt.



MTSO told us that to relieve the stress brought upon us by the changes to the semester, we were free to take every class as Pass or No Credit. Essentially, we could do "C" level work and receive full credit without affecting our grade point average. This was a comfort, especially since access to resource materials would be limited for the remainder of the semester. We were also granted the option to request an additional four weeks after the semester ended to submit all course work without penalty.

**I did not want to accept either option.** To do so would mean I would not KILL THE HILL and prove myself worthy.

During a phone conversation with Pastor April, as I was updating her on the status of the grocery giveaway and other things I was working on at HUMC, she asked me about my

progress with school. I remember telling her that I had a few weeks to knock out what was nearly fifty to sixty pages of writing for all of my courses.

I recall commenting that I was getting weary and wearing down, but I was going to KILL THE HILL. After I explained what that meant, she gave me a challenge:

**What if in this time, a time that is unprecedented and unlike any we have ever faced, I do *not* try to kill the hill? What if I think about doing what is *good enough* for this time?**

I will admit this gave me pause. I wanted to KILL THE HILL. Not only did I want to get everything accomplished, but I wanted to accomplish everything on time and at the level and standards I had already set for myself.

But what if my standards were just that, *my* standards?

What if my expectations of myself and what I thought others expected of me were just that, *what I thought*?

Not just in this season of global pandemic, but what if every other time in my life I was trying to live to *my* standards or what I thought *others* expected of me without regard for what *God* expected of me?

Since that conversation with Pastor April, I have reflected on these words from Ecclesiastes 9:10: "*Whatever you are capable of doing, do with all your might because there's no work, thought, knowledge, or wisdom in the grave, which is where you are headed.*"

For so long I had ignored the fourth word of this verse for sake of the rest. **You see, it is not about doing everything all the time with all of our might, but it is about doing what we are capable of doing at any given time.**

In this season of global pandemic, the news seems to change day by day, and our emotional, mental, and physical states fluctuate like the news.

I am hopeful that even when this season of global pandemic draws to a close — and trust me I am praying every day that it is coming soon — I will continue to lay aside the mantra KILL THE HILL and continue to give all I am capable of giving at any particular time.

If I can KILL THE HILL, great!

If I can take one step and pause, great!

If I need to ask for help, great!

If I look at a hill and say NO, that will be okay, too.

**I want to encourage you to take this pause from “normalcy” to discover in yourself what hills in your life you maybe need to pause, seek assistance, or let go all together.**

**Give what you are capable of, and all will be well.**

So that I do not leave you hanging, know that I accepted the additional four weeks to complete my course work as well as the option of Pass/No Credit. Every day I gave what I was capable of, to the best of my ability. I finished all of my papers — yes, all fifty-plus pages of them. I received credit for all of my course work, and next week I begin my final two courses toward my master’s degree.

You know what? I think that I am going to work to change that mantra that has brought me so much consternation over these years. This semester and for what I hope is the rest of a long time of pastoral ministry, **it is no longer KILL THE HILL, but ALL WILL BE WELL.**

May all be well with you, too!

Grace and peace,

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