

Build Something Great
Redefine “Success”
August 13, 2017

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

**Worship Songs – Who Is Like Our God /
Good, Good, Father
Prayer**

Behind the Scenes – Video

**Feature Song – “On Top of the World” /
Offering**

Good morning everyone.

It's great to be back with you again after being away for the past two Sundays. I (as well as my dad and my sisters) appreciate all the expressions of support we received as well as the many prayers that went up

as we walked through the final days with my mom. You need to know that *God heard them* because even though the journey was extremely difficult, we were continually amazed at how He repeatedly revealed His presence in unmistakable and tangible ways.

One of these days I'll tell you more about that.

But, again, it's good to be here today because not only did I greatly *miss* being here with you all (I love our church) ... but, as Shannon said, today we're beginning a brand new series called *How to Build Something Great*. And I am excited about it because I think this is going to be one of those series with lots of practical application.

If you were here for it, you know that our last series, *Losing Our Religion*, leaned pretty heavily into the intellectual and philosophical. And there is definitely a place for that (a need for that) because, as we say all the time around here, being a follower of Jesus isn't just about how we *feel* – it's about *reality* and our *understanding* of reality. And I love doing those kinds of series.

But this particular series that we're beginning today ... I'm *so* energized by it because if you're a person who is building something in your life – and most of us are:

- We're building a family
- We're building a business
- We're building a team

- We're building a congregation and a ministry.

If you're a person who is building something in your life – and if you're a follower of Jesus you *ought* to be building something in your life because *He* is building something in your life.

Anyway, if you're building a family, a business, a team, a ministry or whatever ... you're going to be able to take the six messages in this series and apply them in a way that will help you move beyond *mediocrity* towards *greatness*. The six principles – actually, values-based practices – that we're going to be talking about are *that* powerful. They are that transformative. They will change *you* and whatever it is that you are building.

And I know that to be true because, over the past 20 years or so, they have changed *me* and what *I* have been building; specifically, my family and this little ministry project we call North Heartland Community Church.

So, let me give you an overview of where we're going in this series and then we'll jump into today's topic. And let me also encourage you to not miss any of these messages. If you're out of town or working watch or listen on our livestream or catch the message later in the media section of our app and website.

This is also a great time to invite someone who is not a church attender to either come with you or to listen or watch online.

So, here's where we're going. Here are the six principles and practices we'll be talking about.

- *#1 Redefine "Success"* – we'll be talking about that today
- *#2 Lose the Mask* – that's next week
- *#3 Put the First Thing First* (if you've been around church for a while you'll probably be surprised at what the first thing is. It's not what you think).
- *#4 Walk Towards the Mess* – which is the opposite of what most of us want do
- *#5 Ask the Hard Questions*

- *#6 Never Forget This One Thing*

By the way, you may notice that there is a date missing in there: September 3rd which is Labor Day. We'll be doing another stand-alone topic on that Sunday because we want to make sure the maximum number of people have the opportunity to hear every message in this series.

So, with all of that buildup – I should probably pray before I begin! Would you join me?

God, in You are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge and we love You for that.

We love You for being a God who freely gives that wisdom and knowledge to those who ask.

We love that You have invited us to use our minds and abilities.

We love that we get to create and build just as You have created and built, for we are made in Your image to reflect who You are in all of Your glory.

But, we confess that so often we fall short of that glory.

So often we are lazy and demotivated and discouraged.

So often we don't build the great lives and the great things you have invited us to build.

Instead, we settle for mediocrity.

As always, Lord, we're thankful that Jesus' blood shed on the cross

forgives us of even that sin. But we want to be more than just forgiven. We want to be transformed. We want to experience the fullness and abundance for which Jesus gave His life.

And so my prayer is that You would use this series to do that in us. Transform us and transform whatever it is we're building.

And then use what *we're* building and what *You're* building in us to shine the light so that others will be drawn to You and know You as we do.

And we pray that in the name of Jesus and for His sake. Amen.

Rick's "Aha" Moment

Probably one of the greatest "aha" moments in my life happened about five, maybe six, years into the life of this church, sometime in the late 90s or early 2000s.

I don't know where we were going or why, but I distinctly remember that Kitti Homan and I had left our office in Riverside and we were driving north on 635. As we passed by Park Hill South High School (which is where the church was meeting at the time), I remember asking her: "Back when we started (FYI, Kitti and her husband Mark were part of our original core group) ... back when we started, did you ever think we be dealing with the kinds of

things we do on a regular basis? Because I certainly did not.”

- I *thought* what we were going to do was to produce a great Sunday service – a high-impact creative presentation of truth and grace – that would draw people to Jesus and help them follow to follow Jesus.
- I *thought* what we were going to do was to produce a first-class children’s ministry where kids and their families could be shaped by the life and teachings of Jesus.
- I *thought* we were going to produce small groups where people could know and be known, celebrate and be celebrated, serve and be served, love

and be loved.

- I *thought* we were going to throw ourselves into producing a “torrent of ministry” that would impact people left and right ...

BUT ... it seemed like we spent so much time dealing with “other issues” which meant there just wasn’t as much time and energy available to put towards production. It felt like we were constantly being drawn away from what I thought ought to be the main thing.

And so I wondered, “how in the world can we be successful if we’re always being sidetracked from what we’re trying to produce?”

Now, I don't remember Kitti or myself at that moment having any blinding insights. But, it wasn't too long after that day that God began to show our leadership team that our definition of "success" was too narrow and needed to change. And that change needed to begin with me and then extend out to our pastors and our ministry staff and then to our volunteer leaders and to those they led.

Our definition of "success" needed to change ... and it did. In fact, it actually became incorporated into one of our stated values as a church.

Jesus and "Success"

And I'll explain what I mean by that in just a bit, but first let me say that the need to

redefine “success” isn’t unique to “church work.”

For most of us, no matter what we’re doing or what we’re building, our definition of success is almost always too narrow ... which is why one of the things that Jesus often did in His teaching was to challenge the way people think about it.

For example – and we talked about this just a few weeks ago – in His famous Sermon on the Mount ...

Jesus said (among other things):

“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’”

Matthew 5:21 (NIV)

That's what the Ten Commandments said, right?

So most people thought, "Well, as long as I don't kill anyone when I'm mad, then I've hit the mark. That's the definition of success when it comes to how I handle my anger."

But Jesus disagreed.

Instead, He said ...

"I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment ... and anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell."

Matthew

5:22-23 (NIV)

In other words, “Success in this area of your life is broader than not committing murder. Success is treating people with grace and kindness in spite of your anger. So, expand your definition.”

On another occasion, Jesus told a story about a rich man whose farming business was extremely profitable. In the words of the song we just heard: he’d worked for it, waited for it, paid his dues to the dirt (literally) and then, finally, he had reached the top.

He was a success in every earthly sense of the word.

“The man said to himself,

'What should I do? I don't have room for all my crops.'

"Then he said, 'I know! I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I'll sit back and say to myself, "My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!"' Luke 12:16-19 (NLT)

But ...

"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'" Luke 12:20 (NIV)

And then Jesus hammers home the point:

“This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

Luke 12:21 (NIV)

This how it will be with those who define “success” only in terms of worldly wealth. This is how it will be for those who exclude a relationship with God from their definition.

So, again, expand your definition of success. Redefine how you think about it.

One more example.

On another occasion, Jesus called his

disciples together and said ...

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.” Matthew 20:25 (NIV)

They're on top of the world. They're successful. They've arrived. And they act like it.

“But,” Jesus said ...

“Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave – just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to

*give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:26-27
(NIV)*

See how Jesus is redefining “success” for them? It isn’t lording your authority *over* people. It’s using that authority to *serve* them.

Jesus was always doing that; challenging people to think about how they defined success in every area of life.

The Three “Ps”

And many years ago, as a leadership team working on this little project called North Heartland Community Church, we realized He was doing that to us. Our definition of success was simply too narrow because, as

it turned out ...

Most of the things we thought were keeping us *from accomplishing* our mission were actually *part* of the mission.

Let me say that again. Most of the things we thought were keeping us *from* the mission were actually *part* of it. We just didn't realize it at the time.

When Kitti and I had that conversation on 635, we had just come from a leadership team meeting where much of our energy had been devoted to addressing problems among our staff and volunteers. I don't remember the exact details but I'm pretty sure it went something like this:

- This staff person wasn't getting along

with that staff person.

- That volunteer had their feelings hurt by this volunteer.
- This staff person was on the verge of burnout; struggling physically, emotionally and spiritually.
- That volunteer kept letting the team down; not doing what they had promised to do.

And it was so frustrating and demoralizing because it seemed like we had dealt with similar issues the week before and the week before. It seemed like we were *always* dealing with that kind of thing! *And how in the world were we supposed to produce more and better followers of*

Jesus if we continually had to deal with all of that going on behind the scenes?

But eventually, through the leading of the Holy Spirit, it finally occurred to us: *that's part of the project, too.*

In other words, those who are leading the church and doing the “production” of church, whether it's ...

- Running the services – the lights, sound, music, video, preaching, etc.
- Running the children's ministry and the student ministry – all the teaching and activities and supplies
- Providing hospitality – serving coffee, greeting people, making sure

everyone is safe

- Doing outreach – events that draw people through our doors or serve our community
- Leading small groups and classes
- And whatever else you can think of that goes into making church “happen” ...

... the folks who are producing those things, be they staff or volunteers, are also supposed to become better followers of Jesus *by doing* that work of production ... which meant (and this is the “aha”) that dealing with the issues among those people – issues that we thought were hindering us – *that* was actually part of the

mission. That effort was helping *all of us* – myself included – to become better followers of Jesus.

I'm sure that sounds like “duh” to some of you when you hear it because it sounds like “duh” to me as I say it.

But it really was a revelation that changed how we define success around here. Instead of a very narrow view focused solely on *production* – just getting the task done, we began to take a broader and more holistic view. In fact, this became so important to us that we decreed it to be one of our six core values as a church.

“Holistic ministry” we call it, meaning that we intend to consider *all* of the factors that go into pulling off a project or an event

(like what we're doing right now).

Specifically, we decided that for us to consider ourselves successful, we have to do well in what we affectionately call the “Three Ps” – People, Process, and Production.

Would you say those words with me? People, process, production. Those are the factors that are part and parcel of everything we do.

I suggest you get those words in your mind, too, because whatever it is you're trying to build – a family, a business, a team, whatever – doing well in those three areas will help you move beyond mediocrity towards greatness. Focusing on the three Ps will help you build something that endures. It will help you build something that is strong; something

that has some depth to it.

So, let's talk for a few minutes about each of them. And we're going to take them in reverse order moving from the most obvious to the least.

“Production” is what most people think of when they define success. It's the effort that goes into creating some kind of a result.

For example, the band stood up here a while ago and did a song.

- Before that, they got here around 8 o'clock and did a run-through of that song (and the others).
- Before that, they met on Thursday evening and practiced until they felt comfortable.

- Before that, they each spent some time individually working on their parts.
- Before that, our arts assistant, Maggie Reeves, sent all of them an email with a link to an MP3 and chord charts and instructions so they could practice on their own.
- Before that, our programming team met and decided the band should do that song.
- Before that, I told the programming team what I would be talking about today so they could choose an appropriate song.

All of that activity is what we mean by *production*. It's the effort that went into creating the result of the musical presentation we just heard. And whether

or not that result was good or not-so-good depended on whether or not everyone did a good job at production.

And that same thing happens all over the church all the time. We put effort into creating some kind of a result. That's what we mean by "production."

Now, I think you can probably see how this applies to any area of life in which we're building something. For instance, in your family, if you want to have good kids, you have to do some things to create that result.

- You have to spend time with them.
- You have to talk to them and listen to them.
- You have to make sure they go to

school and get enough sleep.

- Make sure they have food and clothing and money.
- You have to take them to church
- You have to model your own relationship with God.

All of that is production – the efforts that go into creating the result (so to speak) of good kids.

By the way, I think it needs to be pointed out that production is of great importance to Jesus.

- “Go into all the world,” he said, “and make disciples of all nations.” I want people to become my followers so do the work. Go get ‘em.

- “The kingdom of God,” he said, “is like a wealthy business owner who goes on an extended trip and entrusts the servants with some of his resources. And when he returns, he demands an accounting of what they have done.” Why? Because results matter.

So, that’s production – and that’s what most people think of (and where they stop) when they think of success: *did we do the right things and did our efforts produce a good result?*

However, a more holistic approach (and the lesson we’ve learned at NHCC) is that success is more than just doing the right things and getting a good result.

In other words, it's not enough to just put on a good production. It's not enough for you to walk out of here this morning saying ...

- “Wow, that music really was great.”
- “The people behind the coffee bar were really nice and the coffee was good.”
- “My kids had a good time and they learned something.”

Success as we have redefined it also takes into account the *process* and the *people*.

So, let's talk about process and let me start with what process is not.

“Process” is *not* all the things you do

leading up to the final result.

To use the example of the band, process is not the 8:00 AM run-through or the Thursday night rehearsal or the individual practice or the emails or the planning meetings that eventually led to the song we heard.

That's all production.

Instead, “process” is how we all worked together as we were producing the result. Specifically, did we or did we not act in accordance with our values?

... which, by the way, is a very Christian question to ask.

I mean, if you're not a follower of Jesus or what you're doing isn't necessarily Christ-

oriented, you don't have to ask that question. But if you are and it is, then you do.

The Apostle Paul wrote:

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain

nothing. 1 Corinthians
13:1-3 (NIV)

In other words, if you're a Christian it's possible to produce "Christian activity" out the wazoo, but if you're not doing it from a heart of love, you're just making noise. You are nothing and you gain nothing.

That's hardly what you would call a success!

Now, obviously, I'm making a very Christian application here but the general principle is similar: *unless you produce in a way that is consistent with your values, you're failing.*

For example, let's say you're coaching a

softball team. You've got highly-skilled players at every position. And they win. Every time.

And, let's also say you've told them again and again that one of your values is team-first before individual. You value collaboration and cooperation. All for one and one for all.

But, you've got players who think they are above the rules. And there's constant infighting and backbiting among your players. Yes, they win games but they hate each other.

Guess what? Your team is not a success. Your team wins but it isn't truly great because it won't last.

Now, when I told you earlier about that discussion Kitti and I had way back when, this is what we were realizing about our “team” here at NHCC. We were doing a great job on the production side but our process was a failure because we were not working together according to our values. We’d get up on stage and sing and preach about how much Jesus loves everyone while at the same time not being in relational harmony with one another – and worse, thinking that was OK because that’s how most churches do it.

But we didn’t want to be like most churches. We didn’t want to be mediocre. So we broadened our definition of success to include “process” – how we all worked together as we were producing the result.

And just to be clear that meant that sometimes we had to stop production or limit production because we had to deal with these kinds of issues – values violations.

For example, I'll never forget the year we decided to take a break from doing the Easter Eggstravaganza. Some of you don't know what that is: we used to do this huge event on the Saturday before Easter where we'd open the building and put on basically an Easter carnival for families in the area. (We do something similar now with the Celebration of Christmas).

Anyway, on that Saturday, we'd have up to 1,000 people coming through our doors in a five-hour period. It was a massive production; a massive investment of

effort.

But in this particular year that we did it, 100 people signed up to work the closing session but 40 of them were no shows. That meant 60 people had to do it all and it took forever and they were not happy.

And rightfully so. It wasn't fair. We were crispy-frying them. We were burning them out which is wrong. It's against our values.

So, we decided "we're just not going to do this for a while until we can be sure people will actually show up and do what they promised to do." And that did not go over well. You would've thought we said "Jesus isn't coming back."

But when your definition of success

includes process, sometimes you have to sacrifice production. Sometimes you have to cancel your biggest event. Sometimes you get have to let some of your best players go. We've had to do that a few times through the years.

So, that's "process" – *how we work together to produce the result. Did we honor our cultural values?* And just as importantly, *how will we ensure that we do?*

Ok, let's look at the final "P" – "people" which means those who are involved in the production (whatever it is) and, more importantly, *what their involvement does to them.*

Several times in His ministry Jesus asked

an extremely clarifying question:

*“What do you benefit if you
gain the whole world but
lose your own soul?”
Mark 8:36 (NLT)*

In other words, what good is it if your production is up here (you win, you accomplish the goal with excellence), but your heart is down here (you lose yourself, or your love for God and people shrivel up) because of it?

It's hard to call that a success which is why, when we expanded our definition, we included this element of “people.”

I'll never forget the first time I heard someone talk about this particular way of thinking about success. I was at a

conference at Willow Creek Community Church in Chicago. Bill Hybels, who is the founding and senior pastor of that church, was talking about how he had gotten so crazy trying to keep up with the production side of things that he'd become angry and bitter and his love for God and people had grown cold.

At one point, he got so desperate that he went to see a Christian counselor. I mean, think of it – a pastor of a church of 10,000 people going to see a counselor!

After he told the counselor what was going on and how he was feeling, the counselor said, “Bill, you know what your problem is?”

“The way you’re doing the work of God

is destroying the work of God in you.”

And when I heard Bill relate that story, I thought “Oh my gosh. That’s what happens to me sometimes. That’s what sometimes happens to my staff and our volunteer leaders and the people they lead. We’d better pay attention to this.”

And so we did and we do. We are always asking:

- Is his involvement in this production causing their heart for God and people to grow bigger?
- Is her singing in the band, acting in dramas, running the lights, changing the diapers, leading the small group causing her to love God and people

more?

If not, the role of pastors and leaders is to find out why not and address it.

And addressing it sometimes means we stop doing that ministry or we ask the person to take a break. Sometimes we even suggest they leave that ministry altogether because the last thing we want around here is to see someone walking away from God with a shriveled-up heart from working themselves to the bone serving Him and others.

That's not success.

Now, if what you're building isn't a Christian venture, obviously you'll come up with a different question than we did

but it's important that you have a way to measure the effect that being involved in production is having.

Because people matter. And you can't do it without them.

To Summarize

Ok, let's summarize what we've learned:

- "Production" is the effort that goes into creating some kind of a result.
- "Process" is how we work together as we are producing the result.
- "People" are those who are involved in the production and what their involvement does to them.

Doing all three of those well is what leads to success in building something great; something that lasts.

So, the challenge today if you're building something is to think about what those three elements look like for you.

- What is production for you? What efforts are you making to get what result?
- What is process for you? What should it look and feel like to be part of whatever it is you're building? What should it feel like to be part of your family? Or your team? Or your business? And is that happening? And if so, congratulations. If not, why not?

- And what about the people involved in your production? Are your kids and your wife growing in character and love because they're part of your family? Or are they living such crazy lives and schedules that they're overstressed and burned out? Are the people who work with you or for you being built up or torn down?

Now, some of you are hearing this and you're thinking, "I'm not building anything myself but I'm a part of something someone else is building and the process is not good. There are no values in the way we work together or do life together. It's all about production. And it's crushing my soul."

Maybe that's God's way of saying to you,

“it’s time to get out.” It’s time to start praying about doing something else.

As I said at the beginning of this message, I think we’re all going to have different ways to apply these principles and so I want to pray for you in that right now.

Lord, again we thank You that You allow us to build and create like you create.

Give us wisdom and insight beyond ourselves to know what to do.

Give us courage to do it.

And, as always, we thank you that because of Christ and what He did for us, you are always working in us to build something great which is the character of Jesus. May we know Him and love Him and trust Him

and follow Him.

In His name we pray. Amen.

Feature – “The One Thing I Know”

CLOSING COMMENTS – Rick

1. Next week – Lose the Mask
2. Ages 18-35 meet me down front for five minutes after the service

Endnotes