

**Five Things God Uses**  
***Getting in the Game***  
**September 16, 2018**

**Beautiful Things Overture**

**Video – “Broken Beauty”**

**Responsive Reading – 1 Peter 2:9-10 modified**

**Congregational Song – Beautiful Things**

**Feature – Centerfield w/activity**

**Video – NHCC Behind the Scenes**

**Feature – “Ordinary People” / Offering**

Good morning everyone.

Let’s pray together.

God, you are so amazing. You do not choose only the best, the brightest, the smartest, the richest to carry

out your will on this earth as it is in Heaven. Instead you use ordinary people (like those of us sitting in this room and watching online) who are willing to trust you and do what you say.

I pray that what we talk about during these next few minutes would help us to trust you more.

I know Jesus wants that for all of us and so I ask in His Name.

Amen.

## **Not Enough**

It was one of the most difficult times of His life, second only to the night on which He was betrayed and sentenced to

death.

For one thing, Jesus had recently taken His ministry back to his hometown near the Sea of Galilee, but it had not gone well. The Bible says that people were “offended by him” and they turned against Him. In their minds it was unthinkable for “Joseph’s boy” Jesus (who had grown up among them) to be speaking with such authority about God, as if He had some special insight they didn’t.

To make matters worse, Jesus had just learned that Herod, the Roman ruler of the province, had recently executed John the Baptizer. John, you may remember, had baptized Jesus and possibly even mentored him. But, more importantly – at least, from a personal

perspective – John and Jesus had grown up together. They were cousins and friends.

To make matters even worse, word of Jesus' rapidly growing popularity in the region (except for his hometown) had reached Herod. And, Herod, fearing God's judgment because of what he had done to John, became convinced that Jesus was actually John come back from the dead. And, because he had the power to see that John stayed dead, that meant that Jesus was a marked man.

- Rejected by his own people
- Grieving the loss of his cousin and friend;
- And in grave personal danger

It was one of the most difficult times of

Jesus' life.

**And, so, the Gospel of Matthew tells us ...**

*When Jesus heard what had happened [meaning to John], he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Matthew 14:13 (NIV)*

Overwhelmed by his emotions, time alone with His Father in prayer and meditation was clearly in order – to say nothing of getting away from Herod's insanity.

So Jesus and his disciples hiked on over to the nearby lake, got in a boat and set sail for the other side.

Now, at this particular point of entry, it was roughly four miles across and ten

miles around the shoreline to reach the same spot. And on a day where the wind was uncooperative, a boat would go slow enough that you could actually follow its progress and get there before it.

Which is exactly what happened.<sup>i</sup>

**Matthew writes:**

*Hearing of this [i.e., that Jesus was sailing across the lake], the crowds followed him on foot from the [surrounding] towns.  
Matthew 14:13 (NIV)*

Can you imagine the sight of that?

One group of people starts following from one little town and soon they are joined by a group from another and then

another and then another. And it keeps getting bigger and bigger.

And can you imagine how Jesus might have felt when he realized what was happening? Thinking that He was going to get to be alone for a while to deal with the rejection, grief and fear ... and then looking over at the shore to see a mob of people running to the point where he was sailing?

I know how I would have felt. I don't think it would have been a happy feeling.

I think I would have been complaining to God about my lousy luck – first, all the trials and tribulations and then not even being able to hide out for a while. I think I would have been sarcastic and

skeptical and bitter about how people just like the ones running after me could be so ugly and unappreciative of all the good I was trying to do.

Ever felt like that? I'm sure you have. We all have.

**That's why what happens next is so incredible.**

*When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. Matthew 14:14 (NIV)*

Amazing – Jesus wasn't complaining or angry or bitter.

In spite of the rejection he had previously suffered, in spite of the fact that his emotional tank was on empty,



one more time His heart goes out to people (which is the literal meaning of the Greek word translated “compassion.”)

And, for the next several hours, great things happen.

- Many people are healed.
- The disciples are amazed as they see their master at work.
- Jesus’ heart is encouraged as person after person gives glory to God.

**But there’s a problem.**

*As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the*

*crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”*

*Matthew 14:15 (NIV)*

... which sounds like a reasonable plan.

After all, many in the crowd (which, at this point, numbers about 5,000 men plus women and children – or about as many people show up to tailgate at a Chiefs’ game) ... many have walked several hours in order to be with Jesus. And they’ve all hung around while He’s been healing everyone and ministering to everyone.

And now it’s late. And there are no McDonalds nearby, no food trucks anywhere. And the disciples are concerned: “we’ve got to get these people on the road.”

But Jesus doesn't say, "Good idea, guys. I just got distracted with everything so thanks. We really do need to call it quits for today."

**Instead He says.**

*"They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."*

*Matthew 14:16 (NIV)*

Now, if you were in the disciples' sandals at that point, how do you think you would have reacted?

The Bible doesn't say, but I can imagine that they looked at Jesus, and then they looked at the great multitude of people gathered around them and then back at Jesus again.

And maybe they thought ...

- “He was on the boat with us and he knows we didn’t bring any food.”
- “Maybe He’s been out in the sun too long.”
- “Maybe the whole thing with John is really messing him up and he’s not thinking clearly.”

But they don’t say that.

**All they say is ...**

*“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.  
Matthew 14:17 (NIV)*

Translation: “what we have isn’t going to go very far in a crowd this size. In

fact, we don't even have enough to feed ourselves. How in the world are we going to do what You're asking us?

## **Growth Track**

Now, I want to push pause on that scene for just a bit because if you've been here or watching online over the past month, you know that we've been learning about five things that God seems to use again and again to grow us and our faith so that we can become more and more of the person we're intended to be; more and more of the best possible version of ourselves ...

... which, from a Christian perspective is to be more and more like Jesus in ...

- How we think

- How we act
- And how we impact the world around us

**Two weeks ago we learned about the first of those catalysts: *practical teaching*.**

And we said that if you talk to anyone who has been following Jesus and who has grown in their faith, more than likely they'll tell you about the first time they heard someone take the Bible and teach it in a way that applied to their life and how it changed them.

That's what we mean by practical teaching and we need it in order to grow.

A second thing God often uses to grow us, which we talked about last week, is what we called ...

***Private spiritual disciplines: things you do behind the scenes and alone with God now so that your faith is stronger later.***

... things like prayer and fasting and even *giving* in a disciplined way to the people and causes God loves.

And I *guarantee* you that integrating these two things – practical teaching and private spiritual disciplines – into your life will help you make dramatic progress towards becoming the person you really want to be ...

... which is why, if you missed either of those services, I hope you will take the time to watch, listen to or read the message in the media section of our website and our app.

However, having said *that*, from my experience and the experience of so many others, it's the *third* catalyst which really puts the growth engine into overdrive.

And that particular catalyst is so well illustrated by this moment between Jesus and the disciples at the end of a very long and emotional day when everyone is hungry and there doesn't seem to be enough; the moment when a need arises and God looks at *us* and says:

- I want *you* to handle it.
- I want *you* to take care of it.
- I want *you* to give them something to eat.
- I want *you* to get out of the stands and into the game.



- I want *you* to get *personally* involved in doing *ministry*.

**And that *is* the third catalyst, the third thing God uses to grow us into the best version of ourselves: *personal ministry*.**

Now, unfortunately, for a lot of people – even those who have been Christians and followers of Jesus for a long time – that word “ministry” is saddled with a lot of meaning that is simply inaccurate.

For one thing, when most people hear it, they think of people like *me*.

- Pastors and church staff members
- People who get paid to work for the church
- Or people who have been ordained
- Or people who have gone to seminary or Bible College.

“Those are the people who *do* ministry,” most people think, “while everyone else *receives* ministry.”

However, as we’ll see in a bit, that’s not how God intends for it to work.

But first let’s define what “ministry” actually is.

The word translated “ministry” in the original Greek language literally means “serve.” So, “to minister” or to “do ministry” literally means “to serve.”

Of course, there are lots of ways to serve which are *not* what we mean by the word ministry ... at least, not as we’re talking about it in the context of God using it to grow us and our faith.

For example:

- You can serve on a jury
- You can serve coffee and donuts to your friends
- You can do community service by picking up trash on a highway

But those are not necessarily *ministry* ... although, in some circumstances, they *might* be.

From a biblical point of view, what makes serving *ministry* is who you do it for and why.

**“Ministry” is serving God and people in ways that bring honor to Jesus, build up His church, and help others to know Him better.<sup>ii</sup>**

... which not only means that lots of

activities qualify as ministry; it also means that every dimension of our life can be a forum for ministry.<sup>iii</sup>

- You can do ministry in your marriage.
- You can do ministry in your parenting.
- You can do ministry as you interact with your neighbors and friends.
- You can do ministry at school.
- You can do it at your job.
- And, of course, you can do ministry through your church.

When you do ministry, you are simply responding to whatever need God puts in your path in a way that honors Jesus, builds up His church or helps others to know Him better ... which brings us back to our story.

## The Rest of the Story

Remember that Jesus has just told his disciples that *they* are to feed the hungry multitude of men, women and children. That's the need that God has put into their path; the moment when Jesus is inviting them to join Him in ministry.

In response they say “Jesus, you *have to know* there's no way we can do what You're asking. You were on the boat with us. You know we're not prepared for this. You know we're not equipped for this.”

“Now, we *did* ask around and we found one kid whose mother sent him with five loaves and two fish and he's willing

to let us have them. But that's it."

**And, in response, Jesus says ...**

*"Bring them here to me," he  
said. Matthew 14:18  
(NIV)*

... which is what He *always* says to us whenever He invites us to join in what He is doing. "Just bring Me what you have."

- We say, "But God, I'm new to the faith and I hardly know the Bible."  
He says, "Just bring Me what you do know."
- We say, "But God, I'm old and I don't have much energy."  
He says, "Then bring Me what energy you do have."

- “But God, I’m young and I don’t have much experience.”  
“Then bring Me whatever experience you do have.”
- “But God, I’m raising a family and I don’t have much time.”  
“Then bring Me the time you do have.”
- “But God, I’m just so afraid to try this.”  
“Well then, just bring Me that fear.”

“Just bring Me what you have.” That’s how the invitation to get involved in ministry always starts.

And that’s why God can use ordinary people, which is exactly what the first

followers of Jesus were – just ordinary guys and gals, mostly uneducated and certainly not who you would think of as “people who will one day end up changing the world.”

In fact, the 12 men with Jesus that day were probably the last group of guys you would expect to play an indispensable part of the miracle that was about to take place. But they were indispensable.

And Jesus says to them, “Just bring me what you have” and so they do.

**Matthew writes ...**

*And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up*



*to heaven, he gave thanks  
and broke the loaves.*

*Then he gave them to the  
disciples, and the disciples  
gave them to the people.*

*Matthew 14:19 (NIV)*

So Jesus hands back to them what they just gave to Him.

And what happens next – and this is so important to understand – once Jesus handed them the bread and fish, the disciples just did what they knew how to do ... because that's all they *could* do.

In other words, they didn't know how to come up with enough food to feed thousands of people. What they *did* know was how to turn and serve the food they already had.

So that's what they did ... "and the disciples gave them to the people" Matthew says.

- They did what they knew how to do ... trusting that Jesus was going to do something unusual.
- They did what they knew how to do ... trusting that Jesus would do what only Jesus could do.

And, friends, if you're a Christian - if you know Jesus as your savior and you are following in His way - this is why personally getting involved in ministry is so powerful when it comes to growing you and growing your faith.

**So often, you simply cannot do what the situation requires. But that's OK because all**

**God asks is that *you* do what *you* can do  
and trust *Him* to do what only *He* can do.**

... which is, as I'm sure you already know, how this story ends.

The disciples take the food from Jesus and start passing it out (which is what *they* knew how to do) and, incredibly, there is enough (which is what only *He* could do).

**Matthew writes ...**

*They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.      Matthew  
14:20 (NIV)*

Think there's a message to them in that amount of leftovers? Absolutely,

because this miracle was as much *about the disciples* as it was feeding the hungry people!

Jesus wanted them – and us – to understand that God wants ordinary people just like me and you to get into the game; that ministry isn't reserved just for a special class of people who go to seminary or work for the church as a job. It's for everyone who follows Him.

## **Ordinary People**

I'll never forget when this truth first became clear to me personally many years ago (I briefly mentioned this event several weeks ago but, today, I want to give you the full story).

We were living in New Jersey and I was

working at Bell Labs as a software engineer. Jetta and I had been serving for about a year as the volunteer youth directors at our church. We had about 35 to 40 teenagers involved at the time and we felt like God wanted us to take them to summer camp, which is something they'd never done before.

So, we did. But we didn't go to some big camp program that was already set up, because there weren't any in that area and at that time.

Instead, we and the other adult volunteers on our youth team decided we would try to run it ourselves. Everybody took vacation or worked overtime to get comp time and we rented a small camp up in the Poconos.

We also hired a speaker/musician named Tom Sparling to come and do the teaching and the music while the rest of us ran everything else – the games, the service projects, the small groups.

And it just so happened that during the four days we were there, Tom focused his teaching on one single passage of scripture; something the Apostle Paul had written to the Ephesian church.

**In the second chapter of his letter, beginning in verse 8, Paul writes:**

*God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about*

*it. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)*

Now, this wasn't new to me. I had come to understand it when I was a teenager, and I agreed with God that I was a sinner, that I couldn't save myself and that I needed *grace* - the special undeserved and unearned favor that Jesus provided on the cross to atone for my all of my sins past, present and future.

But what was new for me at that youth camp so many years ago ... what was awesome and life-changing ... was the very next verse. I had never really read it very closely before or pondered what it meant.

**Here's what it says:**

*We are God's masterpiece.*

*He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

*Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)*

Tom went on to explain to the kids – and, by proxy, to me – that God didn’t just save us from sin and its penalty so that we’d be happy in the sweet bye-and-bye (although we certainly will be). His grace creates us anew so that we can do good things – “good works” another translation says.

“God wants to use your whole life,” Tom told us, “to get His work done. He’s planning on it. He’s counting on all of us – which means that every one of us is a minister and is to be involved in doing ministry in some form or fashion.”



He went on to show us some other verses that echoed this same idea ...

**... verses like 1 Peter 2:9-10, which says:**

*You [plural, meaning “all of you who follow Christ”] are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God’s very own possession.*

*As a result, you [all of you who follow Christ] can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light. 1 Peter 2:9 (NLT)*

Do you get that? Ordinary followers of Jesus are chosen and called by God to be priests!

That role (contrary to popular opinion)

is not reserved for a special class of professionals who have formalized education and training. Every “ordinary” Christian is to serve God – doing the “good works” of ministry.

Now, those guys and gals who have the specialized training and have made it a profession *do* have a role to play.

**This passage, again from the book of Ephesians, tells us what it is:**

*[God] gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service [which is actually the same Greek word translated “ministry” elsewhere] so that the body of Christ may*

*be built up.*

*Ephesians 4:11-12 (NIV)*

... which means that:

- The job of the leaders in a church is not to *do* the ministry themselves while everyone else *receives* it.
- The job of the leaders is to prepare God's people to get in the game of doing the good things that build up the church, the body of Christ.
- The job of the leaders is to discern where God might be leading the church, to see that the necessary resources are aligned and to see that everyone is equipped (as several translations put it) to do their part.

We had heard this kind of teaching all week and, on the closing night, we had a bonfire. All the kids sat around it and shared how God had spoken to them during the week, which was amazing ... but the *most* amazing part happened when it was over.

I remember standing off to the side in the dark watching groups of kids here and there walking to their cabins so excited, so fired up about the Lord. And a great sense of satisfaction and awe overwhelmed me.

And it hit me: “God just did something incredible through a bunch of unpaid and unqualified ordinary people like us. A young mom, a couple of young single guys, a guy who was old enough to be

my dad, a couple with teenaged sons in the group and me, a software geek.

And all we did, really, was to show up and give our time. We're not professionals. We're not supposed to be *able* to do this. But we pulled it off. We really are the ministers."

My heart was so full of joy in that moment I felt like it could burst!

That night the light went ON in my head and it's never gone OFF. Even as one of the so-called "professionals" now, it is still abundantly clear in my mind ...

- That there is no exclusive class of people who are called to "do ministry."

- That everyone who follows Jesus is meant to be in the game contributing in some way or another.
  
- That everyone has a position to play. That everyone is a minister.
  
- That every follower of Christ can serve God and people in some way that brings honor to Jesus, builds up His church, and helps others to know Him better, whether that's ...
  - Cooking a meal
  - Changing a diaper
  - Singing in a band
  - Praying for people
  - Picking up trash on the highway
  - Serving coffee to a friend

## Conclusion

Now, as I said before, those kinds of things can happen anytime, anywhere. Ministry doesn't have to happen in and through the program of a church.

However, *that's an ideal place to start* because, as we've seen, one of the primary tasks of church leaders is to help "ordinary Christians" find their place and get involved in some sort of personal ministry.

And that's what I want to talk to you about very briefly as we bring this to a close.

We are all here today because, at some point in time, someone else stepped out

in faith and trusted God to use them in some kind of personal ministry.

- Someone volunteered to teach us in Sunday School and guide us at youth meetings.
- Someone took the risk of talking to us about Jesus or inviting us to church.
- We are here because someone was willing to volunteer in Adventureland so our kids could experience church at their level while we experience it at ours.
- We are here because almost 25 years ago, people stepped out and trusted God to start this church.



- And, in the time since then, others have taken the responsibility to sustain it.

And, today, I think God might be inviting more of us to take that same kind of step – to get involved in some kind of personal ministry through this church ...

... because what I've seen happen so often is that we learn and grow through *practical teaching*, and we are built up and encouraged through our *private spiritual disciplines* – those things we do alone with God behind the scenes.

**But if all of that spiritual *input* doesn't to turn into spiritual *output* in the form of making it possible for others to receive what we've received, we'll hit a wall in our growth.**

And we'll get discouraged by that and

we'll start wondering what's wrong.

And, typically, when that happens, we also become overly critical of others who *are* "in the game."

- I'm just not being fed by the pastor's sermons.
- The music just doesn't move me like it should.
- The coffee they serve isn't as good as Starbucks.
- The ushers sometimes aren't very friendly.

Now, at any church, you *should* be fed by the pastor's sermons, the music *should* move you, the coffee *should* be decent and the ushers *should* be friendly.

But I've seen it so many times - when someone becomes overly-focused on the shortcomings of a church, that's often a clue that there's an "output" problem in their life. There's no involvement in *personal ministry*.

See, the typical spiritual journey almost always starts with learning and receiving in some form but at some point, Jesus says "I want you to get in the game, too. I want you to get on the field *with me*. I want you to *join me*, not just watch me."

So, what does it take to "get in the game" here at NHCC?

When you came in today, you should have received a "volunteer information" flyer. Inside, there's a brief overview of

11 different and very diverse areas where there are opportunities to get involved in ministry as a volunteer. I encourage you to look at that and ask God about where you could serve because *there is something* that every person who calls NHCC “home” can do.

It may not look that way from the outside because things run pretty smoothly around here but it takes as many as 250 volunteers to make things happen from week to week. 250 people who sign on the dotted line and say “you can count me in to make <whatever> happen.”

Now, on the back of the flyer, there is a list of current volunteer needs. These are areas where we really need some help right now.

And if you look at it, you can see that there is such a wide variety of ways to be involved in serving God and people so that Jesus is honored, His church is built up, and others get to know Him better – everything from ...

- Taking care of the church yard
- To helping kids with special needs
- To running the multimedia presentations that you see on the screens in each service.

There's stuff for introverts and extroverts to do. Things for people-oriented persons to do. Things for task-oriented persons to do.

Again, if you want the experience of *personal ministry*, there is something

you can do.

Now, if you want to know more specifics about these opportunities ...

- Julie Smoldt, who oversees volunteerism here at NHCC, will be down front to talk with you about them.
- Or you can fill out a communication card and drop it in the basket on the way out. Let us know you're interested in talking more.
- You can also come to the volunteer class tomorrow evening which Shannon mentioned earlier.

Now, one more thing and then I'm done. Promise.

Whenever pastors talk about this kind of thing, *it can sound like we're begging for help or begging for money.*

I really hope you don't feel that way today because, honestly, that's not my purpose. We've learned how over the years to get things done around here with who and what we have. And it's been a joy.

But friends, the God's honest truth is that you will never be the person God intends for you to be; you will never be the very best version of yourself without getting involved in some kind of personal ministry whether it's here at NHCC or somewhere else.

And that's why I invite you today to

yield yourself to God's purposes. At the very least, say "God I'm not sure what this personal ministry thing looks like but I'm willing if you will show me."

And to that end, I'm going to ask you to sing with our band a song that expresses that idea and then I'll come back and we'll close with a blessing.

Let's stand together.

### **Congregational Song – Take My Life**

### **CLOSING COMMENTS**

1. Julie down front to talk about ministry positions available.
2. Next week ... fourth thing God uses to grow us: *providential relationships.*



## Blessing:

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face to shine  
upon you.

For you are His masterpiece,  
created anew in Christ Jesus

To do the good things – the ministry  
– He planned for you long ago.

May you go in His strength and  
power,

And may you be amazed by what He  
can do through ordinary you.

Amen.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Barclay's Daily Study Bible (NT)

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<sup>ii</sup> A great definition from Bible.org. <https://bible.org/seriespage/1-expanding-your-concept-ministry>

<sup>iii</sup> Slightly modified from <https://www.paultripp.com/wednesdays-word/posts/ministry-is-life-and-life-is-ministry>