

**Five Things God Uses**  
***The Great Invitation***  
**August 26, 2018**

**Scripture Reading**  
**Worship Songs – Jesus / King of Love**

**Video – Behind the Scenes**  
**Survey – Shannon**

**Feature – “Boy Like Me, Man Like You” /**  
**Offering**

**Video – “Follow Me”**

Good morning everyone.

Today, as Shannon said, we’re beginning a brand new series ... and, as we begin, I want you to know that what we’re going to talk about over the next six weeks is incredibly important to me personally. To me this is not “just another series.”

That’s because – and I didn’t plan it this way when

I put this series on the calendar but, as it turns out ... what we're going to look at actually ties into a challenge that our pastoral leadership team is currently wrestling with; a challenge which our entire church will face in the next phase of our ministry.

The challenge (for those who are curious) is ... how can NHCC effectively connect with and retain younger people even as its founding pastor (me) and other key leaders move closer and closer to retirement age?

Now, we're still a ways from the day when I and many others of my generation ride off into the sunset, but now is the time to be thinking about it and praying about it. Now is the time to be strategizing for it because *if we don't*, our church will follow the path of so many other churches that didn't address the challenge: we'll slowly decline and maybe even die at some point.

But that's not what I want to talk to you about

today. We'll do that sometime in the near future

The reason I'm telling you this is because, in recent days, there has been *a lot* of discussion in our ministry team (with a good degree of intensity and urgency!) about what the future should look like; about what we need to do to ensure that our church grows younger even as it grows older. And there will be even more of those discussions in the days to come and more than a few of you will be part of the process.

But, as exciting as it is to think and dream, I have to be honest with you: with all the voices, all the options, all the possibilities it reaches a point where it's a little bewildering ... which is what happened to me last Tuesday.

After we'd spent an entire day processing through our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as it relates to this challenge, I was overwhelmed and I even thought, "I'm not sure I can do this."

## Two Questions

But later that evening, I felt like the Lord said to me, “Take a step back and think about an even bigger question than the one you’re asking.”

And here it is:

**What *exactly* are we trying to do for people who become part of NHCC?**

Whether a person is 6 or 16 or 60, what is all of “this” – everything we’re doing (and might do) as a church – intended to accomplish? What should be the net result?

Because regardless of what the future looks like in terms of services and programs and personnel and everything else, the answer to *that* question transcends all of those things. It’s foundational. Everything else rests on it.

And once I realized that, not only did I feel a lot more peace and clarity, I also realized just how timely and important this series will be.

But enough about me.

Let's flip things around and talk about *you* because it turns out that this little question has an immediate application to you and your life.

From your perspective, the question is:

**What benefit is there to *you*, personally, of what we're doing and inviting you to do?**

And that's a question you ought to know the answer to since, after all ...

- You obviously got up and came here this morning.
- Or you decided to watch online.
- Or you came early to volunteer in some way.
- Or you're going to be participating in a small

group later this week.

- Or you're contributing financially to our cause.
- Or you're inviting people to come with you to church.

What ought to be happening to you as a result of all that activity? What's the ultimate goal of your involvement? Of your investment of time, energy and money?

And *that's* what I want to talk to you about today and in the weeks that follow.

## **You're Invited**

Now, if you were paying attention to the song that Richard sang and the video that played afterwards, you probably already have a pretty good idea of where this is all going. The ultimate goal, the benefit to you, the net result has something to do with ...

- That great invitation that Jesus issued again and again to men and women of His day.
- That same invitation that He has offered through the Holy Spirit and His church to countless men and women all over the world for the past 20 centuries.
- The same invitation that He gives to you and me today, right here in the Kansas City Northland.

What is that invitation?

- It isn't "try to behave better" ... though Jesus did explain how that would help your life be better and you be better at life.
- And it isn't "believe in Me so you can be with God when you die" ... though that is true.

**Instead, the all-encompassing great**

**invitation of Jesus (then and now) to all who will listen is “Follow Me!”**

So, *at the very least*, what ought to be happening as a result of your involvement here (or any church for that matter) is that you learn something about following Jesus: beginning with who He was, what He did, how He lived, and the things He taught.

But more than simply *learning about* following Jesus, the net result (at least for those who buy in to the process) ought to be that you actually *do follow*.

**As one of Jesus’ closest friends once wrote:**

*Whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked! 1 John 2:6 (ESV)*

Now, obviously John didn’t mean that literally. He’s not talking about how Jesus put one foot in front of another.



Instead, John meant that whatever Jesus believed and did should become the normative pattern of life for anyone who follows Him, so that *over time*

...

- We more and more *think* like He thought.
- We more and more *live* like He lived.
- And we more and more *impact* the world like He impacted the world.

Or, as the song put it: “Jesus, I may just grow up and be like You someday.”<sup>i</sup>

... which is, in fact ...

- The ultimate goal of the enterprise that Christians call “church.”
- The intended net result of everything we do here at NHCC.
- And what ought to be happening to you if you consistently participate in this church or any other.

In one of his letters, the guy who is more responsible for the spread of the church than anyone else in the first century, the Apostle Paul, wrote that God calls people to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers ...

**... so that we ...**

*... become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*Ephesians 4:13b (NIV)*

... which is an incredible thought.

I mean, just try to imagine *that*: you (and me) somehow attaining to “the whole measure of the fullness of Jesus!”

- Everything that Jesus was and is – the fullness of His thinking and living and impact.
- You and me at some point measuring up to

all of that in who we are and how we live.

Pretty lofty goal wouldn't you say?

But it *is* the goal!

And it's the reason Jesus invites us to follow Him.

**We are invited to *follow* Jesus so that we can become *like* Jesus.**

And again, this is the answer to both questions I posed earlier.

- This is what the church is (or should be) designed to accomplish whether a person is 6 or 16 or 60.
- And this is what the payoff should be for you from your involvement.

... the whole measure of the fullness of Jesus (how He thought, how He lived, how He impacted the world) coming out of *you*; emanating through *your*

unique personality and talents and experiences.

## **Growth Engine**

Obviously, this kind of transformation doesn't happen overnight. Instead, it happens over time. There's a process of growth and maturing.

Of course, the question is “what *specifically* has to grow and mature in order for this radical change to take place?”

I mean, for my life to emanate less and less of *me* (and the messed up way I think and act and impact the world around me) ... and more and more of *Jesus* (and the perfect way He thinks and acts and impacts the world) something has to grow and keep on growing over time.

What is it?

Again Paul gives us the answer in one of his letters.

## **He writes:**

*I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.*

Which is exactly the transformation we're talking about: less of me and more of Him.

## **And then he says ...**

*The life I now live in the body, I live  
by faith in the Son of God, who loved  
me and gave himself for me.  
Galatians 2:20 (NIV)*

*Faith* is what has to grow; specifically, our confidence in Jesus; confidence that He is who He says He is and that He will do what He has promised to do<sup>ii</sup> ... which means that following Jesus is about more than just marching in lockstep with how He thinks and acts and impacts the world.

Of course, you *can* do that – in fact, that's actually a really good way to investigate Jesus; to simply

do what He says and see what happens.

But the idea of faith in Jesus and confidence in Jesus implies something much deeper: a personal connection, an intimate friendship, a close relationship of trust in Him.

**And *that* – faith and confidence and trust – is what lies at the heart of transformation.**

It's the engine. And it's what needs to grow if we're going to become like Jesus by following Him.

-----

By the way, I realize that some of you who are new to us or who are skeptical about the Christian faith might be thinking “why would anyone even care about such a thing? Why would I even *want* to be like Jesus?”

In the interest of time, I've not attempted to address that question today and I'm not going to.

However, if you're curious enough to do a little bit of investigation, I did a huge mega-series called "This Is Jesus" earlier this year which answers not only that question but a lot more.

And everything in that series – audio, video and message transcripts – is available in the media section of our app and our website. You can also find the audio on the North Heartland podcast.

In addition, if you really are interested in knowing more about that, I'd be happy to meet with you sometime to talk about it. Just stop by after the service and we'll set something up.

-----

Now, I also realize at this point that I've spent a lot of time peeling back the onion, so to speak.

- I've raised the question of what we're we trying to do here at NHCC.

- And the mirror-image question of how your involvement in that ought to benefit you.
- I've explained that the answer to both of those questions has something to do with the great invitation of Jesus to follow Him.
- And then, that following Him means becoming more like Him over time as we grow and mature.
- And then, finally, that *specifically* what needs to grow and mature is our *faith* in Him – our trust that He is who He says He is and will do what He says He'll do.

And because peeling that onion is a bit of a philosophical intellectual exercise, I suspect that some of you are about ready to zone out. 😊

## **Five Things**



But hang with me: we're going to get really practical *right now* because the question at this point is "how does faith grow?"

Or, to put it in terms of the title of this series, "what are the five things that God uses to develop our faith?"

Now, in just a minute, I'm going to give you the list of these five things and just a brief overview of each one and then, in each successive week of the series, we'll look at each one in detail.

But before I do that, I need to tell you that ...

**First of all, this list is not a formula or steps to follow.**

There's no order or sequence to these things. This is not a procedure to follow.

**Second, this list is not in the Bible.**

I think as we go through the series, you'll see that

these catalysts are *in line* with scriptural principles but there isn't a list anywhere (like, for instance, The Ten Commandments). There's no place where Jesus says "now, just do these five things and you'll grow in your faith and you'll become more like Me and less like you."

So, that's what this list is not. Now let me tell you what it *is*.

**This list is a set of empirical observations of the kinds of experiences that effectively fuel the development of faith in people.**

... the ingredients (so to speak) that, when stirred together, result in greater trust and confidence in the person and promises of God.<sup>iii</sup>

And just so you'll know, those are not my words but the words of Andy Stanley – the pastor of North Point Church in Georgia – who, over 20 years ago, came up with the list that I'm about to give you.

But what's amazing about this list is that when he and his leadership team came up with it, they were asking themselves the same exact question *our* leadership team was asking at a crucial point many years ago. We'd been "in business" for about 10 years at the time and we had so many programs and activities and everyone was running ragged, so we called a time-out and went off on a two-day retreat.

And the question we asked ourselves was *what helps people grow in their faith? What helps people know Jesus better and become more like Him?*

And we had lots of discussion and debate but little clarity until, at one point, I said "let's not talk hypothetical. And let's not go from some book we've read or copy what someone else is doing."

"Instead, let's talk about *each of us*, personally. What environments – what habits and practices – have been most transformational in our own lives? I mean, if we're going to design something

for everyone else, shouldn't it be something that's worked for us?"

And so we came up with a list, and we restructured our staff and programming around that list.<sup>iv</sup>

Several years later, I was reading an article Stanley had written, and I was amazed to discover that *their* list and our list were almost identical. I was like, "Wow! We've never met these people and they have had almost the same experience. This really is how God works."

Now, throughout this series, I'll be sharing our list but, because Andy is pretty much the world's best strategist and communicator, his list is going to be the framework.

I mean, the guy even figured out how to start everything with the letter "P" which is really cool and easy to remember!

So, with all of that said ...

**Here are the five things God uses to grow our faith.<sup>v</sup>**

- Practical Teaching
- Private Disciplines
- Personal Ministry
- Providential Relationships
- Pivotal Circumstances

You talk to any follower of Jesus who has grown in their faith and more than likely, they'll mention at least one or more of those things as being catalytic – helping them to grow.

So, let's take a quick look.

*Practical teaching ...* reveals where we are, where we need to go and how to get there.

Examples: Sparling, Stanley, N.T. Wright  
Faith grows

*Private Disciplines ...* tune our hearts to God's heart

Examples – read Bible for myself, keep a journal, spend time with God in nature

Faith grows

*Personal Ministry ...* enables us to experience God's power as we serve Him.

Example: invited to teach 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls Bible study

Faith grows

*Providential Relationships ...* people who, in some way, show us God

Example: Jackie Byrd

Faith grows

*Pivotal Circumstances ...* events (good or bad) that force us to look at God and choose to draw near or turn away.

Example: my mom's death

Faith grows – have to depend on God in a different way

All of those things ...

- Practical Teaching
- Private Disciplines
- Personal Ministry
- Providential Relationships
- Pivotal Circumstances

... have been key ingredients in my own faith development and in whatever transformation God has worked in me. And they are key to yours as well.

And again, the purpose of sharing this list isn't to prescribe some kind of procedure or formula.

Instead, being aware of these five things prepares us and makes us more sensitive to the ways of God as he seeks to build our faith.<sup>vi</sup>

And why does He want to build our faith? Because the greater the faith, the greater the connection,

the stronger the friendship, the more intimate the relationship with Him.

And that's what's most important of all. That's His heart's desire for you and for me.

So, the reason we do what we do here at NHCC is to grow our faith so that we can wake up in the morning and say, "God, I trust you. I don't know what's going to happen today but You do. So I'm not going to fear because I can't control the future but I trust the One who both knows the future and in some capacity, controls it.

That's where you want to be. That's where I and the ministry leaders of this church want you to be. And that only happens as your faith gets deeper and bigger.

And God's going to use some relationships, and teaching and circumstances and private disciplines and those moments where He asks you to do something for Him that you're not prepared



for and you step out and do it anyway.

And every time, your faith will get deeper and bigger and deeper and bigger. And at the end of the day, you'll know Him and you'll trust Him.

## Conclusion

**So here's a question to ponder: What would my life be like if that really happened – if my faith got bigger?**

What if I really was able to follow Jesus and become more like Him than me?

What if I really was able to say with the Apostle Paul ...

*I am confident of this; that he who began a good work in [me] will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.      Philippians    1:5  
(NIV)*

What if I had that kind of connection, friendship

and relationship with God? What would life be like?

Now in just a minute the band is going to do a song that's an expression of that kind of faith. And as you listen to it, I want you to imagine: what if my faith was that strong regardless of my circumstances?

In fact, what I want you to do before they start – and we're going to have 30 seconds of silence so you can do this well – what I want you to do is to think about a challenge you're facing right now in your life.

It could be a really big thing; maybe a health crisis or a financial predicament or a job issue. Maybe there's a relational struggle in your family; maybe there's a disconnect with your spouse or your kids.

Or maybe the challenge you're facing in the overall scheme of things isn't that big, but it's

something that worries you or frustrates you or confuses you. Maybe it's a question of how you could spend your time and money more wisely. Maybe it's a question about God Himself ... or what your next step is spiritually.

Whatever challenge you frame up in your mind over the next 30 seconds, as you listen to the song imagine: what if I had that kind of faith and trust in God in this circumstance?

Here we go.

<silence>

## **Feature – The One Thing I Know**

### **CLOSING COMMENTS**

Two things ...

1. I want to make you aware that we're in the process of making some changes to the typical flow of our services: sometimes

things get a little too routine and predictable. One change is that we're not always going to start the same way ... which means that you really do want to be seated and ready to go right at 9:30 or 11:00, because and you don't want to miss something really cool or meaningful.

2. If you're married and you and your better half would like to know more about a new small group that's forming, stop down here on your way out for more details. Just a few minutes.

Stand for blessing (Rom 15:13 paraphrase)

May the God of hope fill you completely with joy and peace because of your faith. And may your whole life overflow with hope and confidence through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Endnotes

---

<sup>i</sup> Boy Like Me, Man Like You, Rich Mullins

<sup>ii</sup> Stanley, Andy. Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend (Kindle Locations 1112-1115). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.

<sup>iii</sup> Andy Stanley's book "Deep and Wide."

<sup>iv</sup> Rick McGinniss, The Great Expectation, January 7, 2007

<sup>v</sup> Stanley, Kindle Locations 1172-1173

<sup>vi</sup> From the conclusion of Part 1 of Stanley's series, "Five Things"