

Accelerate
Fast-Forward Your Faith
November 13, 2011

Let's pray together.

God, it is so easy for us to get sucked into the Kingdom of Comfort. It's so easy to buy into the marketing and hype that says it's all about us and that, in order to be happy, we need this thing or that thing. So, this morning, as the song said, we ask that you would rescue us from *that* kingdom to the Kingdom of Heaven where you are King. Amen.

Good morning everyone. As you know, over the past month or so we've been in a series called *Accelerate: Building Momentum to Change Lives* – a series that marks the beginning of a two-year campaign to do just

that: to begin building momentum as a church so we can better accomplish the three things that we believe God has put us here for in the first place:

- to reach seekers – people who are not part of a church anywhere who feel like God doesn't have any interest in them, or a church has nothing to say to them of relevance
- to build a family of believers so that when people become Christians, they become part of our family
- and we also want to be a church that plants churches

Those are the three things we are trying to build momentum so that we can do those. But not only are we “accelerating” so that we can change the lives of others, we also believe, as I've said each week, that *our* lives will be changed as well as we partner with

God in these things. I'll say more about that later in this message but, as far as what we're trying to do "project-wise," since we are coming to the finish line of this series, I want to make sure that we're all on the same page. So, I'll just take a couple of minutes here to make sure that we all understand what we're trying to do here. Here it is:

We're trying to raise \$4M over the next two years beginning this December and running through December of 2013.

And, that \$4M covers everything we're currently doing – it covers the cost of having this facility, it covers the cost of having a staff to lead the ministry programs and the cost of the programs themselves, *plus* that \$4M covers the additional things we need to do to accelerate in those three things we're here for.

Very specifically, to accelerate our ability to

reach even more seekers, we plan to spend about \$2.1M over the next two years. \$300K of that is roughly what it costs us to continue what we're currently doing. The remainder of that, \$1.8M is what we think it will cost to renovate our facility. The main project, and we've been talking about it for months, is ...

We want to expand and upgrade this current auditorium to 500 seats.

We've talked about this on many occasions, including the rationale as to why we think it's necessary, so I won't go into that any further.

But, in addition, if we can afford it, we'd like to add an atrium on the front entry, possibly demolishing the lease space offices (and moving the tenants who are there to another unused space in our facility). Here's what I mean by that.

<floor plan> Here's how it looks now.

If you come in the main entryway, the lease space is the building to the right, that kind of juts out that way.

<floor plan> Here's how it would look.

If we are able to do this, we would demolish the lease space and put the atrium in the middle. So, when you walk into the building, that's what you would see, not the long hallway.

Just this week, we had an "artist rendering" of what that might look like from the outside. This is pretty cool.

<picture> Here's what it would look like from 88th street right before you turn into the parking lot.

Finally, if we can fit it in under the \$1.8M,

we'd like to upgrade the existing commons area (which would obviously flow into the new atrium) by raising the ceiling so it feels more spacious and also enlarging the opening into the dining hall to add a permanent coffee corner ...

<picture> Like the one in this rendering.

I saw something very similar at a church in the Chicago area that I got to visit a few weeks ago.

So, that's kind of what we're going to do with our facility.

But, in addition, part of the \$4M we're trying to raise will accelerate our ability to get back into the business of planting churches, which is something we've done very well in our history but have gotten away from in recent years, and we want to remedy that.

So, over the next two years, we want to put about \$200K into ...

- Training a full-time church planter (as an intern on our staff)
- Launching a new congregation somewhere in this region
- Supporting existing ministries that are already in the church-planting business

And we hope that, moving forward, that kind of thing will happen every two years from now on.

So, that's the plan. That's where the \$4M figure comes from. It's everything we're currently doing plus what we think God is telling us to do in addition so that we can accelerate.

Now, as you know ...

- We've created a cool little booklet that explains it all. If you haven't had a chance to read it, I encourage you to do so (If you don't have one, you can get one at the information table).
- We had a professional video made which explains it.
- And we've created a special website: www.acceleratenhcc.org. (If you haven't seen the video, it's posted there as well).

But even with the booklet and the video and the website, we know that you still may have some questions about all of this – and that's OK because there is some complexity to it ...

So, on the Accelerate website there is a tab labeled FAQs.

And under that tab, sometime in the very

near future, we're going to post the answers to a bunch of questions that we've heard over the past several of months, including questions about:

- The rationale for expansion
- The Accelerate campaign itself
- The NHCC financial picture - people are curious about that
- How to determine your involvement
- The construction process – ex. How long are we going to be out of the auditorium?
- Improvements to the building
- Our long-term vision

If you read through all of that, I'm sure it will answer a bunch of questions. But, if you *still* have questions, please call me or send me an email. I will be more than happy to address anything that isn't clear to you or anything that causes you concern.

And the reason I will be more than happy to do that is because *I, and the leadership team of this church, believe in what we're doing.* We've done the homework, we've answered the questions, we've sought the counsel of wise consultants, we've gone back to our roots – our vision and our calling, we've paid attention to what our people are saying and to what the Spirit is saying and we believe this is the right thing for NHCC. That doesn't mean there won't be some surprises along the way, there always are, but we believe this is the right plan at the right time for the right reasons.

And, more importantly, we believe this is going to happen. *Specifically ...* and this gets to what I really want to talk to you about this morning ... we believe the *financial goal* is going to happen. We really do. We believe that for those of us who call NHCC "home" to

collectively accelerate our giving from \$2M over a two-year period (which is what the pace is right now) to \$4M over the next two years is well within the realm of possibility. In fact, it is highly possible that we could accelerate even beyond that.

Let me tell you why we believe that.

Advance Commitments

Last Sunday evening, our staff and our Advisory Council along with other leaders and key volunteers gathered together in this room to make our pledges to the *Accelerate* campaign, early, ahead of everyone else. And the reason we did that goes back to something that happened when King David of Israel built the very first temple in Jerusalem. Actually, he didn't build it – his son Solomon ended up leading construction, but David led the capital campaign.

And, the record of what happened in that campaign is in 1 Chronicles 29. It tells us that David called everyone together – everyone in Jerusalem and everyone from all over Israel who had come to contribute to this project - and then he stood up and said, “I want you to know what I personally am going to give to this project.”

And then he laid it out in detail, kind of like I did last week, except that he had a lot more money to give than Jetta and I do! 😊 (If you weren't here, I explained how we think God is making it possible for us to accelerate our giving from about \$36K over two years to about \$90K over two years. It's shocking, it's amazing to us. And the message is posted online if you want to know how we came up with that).

But listen to David's pledge:

"Because of my devotion to the Temple of my God, I am giving all of my own private treasures of gold and silver to help in the construction ... I am donating more than 112 tons of gold and 262 tons of refined silver to be used for overlaying the walls of the buildings and for the other gold and silver work to be done by the craftsmen."

1 Chronicles 29:3-5 (NLT)

And I looked that up because I was curious about what that was worth, and it's worth about \$6B on today's market! That's a huge amount of money he put into it.

Then he turned to the other leaders and said:

"Now then, who will follow my example and give offerings to the Lord today?"

1 Chronicles 29:5 (NLT)

I love this because what David is saying is "speed of the leaders, speed of the team. If we're not all-in (the leaders), then we can't expect anyone else to be."

In response, the Bible says that ...

*The family leaders, the leaders of the tribes of Israel, the generals and captains of the army, and the king's administrative officers all gave willingly. 1
Chronicles 29:6 (NLT)*

And then the Bible goes on to list how much they gave ...

For the construction of the Temple of God, they gave about 188 tons of gold, 10,000 gold coins, 375 tons of silver, 675 tons of bronze, and 3,750 tons of iron. They also

*contributed numerous
precious stones, which were
deposited in the treasury ...*

Then, the Bible says ...

*The people rejoiced over the
offerings, for they had given
freely and wholeheartedly to
the Lord, and King David was
filled with joy. 1 Chronicles
29:9 (NLT)*

You see the pattern here? The senior leader goes first, then the rest of the leaders, then everyone else. And the result, as the scripture says, is joy and rejoicing. Everyone is encouraged. Everyone is inspired to follow in the example of the leaders.

So, last Sunday night, I asked our staff and council and leaders and key volunteers to make their pledges in advance as an inspiration and encouragement to you. And

they did. We gathered here for a time of worship and sharing and at the end of the evening, 72 individuals and families wrote down on a card the exact same thing we're all going to write down next weekend on Pledge Sunday.

Slide of commitment card

- They wrote down how much they currently give in a two-year period.
- They wrote down how much they are going to increase their giving over the next two years.
- And they wrote down what they plan to give out of stored resources (stocks, bonds, property, lump sums of cash, etc).

And then they totaled it up and everyone walked up here and dropped their card into an offering box, just like we're all going to do

as part of the service next week.

(And I know some of you would like to know how much it added up to, but if I tell you I'll have to kill you ... and if I kill you, you won't be able to make a pledge to Accelerate! So, it's not happening).

And, actually, what was most amazing about the whole thing wasn't so much the total of what people pledged (although it was so good that our consultant screamed when I told her what the number was) ... the most amazing part of the whole thing was the stories that people told. At one point, I opened up the mic in the service and asked people to come up and talk about how this whole campaign process had been affecting them.

- One person said, "As I've thought about this, I realize that I need to give more

than just money. I need to give all of me to God, including all of my failures and my sin." Wow!

- Another person said, "Several months ago, I had a very big number come to me of what I thought God wanted me to give. And then the economy just blasted my business and I thought, 'no way.' But when I put it all on the table again today, I realized that I can do that number. I need to make some changes, but I can do it."
- One guy said that because we had special Accelerate small groups, he had decided to attend one. And he felt so welcomed by the people in the group, he was going to keep coming!
- Another guy shared there was a possibility he and his family might be moving, but even if they did, NHCC was home and they were going to make a pledge and fulfill it even if that

happens. It was incredible!

- Later, another person, who actually didn't speak, wrote this on her blog:

To say that I am scared out of my ever-lovin' mind about making this kind of commitment over the next two years would be a huge understatement. HUGE. There have been long talks with God ... days where I spent my time weighing the pros and cons of how this will affect me and my livelihood over the next two years. My car is 9 years old. My house is 74 years old. I'm 20 years from retirement and have next to nothing saved. It's scary. It's frightening. And it has ... been the biggest blessing."

And then she went on describe how God had spoken to her about her future and what she should do. She sent me

an email saying “Thanks for the challenge, Rick. It was the kick in the butt I've needed for a very long time.”

So, as cool as the pledge cards themselves were, the things that happened *around* those cards were even more amazing.

And I guess I *can* tell you *something else* about the pledges that were turned in. Many of them represented a doubling or even tripling of what people are currently giving. Some people are planning to increase their giving from 10% to 20% or even 30% of their income. Some are going to give significant chunks from their stored resources. Some people – folks who are just in the starting out on their “generosity journey” – pledged to increase their giving by fivefold or tenfold; going from 1% or 2% of their income to 10%. It's just amazing what people decided to do.

And, I have to say that, even if we don't reach the financial goal, this whole campaign has been worth it just to see all of *that* happen in our leaders. As I've said from the beginning: God is using the process of building momentum to change the lives of *others* to change *us*. And if that kind of growth and change happens to everyone else – and I'm sure it will – I'm certain we're going to reach our financial goal.

Why People Give

But here's a question – and this gets into another way that God changes us as we give so that others can be changed: *what causes people to make those kinds of commitments?* That was actually a question that came up at my small group last Wednesday. "What would possess someone to give so much money? Or to make such a large increase in what they are currently

giving?”

Based on almost 25 years of experience as a pastor, I'll tell you what it's *not*.

Very few people give “just because they’re supposed to.”

Very few people just out of the blue one day say, “you know, I think I’m going to start tithing” – and, by the way, that word means “10%” not just “giving to the church” – very few people just decide on the spot, “next month, I’m going to start giving 10% of my income (or more) to the Lord’s work *just because the Bible says I’m supposed to.*”

There may be some people who’ve done it for that reason, but I’ve never met any of them. Instead, what I’ve noticed is that there is a defining moment that convinces people to reallocate dollars that are currently being invested in the Kingdom of Comfort to the

Kingdom of Heaven. Something happens that inspires people to put *less money* into their own little world of cars and houses and kids and vacations and toys and 401Ks and *more money* into the offering basket.

And a lot of times that “something” depends on personality.

- For some people it’s the example of others, like we talked about a little while ago with David raising money to build the temple in Jerusalem.
- For others, it’s a sense of gratefulness – being moved by how much God has blessed them and by what God has done for them in Christ.
- For still others, it’s the understanding that giving to God is one of the greatest long-term investments you can make (which we talked about last week).

A couple months ago, we invited several NHCCers to sit down and talk to us about what inspires *them* to give. Let's watch and listen.

Video – “Generosity”

Hey, can we express our appreciation to those folks? <applause>

People have all kinds of motivations that inspire them to give, but I've noticed that when people make a serious commitment to a lifestyle of financial generosity, three things happen.

They understand the cause, they're given a challenge and they feel confident.

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Somewhere along the line, when people

decide to go all-in, they understand “here’s what we’re doing and why,” whether it’s building the very first temple in Jerusalem or providing food for starving brothers and sisters (as we read about last week in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians) or raising \$4M for three initiatives like we are or making sure there’s enough money to pay the light bill ... which was the “cause” that helped me get serious about giving.

Jetta and I had been married just a little over a year. She was teaching school and I was still in school, so we didn’t have much money, but we were part of this really cool church in Arlington, TX. One day we were sitting in the fellowship hall and I got talking to one of the other guys in our young marrieds group. I said, “Mark, do you think it’s necessary to give to be part of the church? Things are really, really tight for us right now and I just don’t see how we can do

it." (Quite honestly, I was trying to give myself an "out.")

He said, "Well, the lights are on in this room because people give. If they didn't, we wouldn't be sitting here having this conversation. The way I see it, we all benefit from this building and what happens in it, we all benefit from what Pastor David does and what Brother Ed (who was our Music Director) does ... and that's why we should give." He didn't know it at the time, but he was defining the cause.

And then he challenged me. He said, "Even though your finances are tight, I think you should give anyway. Maybe you can only give 5% right now, but start there and make it your goal to get to 10% so *you can share the burden equally with everyone else.*"

I've never forgotten that. Within a couple of

months, we found ourselves in a better financial position and we were able to tithe. In fact, not long after that we were able to make a pledge to a three-year building campaign.

When people go all in, they understand the cause and then somehow, somehow they're challenged. That's what King David did. That's what the Apostle Paul did. And that's what we're doing in this *Accelerate* campaign. We've gone to great lengths to explain the what, why and how – the cause – and then to lay out the challenge, which is:

- Put everything you have on the table – everything you earn, everything you own and everything you spend – and say, “God, all this is yours in the first place. You're the owner. I'm just the manager. What do you want me to do with Your resources concerning this

cause?”

- Make a two-year commitment that is “exceedingly generous” – a pledge that takes into account your life circumstances but still requires you to excel in generosity as you never have before; a pledge that, for some of us, will be two or threefold of what we currently give and, for many of us who are just starting out, five or ten or even twentyfold.

But it takes one other thing beyond cause and challenge to move people – at least, in a significant way – from investing in the Kingdom of Comfort to investing in the Kingdom of Heaven. And this is by far the most important of the three: *confidence*. But I don’t mean confidence that the cause is worthy or that successfully meeting the challenge is possible. I mean confidence

that “if I take this step – whether I’m a tither and I’m going to double or triple my giving – or if I’m giving .5% and I’m going to increase that by twenty-fold and become a tither ... *I will be OK.*”

No matter where you are in your spiritual journey with respect to generosity, that’s *always* the question. I hear it from people who are just starting out. “If I start by giving 2% on a regular basis, will I be able to pay the doctor bills? Save enough money to put my kids through college? Fix my car when it breaks down? Go out to dinner every once-in-a-while?” Translation ... “if we give this amount of money, will we be OK?”

That was the question Jetta and I wrestled with when we came up with our pledge. “I’m not too far from retirement,” she said. “Let’s not forget that what we give away now is what we won’t have for the future.”

Translation ... if we give this amount of money, will we be OK?

The reason that most followers of Jesus never really get into the game generosity-wise isn't because they're greedy. It's because they're afraid. They're afraid that if they get radical, they're eventually going to wind up in a situation that's very ... uncomfortable.

Confidence

I like how Andy Stanley in his book, *Fields of Gold*, explains this tension (and we have it available at our bookstore. I highly recommend it as it's one of the best books I've ever read on the fear that keeps us from "exceedingly generous" giving). He writes ...

"By nature, the concept of generosity is

in direct conflict with the concept of self-preservation. There's a point at which your own generosity will pose a direct threat to your well-being. Conventional wisdom tells you that unless something governs your generosity, you will give your way right into the poor house."

That's why "Everyone has a threshold when it comes to giving. Whether it's a dollar amount or a percentage, there are some giving levels that are effortless and others that make us uneasy. No matter how far you're willing to go for God's kingdom, sooner or later you hit a wall. For many Christians, the wall is fear. Until you recognize it, you'll never be able to break through it.

"For me," Stanley writes (and I agree with him), "tithing is well within my

comfort zone. I could tithe my whole life without getting close to the fear threshold or truly dealing with the issue of who owns my possessions and who provides for my daily needs. But throughout my life, there have been defining moments when I was challenged to go above and beyond my regular giving. And each time I faced one of those challenges, I experienced fear.”

But that’s not a bad thing. That actually tells you you’re getting close to a breakthrough in your faith. It tells you that you’re in position to accelerate spiritually.

“When you pursue a growing faith you increase your exposure to potential fears. Actually, fear and faith live parallel lives. Uncertainty is an essential ingredient for both. Without

the element of the unknown, there could be no faith. It's in that moment of faith that we learn to rely less on what is seen and more on what is unseen. Faith bridges the gap."

And then he asks what, for me, is the million dollar question (no pun intended):

If God were involved in your finances, would you feel more secure or less?

Most people would say "more." I mean, what do people do when the bottom drops out financially? They pray. They ask God to help them.

Amazingly, Stanley writes, "with the flick of a pen, you can invite your heavenly Father into the world of your finances." Really? How do you do that? Jesus explained it like this:

Don't worry about these

And God the Father explained it like this through the prophet Malachi:

"Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test," says the Lord of hosts. "See if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing." Malachi 3:8-10 (NIV)

In every case, again and again, God says, "If you will be about My needs – investing generously in my agenda in this world which includes taking care of the less fortunate and spreading the gospel and making disciples – if you will be about My needs, I will be about your needs."

And that's been my experience and I could

tell story after story about it. I won't because of time, but just this week – I don't know if you saw it or not – there was a post on the City from a person affirming the same thing.

Tithing is a tough choice. I wrestled with it for a long time before I decided to test God's word and now I'm happy to say I have been a faithful tither for the last 15 years and all I say, is God has always, always taken care of me.

I was unemployed while my son was being born, God provided. My family lives off of a single income, I have a son and a wife who is going to school and God has provided. I moved here from Phoenix with no degree, only work experience, as I felt led to move here to help take care of a family member with cancer and God provided.

My advice to those who don't tithe is read Malachi 3:10 and question it with all your might, argue with it, but also test it for a month. I guarantee you will see and feel God's blessing, the least of which will be changes in your own heart.

So we have a choice to make. If we want God involved in our finances, we need to put our finances to work for God's interests. If we want His guarantee that we'll have something to eat and drink, and clothes to wear, then we need to focus on His agenda. And that means we need to give. That might mean a percentage of your next paycheck. It might mean a part of your net worth. Wherever the voice of generosity leads you, you need to follow it, in spite of the fear you may feel.

Of course, the illusion is that "the more I hold

on to, the safer I am." But the truth is that I am no "safer" with 100% than I am with 90%. I'm no "safer" with 1000% than I am with 90% or 80%. I can still get a fatal disease like Steve Jobs. Terrible things could happen to my family like Tiger Woods. Financial ruin happens all the time to people who have far more than I do. Just ask anyone who invested with Bernie Madoff.

There are plenty of things to fear that a huge bank balance can't control.

Which is why, Stanley writes, "when you begin to view your wealth from God's perspective, you'll see that the thing to fear isn't giving away too much, but sowing too little."

It's not putting enough into God's hands for him to bless us with more so that we can give even more so that he can bless us with even more.

It know sounds like a get-rich-quick scheme but I believe Paul is actually suggesting that the amount entrusted to you in your life often depends on how well you steward what you've already got. If you give like you're supposed to, God will give you more. Quite frankly, that's how a schoolteacher and a pastor have the ability to give what we're going to give. Because we have given over the years, God keeps dumping more on us and we keep giving more back and ...

Conclusion

But the only way for you to experience that is to try it; to take a leap of faith; to have confidence in God that he says what he means and means what he says.

And this Accelerate campaign is such an amazing opportunity to do that. And I have been praying to God that so many of you

would just jump on this in a big way. Yes, because it will help NHCC become what God wants it to become but also because it will help *you* become what He wants *you* to become. So, don't miss out on this. God wants to grow you through this.

So, this week, I challenge you to do what I challenged you to do last week. Go home, sit down and put everything on the table. And then choose to be exceedingly generous with it over the next two years. Read the booklet again. Look at the gift chart. Then fill out your pledge card and bring it back next Sunday. (And if you forget your card, we'll have plenty).

Oh, and by the way ... next week, get here early and expect great things. It's going to be one of the greatest days ever in our history.

Endnotes