

Sustain: The “Others”
Relationships That Replenish
November 6/7, 2010

Let's pray.

God, I'm thankful for the opportunity to speak this morning. I'm thankful that You have something to say to us.

And I'm thankful that you said some things to me last summer that have had such an impact on my life; things that have given me clarity and courage to make some changes so I can live a more sustainable life emotionally ... so that I can serve You and others out of fullness instead of emptiness; out of “want to” instead of “have to.”

I know that's your desire for everyone in this room, so I pray this morning that we'll hear what You want to say and trust You as You say it. In Jesus name, amen.

As most of you know, this series and the one preceding it (which I called *Detox – cleansing your head and heart from the emotional toxins that are destroying you*) comes out of an experience I had last summer ...

... when Jetta and I were fortunate to spend a week at a retreat for pastors and spouses called SonScape.

I've described a little bit of what it was like in terms of the teaching and the personal counseling but I haven't said much about the relational side of things other than there were three other pastor-spouse couples who were there with us ... going through the same program ... who we'd never met before. Everyone was in a different stage of life. Everyone was in a different stage of their ministry career. Everyone was from a different denomination. Every day we shared at least two meals together.

And as you might expect, there was some awkwardness at first. I think everyone looked around the room and wondered about everyone else – “are they weird? Or are they normal ... like me?”

But on the very first night after our first learning session together, for some reason, Jetta and I decided that we were going to be the game-meisters. The retreat center had a big room with a ping-pong table and a lot of board games and we had brought our marble game and we just said, “Hey, anybody who wants to play games instead of going to bed, we're going to be in the game room for awhile.”

And for some reason, everybody said “OK.” And the relational ice was broken.

By the time the week was over, we had spent almost as many hours in that game room together as we had in our learning sessions. In fact, our retreat leaders, Bob and Jeanne, said they had never seen a group bond as quickly and as tightly as ours did – and they'd led over 40 retreats, so I think they knew what they were talking about.

But, through that experience, I think God said something to me that He *didn't* say during the time that Bob and

Jeanne were teaching us ... or in the time that we spent in one-on-one counseling ... or in the time I spent alone reading or walking through the woods. I think God said, "Rick, if you're going to live an emotionally sustainable life, you have to spend more time with people doing things that fill you up instead of draining you down. You need more relationships that replenish in your life."

And I'm going to talk to you about that today because I suspect that it's not just me who needs that kind of thing. All of us do. So, it needs to go on the list of "emotional health components" that we've talked about in this series so far ...

... which, if you remember, include ...

- Knowing how we're wired up personality-wise and then, as much as possible, living accordingly.
- Intentionally taking time to rest and then living out of that rest; we described it as "living as human beings instead of human doings."
- Discovering and living within our limitations (which we talked about last weekend).

Those are the things we've talked about over the past three weeks and, as always, if you missed one, you can listen online at our website or pick up a DVD or CD at our bookstore on the way out.

So, as I said, let's add this fourth component to the list and let's put it like this:

To enjoy an emotionally sustainable life, we need relationships that replenish.

If you're going to have an emotionally sustainable life, you need to have relationships that replenish you. And, actually, this is just the first of *four components having to do with relationships* that we'll be adding to the list from now through Thanksgiving.

And we're going to spend so much time on this because a lot of the toxic emotional sludge that develops in our hearts over time comes from the unhealthy ways in which we relate to others and, quite frankly, *allow them to relate to us*. Since doing relationships well is critical to our emotional health, we're going to dig deep on it for the next four weekends.

And today we're going to start out by talking about relationships that actually replenish us; relationships that fill us up instead of draining us.

Now, I think it's important to say from the very beginning that the idea of seeking to have these kinds of relationships is not a new concept; it's not some form of modern psychobabble; and it's not a optional luxury for those who have the time. It's biblical and it's God-ordained. I say that for three reasons.

1. Almost all of the relational instruction in the New Testament is meant to exhort followers of Jesus to build up and fill up other followers of Jesus. In other words, if we're Christians, God intends for us to fill others up instead of draining them down.

For instance, Paul wrote ...

We should help others do what is right and build them up in the Lord. Romans 15:2 (NLT)

In another part of the scripture he says ...

Encourage one another and build each other up. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (NIV)

And in another place he says ...

Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. Ephesians 4:29 (NLT)

2. Another reason that I say that the idea of replenishing relationships is biblical and God-ordained is that *Jesus* had those kinds of relationships.

In fact, if you read the scripture, it's clear that Jesus intentionally surrounded himself with an inner circle of men (and womenⁱ) who filled him up, men and women who were supportive of him as a person and of his mission as the Messiah of Israel. In fact, he even went so far as to *insulate himself* (not isolate himself), insulate himself from people who were *not* supportive and people he knew would distract and drain him.

The Gospel of John tells us that ...

Because of the miraculous signs Jesus did in Jerusalem at the Passover celebration, many began to trust in him. But Jesus didn't trust them, because he knew human nature. John 2:23-24 (NLT)

In other words, Jesus didn't just embrace them and say "oh, so you believe in me now, great! Come be my best friend!" He could sense that something wasn't right about their "faith" and so he kept them at arms length.

Same thing happened after Jesus fed the 5000 men plus their families the five loaves and two fish. Again, John writes ...

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did ...

... they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."

But Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. John 6:14-15 (NIV)

Jesus understood that if he was going to be who the Father intended him to be, he needed to not let himself get entangled in relationships that would drain him and pull him off course.

3. But there's one more reason I say that this idea of replenishing relationships is biblical and God-ordained. And that is that the three-part being of God – the trinity of Father, Son and Spirit – are the very definition of a relationship that replenishes. The three-who-are-one are always filling each other up instead of draining each other.

So, I think it's safe to say that this is something God wants for us; something we need to have if we're going to live emotionally sustainable lives.

What It Looks Like

So, the question would be - what do those relationships look like? I mean, how do you know if you are in a replenishing kind of relationship? And how do you get them if you're not?

Well, let's start with the first question - what relationships that replenish us look like. And just so you'll know, there isn't anything really deep or super-spiritual about the list of characteristics I'm going to give you. A lot of it is just wisdom. I'm sure if you thought about it long enough you could come up with a list better than mine.

But to me, the first characteristic is obvious.

1. In a relationship that replenishes you're not always in the place of giving. You also get to receive.

I mean, that just makes logical sense. You give but something comes back. That's the literal definition of replenishing, you give and something comes back.

In a relationship ...

- It means that you're not always the one listening. Sometimes you actually get to talk and the other person listens to you.
- It means that you don't just carry *their* burden. Sometimes, they carry yours.
- It means that you don't take total responsibility for the state of the relation; they do, too.

For example, when your children are very young, the relationship is not very replenishing. From the moment they're born, you're in the giving position. Now, obviously, there is something fulfilling about serving your children, but there's nothing that they *intentionally* can give back to you.

But as they get older, particularly as they approach adulthood, the balance of give and take in your relationship with your children can change and you can actually begin to have a relationship that replenishes where they intentionally give back to you. (That's why I always tell parents of teenagers "never do anything in that relationship with that kid that will permanently damage things because one day they'll grow out of this phase, whatever it is" and you can have an incredibly replenishing relationship with them if you haven't done damage).

2. The second characteristic on my list of what makes for a relationship that replenishes is an abiding sense of joy.

That's not necessarily the same thing as happiness, because as we know, happiness comes and goes with circumstances. Joy is an underlying sense of well-being and comfort that no matter what the circumstances are, I am safe and I'm secure.

In a relationship that's filling instead of draining, just being around that person lifts our spirits even when things aren't going the way we want. There's a joy in just being on the same page with that person, in the same room with them. And we walk away enriched from just having been in their presence.

3. In relationships that replenish, you're primarily valued for who you are, not for who you *should* be and not for what you do.

When Jetta and I were at Sonscape, one evening they set up a special candlelight dinner for everyone in their own cabins. The idea was to have dinner and then a romantic evening. Unfortunately, being that it was July, when we finished dinner, it still felt like the middle of the day. So, we decided to take a walk.

About 45 minutes later we came back and found a little note on our door. It was from Bailey and Randa, a younger couple whose cabin was right next to ours. It said, "It's too early to go to bed. So, if y'all want to play the marble game, knock on our door. We'd love to play."

And then strangest thing happened. Jetta and I both got very emotional because someone who didn't know us as "the pastor" or "the boss" or "the teacher" or "mom" or "dad" was saying, "Hey, we think you guys are pretty cool. We'd like to hang out with you." And so we knocked on their door and spent the whole evening there. We felt like a couple of kids sneaking out at night at summer camp. It was awesome.

And quite frankly, that's when I began to realize that I needed more of that kind of interaction in my life. Because I'm a pastor, a lot of my time is spent in a giving mode. And I'm not complaining because it's what I'm called, gifted, empowered and able to do. I love my job. But it also means that a lot of what I *receive* in life comes from what I do, not who I am.

Of course, I'm sure that's true for you, too. It's not just a pastor-thing. We *all* need relationships where we are valued for who we are, not for what we do and not for who we should be.

However, having said *that* ...

4. A replenishing relationship also *helps you* become more of who you should be, more of who God made you to be.

See, in a relationship that replenishes, there's always a tension between grace and truth. Grace says, "You're never going to be everything you should be but that's OK. I love you anyway. I'll hang out with you anyway."

Truth says, "God wants you to be more than you are today, so let me encourage you to grow."

In fact, I think this is why the Apostle Paul once wrote:

If someone is caught in a sin [which literally means "falling short" or "missing the mark"], you who are spiritual [you who are more mature in your faith, a little further along] should restore him gently. Galatians 6:1 (NIV)

"Don't let the people you love settle for less than who God intends for them to be," Paul is saying.

Call out the best in them. And that's a characteristic of a replenishing relationship.

Now, those are just a few characteristics of replenishing relationships that I thought of. And, as I said, I'm sure you could add a bunch more, maybe even some better ones.

But, at this point, the real question is ... do you *have* any of these kinds of relationships in your life? As you think about the people you spend time with on a regular basis; people like ...

- your spouse (if you're married)
- the people you work with
- the people you play with
- the people you hang out with
- your kids
- your parents
- your immediate and extended family (if you spend a lot of time with them)
- the people you volunteer with here at NHCC

... as you think about all of those people and the relationships you have with them, are there any that fill you up? Relationships ...

- Where you're not always in the place of giving but you also get to receive.
- Where there is a sense of joy in being together.
- Where you're valued primarily for who you are, not for what you do and not for who you should be.
- Yet, where you're also challenged and encouraged to become *more* of who you should be.

It's worth it to think about that, especially if you feel drained in your life.

In addition, it's worth it to ask whether the net balance of *all* your relationships is filling or draining. Do the ones that replenish, assuming you have some, outweigh the ones that do not? If not, you're living an emotionally *unsustainable* life. And you can do it for a while. Sometimes you *need* to do it for a while because the situation demands it. But you can't live that way forever without becoming emotionally toxic to yourself and to everyone else around you.

The good news is that you don't have to. You have permission from God to have relationships that replenish. You are encouraged to look for and build them. That's his desire for your life as one who is created to reflect who He is in who you are.

How You Get Them

The question then is "how do you get these kinds of relationships in your life?" I think there are only two ways.

1. One is to go look for new relationships.

Start praying, “God, I need some more people in my life who will fill me up. Could you please help me find them? Could you send some of them my way?” And then you take initiative. You start looking. You start reaching out to people.

After that evening when Bailey and Randa left the note on our door, Jetta and I decided that we were going to start looking for people in our stage of life here at NHCC; people who are empty-nesters; people who were not already well-connected in a small group and just hang out with them on a regular basis. We decided to just pick the first six couples we saw who fit that definition and have some fun.

So, now, every Wednesday evening, there’s a dozen people who we never really knew before who get together to eat, play games, talk, go to the movies, whatever. It’s wonderful. And I can’t put into words the difference in how I feel about doing the pastor-things I do because I’m now receiving something relationally from this church.

Listen: if you want more replenishing relationships in your life ask God to help you find some new people; strategically seek out some new relationships and see where they go. And a great way to do that around here is to get in a small group or make one of your own. In fact, just look around you right now. There are probably a dozen people sitting around you right now who feel the exact same way you do “I don’t know anybody. Nobody cares about me. Nobody wants to hang out with me.” I dare you to talk to some of those people after this service.

That’s one way to find replenishing relationships.

2. The other is to work on changing some of your existing relationships.

Start praying, “God, the relationship with my boss or my adult children or this particular friend is really draining to me. Would you give me the wisdom and the courage to work at changing it?”

And in a lot of cases this is the route we *must* take because we can’t easily end the relationship. We can’t stop being a brother or a sister or a spouse – at least not without doing terrible damage to ourselves and everyone else in the process. We can’t end the relationship *but* we also can’t allow ourselves to continually be drained.

Obviously, this is where the other components of emotional sustainability that we’ve talked about come in. This is where our relationship with Christ comes in. Those fill us up in other ways and increase our capacity to deal with these kinds of relationships.

But long-term, it behooves us to work to change the relationship ... *and not just for our sake, but also for the sake of the other person*. It’s simply not fair to that draining person that we are thinking “oh no, here she comes again” or “oh no, he’s on the phone again” and pretending that we’re “just fine with the way things are” when, in fact, we are not; when, in fact, we dread them because we are drained by them.

It’s not right and it’s emotionally unsustainable. By the way, it’s amazing how often the two of those – “not right” and “emotionally unsustainable” – go together.

So how do you work for change in existing relationships?

I think you start with a prayer and a courageous conversation and then you go from there.

I think you pray for God to give you the words to say and, then, just be honest about how you feel without heaping shame and condemnation on the other person.

Now, if you do that, most people will be surprised. Most people will be hurt and maybe a little angry or embarrassed. They'll probably become defensive and may even point the finger back at you and talk about how draining you are. That's just natural. Don't let that throw you.

About this time last year, I was really stressed out and I became a drain on the rest of the staff. So, Ladell did me a favor one day. He said, "Rick, this is what it feels like to work with you right now" and he went on to describe for me what a jerk I was being. It was such a pleasant conversation.

Not really. I got angry and defensive. I got self-justified ... *at first*, because I knew in my heart that what he was saying was right. When I got past enough of my pride to actually listen to what he was saying, I decided "yeah, you're right, I do need to make some changes so that we can have a working relationship that's replenishing instead of draining."

Of course, it doesn't always turn out like that. Sometimes, that kind of conversation has a very different result.

Actually, though, there are *only three possible results* when you do talk to someone about changing a relationship so that it's more replenishing and less draining.

Sometimes, they will say "I can't change" ... because they don't have the capacity to change.

In that conversation with Ladell, after I got over being defensive and offended, I said, in essence, "the jerk part of me I can change and I will try to change with God's help. But some of what you're talking about I don't really think I *can* change because it's how I'm wired. It's inherent to my personality and that isn't necessarily a bad thing."

And when that's the case, we have to change our expectations and give people grace – treat them better than they deserve. We have to accept that they're probably not going to be the replenishing partner that we would like in this relationship and then develop the capacity elsewhere that allows us to love and accept them as they are.

So, sometimes people say "I can't change" because they really can't – at least, not as much as we'd like.

But sometimes people will say, "I can ... and I will."

Sometimes people will say, "It wasn't pleasant to hear everything you just told me, but thank you for taking the risk and letting me know what I can do differently because *I don't want to be on the negative side of your relational ledger*. I will try to make some changes."

By the way, if you're married, that kind of sentence ought to come out of your heart and your mouth over and over and over. For example, "I didn't like it when you told me I made you feel stupid (because I wasn't really trying to do that), but *thank you* for risking the wrath of my self-defensiveness and my childish anger and telling me anyway. I

don't want to be a drain in your life, so I will be more sensitive to that in the future. I can and I will."

That's actually a conversation Jetta and I had last Monday night. And, as you might guess, I was the one doing the repenting.

But there's a third response that's possible when you talk to someone about making changes so that a relationship is more replenishing.

Sometimes people will say "I can ... but I won't."

"I *can* pick up my clothes instead of leaving them on the floor. It would take me all of 60 seconds to do so. I can take out the trash. But *I don't want to*. So *I won't*. You do it."

Obviously, that's a very simple example of this kind of response but it does raise a very important question that I think any discussion of emotional sustainability has to address: *what do you do when you're in the kind of relationship where the other party chronically refuses to take any kind of responsibility?* I'm not talking about an occasional lapse into self-centeredness because we all do that. We're all self-centered. We're all sinners. I'm talking about a consistent pattern of "all take and no give"; a consistent pattern of passing the buck and the blame to someone else, usually you.

Have anybody in your life like that? I do. Actually, I have a bunch of people like that in my life!

A Tendency to Codependency

So, what do you do? What do you do with people who will not take responsibility for their own lives and, as a byproduct, drain the snot out of yours? What do you do?

I'll tell you what most of us do. What most of us do *is allow that irresponsibility to trap us and change us into angry and bitter people*. And that's it. That's all we do. We just let it change us. We never really confront the behavior because, in a weird sort of way, after awhile, that becomes our identity. It allows us to say things like ...

- "Well, I'm the only one who never says no around here."
- "I'm the one who always picks up the pieces."
- "I'm the one who always saves the day when everyone else drops the ball. Look at me – aren't I wonderful."

See, we get our identity from that but it's a love/hate thing. We hate it because we're drained by it but we love it because it gives us a sense of purpose, regardless of how warped that sense of purpose might be. *We actually become dependent on the irresponsibility of others* which is why, as I'm sure you're aware, psychologists label this pattern "codependency."

And it's the way most of us deal with people who are "all take and no give" if we're stuck with them; if they're part of our family; if they're co-workers, teammates, co-volunteers, long-time acquaintances, even church members. But that strategy – codependency – is not sustainable emotionally. It creates tons of emotional sludge in us.

So, how do you get out of it?

Well, part of it is an inside job – stuff we need to do in our own hearts. And part of it is something we need to do externally, with the person or persons in question.

So, let's start with the inside. The first thing you need to do if you have a tendency to codependency is to ...

1. Repent of believing that you must indefinitely tolerate bad behavior or irresponsibility in the name of "grace."

Long sentence. Repent of thinking that grace is just putting up with whatever anybody else wants to dish to you out as long as they want to dish it out. See, a lot of people who follow Christ think, "Well, if someone is behaving badly, I should just be patient, be gracious, I shouldn't say anything to them because I am sinner, too." We have unfortunately confused "being nice" with being gracious. There's a huge difference between the two.

In the first-century church of Corinth, there was a situation where a man who claimed to be a Christian was openly living in sin with a woman who was not his wife. And apparently, the people of the church saw this but weren't sure what to do about it. They knew it was wrong, but they wanted to be nice. So, they never confronted him; never gently tried to restore him as we read earlier; never said anything to him like, "hey, brother you've fallen into a ditch. And there's no shame in that because we're all sinners. We all fall into ditches, but let us help you get out. We don't live in ditches."

Instead, they just accepted it and patted themselves on the back for being so tolerant.

Paul wrote to them ...

You are so proud of yourselves, but you should be mourning in sorrow and shame. And you should remove this man from your fellowship. 1 Corinthians 5:2 (NLT)

In fact, Paul continued ...

You are not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer yet indulges in sexual sin, or is greedy, or worships idols, or is abusive, or is a drunkard, or cheats people. Don't even eat with such people. 1 Corinthians 5:11 (NLT)

Now, don't hear what Paul's not saying: *This isn't a license to go on a witch hunt*, "let's go see who is doing what wrong and let's kick them out!" That's not even the point. This is permission to not indefinitely put up with bad behavior. Because that's not grace.

Grace is doing someone a favor, that maybe no one else will, by telling them the truth and if necessary, if they don't respond, completely changing the nature of the relationship – cutting it off, even, so that the person will get clarity about what they're doing and repent (which is what happened here, if you read second Corinthians, is actually what happened to this guy. The church did what Paul told them to do, and the guy went "oh man, I didn't realize this was such a big deal. I am in sin and I need to get out of that." And, he repented and was restored to fellowship). It was a win/win. It was a win for the church; it was a win for the guy.

And to get out of codependency, you have to stop believing that you must indefinitely tolerate bad behavior or irresponsibility in the name of "grace."

2. You also have to repent of believing it's your responsibility to carry burdens that other people can carry for themselves.

I think you've got to repent. And, repent, as you know, just means changing your mind - change the way you think which then produces a change in action. Change the way you're thinking. Stop believing that it's your responsibility to carry burdens that other people can carry for themselves. And, unfortunately, a lot of Christ-followers are misinformed about this. We think - as we talked about last week - that we're supposed to give and give and give and give because we don't read things from the scripture in context.

For example, Paul writes ...

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

In other words, you'll be doing what Jesus said to do - which is "love your neighbor as yourself." So you carry other people's burdens and that's what you'll be doing. But a few verses later Paul also writes this:

Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else for each one should carry his or her own load. Galatians 6:2-5 (NIV)

Well, wait a minute ... what are we supposed to do? Are we supposed to carry each other's burdens? Or are we supposed to carry our own burden?

Well here's the deal. The meaning of v. 2, the first part of that, that's when a person is in the ditch, when a person is suffering and needs someone to come along because they can't carry their own load. We jump in and we help them. But the next part of what Paul is saying is "look, your pattern of life is that you're supposed to be responsible for yourself. You're supposed to do that." So, I think a lot of us need to repent of believing that we're supposed to do that for people who can do that for themselves, as "Christian" as it might seem to us.

Now, once you get those two thoughts clear in your mind, I think now it's time to go external and communicate some things to the people or person who is in question.

3. Let them know that their failure to be responsible is creating a hardship for you.

I don't think you don't need to whine or be ugly about this. I think there is a way to do this graciously, you just tell the truth. "When you don't do this, I have to do this. And since I'm already trying to carry my own load it's really hard for me to carry yours, too, unless you are truly in need of help. But if you're just lazy, carry your own load."

4. Communicate that you will no longer be covering for them when they don't carry their load.

What a lot of us do when someone is supposed to be responsible for something, we just want to manipulate the outcome so there is not a whole lot of turmoil, like "I don't want people getting upset because things didn't go the

way we thought. You were supposed to do this, so I'm going to cover for you. I'm going to do it so people don't think we're a messed up family or a messed up church..." and the list could go on. I think we need to communicate to people "hey, we're not going to cover for you anymore. You have a responsibility here and you need to do it."

And, of course, as you communicate these things, you want to reaffirm your love for people or the friendship and your willingness to do what *you* need to do to make things better.

Now, again, people may not like it when you communicate these things. But eventually, they will respond in one of the three ways we talked about before. "I hear what you're saying but I can't - I really am doing the best I can. I can't do anymore" or they are going to say, "Thank you for telling me. Didn't like to hear it, but I can and I will" or they're going to say, "I can but I won't."

And if they say, "I can but I won't" you need to follow through on what you have said. You need to change the nature of the relationship. Stop covering for them and let the chips fall where they may.

Conclusion

So, if you need it, this morning I give you permission to repent of codependency and get out of it because God does not want you to live an emotionally unsustainable life. He wants you to have relationships that replenish you more than they drain you.

In fact, just this week, I gave our staff permission to repent of codependency. I did. We had a staff meeting on Wednesday and I gave them permission to repent of codependency. What happened was, last week was a really busy week. As you know, it was the Boo Bash and we had about 2,000 people come through our building and it was wonderful. It was such a great time. But, that kind of event is tiring on our staff so I thought, well, I'm just going to do the dipstick this morning and see how everybody is doing. So we just went around the circle to see how everybody was doing. And as we went around the circle I discovered something. I found out that last weekend when we put on this huge thing for our community, almost 40 people who had signed up to volunteer did not show up. Now some people called and said "I'm sick" or "my kid fell off the bike" or whatever. And I don't even know who the people are, and I don't care. This is not a witch hunt or anything like that. But I was just shocked to hear that all these people didn't show up and so everybody else had to scramble and cover their stuff. And as I listened, I just couldn't believe that 40 people didn't show up.

And then as we kept talking, come to find out, that same thing goes on in Adventureland a lot. There are people who say they are going to show up and then they don't show up and we kind of stretch everybody out. Everybody has to work harder because they didn't show up. And it happens in the Arts Ministry. It happens on the cameras, it happens in First Impressions - everything we're doing is like this. And I'm going, "you're kidding me - where have I been?" So I asked them, "what do you guys do when people have said 'I'm going to do something' and then they don't? What do you do to follow up with that?" You know what my staff said? "We don't really say anything because we don't want to be judgmental. We don't want to offend people because then they might not do *anything* if you tell them the truth. They might just go. So we just kind of cover it. If we don't have enough people back in Adventureland on some Sunday morning, we just take the volunteers who do show up and stretch them as thin as we can. We may pull some staff people who may not be doing anything. We may pull people out of the service who aren't doing anything, because we don't want people who are coming to North Heartland for the first time to have

no child care or no program for their kids! So, we just stretch everybody out.”

And as I’m listening to this I’m thinking, oh my gosh, my staff and many of the other committed volunteers in this church are living an emotionally unsustainable life and I have allowed it. In fact, I’ve led them there by my own foolish belief that “I am my job. It’s all up to me and if I don’t preach the best sermon in the world, nobody will ...” I’m the king of codependency. And I’ve been doing that and leading my staff in that way for years. But here’s the deal – I’m free of that. So, this week I gave my staff permission to be free as well. And I said “here’s the deal guys, we’re going to repent of believing that grace means that we indefinitely tolerate irresponsibility. That we have to carry burdens that others can carry, burdens that others have even volunteered to carry. We’re going to stop believing that it’s all up to us because there are a whole bunch of capable people in this church. This morning there are probably about 225 people sitting in this auditorium. There were about 250 in the service before. There were about 100 last night. That’s about 550. There are probably about 800 grown people in this church. *It’s stupid that a handful of people burn themselves out.* It’s crazy. So I told them, hey, we’re not going to do it anymore. So, here’s the deal, and I think you should know because you are part of this church, I think. We’re going to stop covering. I’m not going to ask my staff or our volunteers to cover any more. We’re going to let the chips fall where they may. If we don’t have enough people to run the rooms back in Adventureland, guess what, we’re not going to burn people out, we will turn parents away. I’m not going to burn out the volunteer people that we have. If we can’t get enough people to staff our Saturday night service, we’re going to shut it down. That would be the stupidest thing we’ve ever done as a church, I think, because of the culture in which we live, but I’m going to burn people out. In the future, we’re just not going to have any more of these big events that take 150 people to pull off, like the Boo Bash or the Eggstravaganza, unless we fill the slots in advance before we publicize it.

See, here is what happens, we publicize it all over the community, “oh, greatest party ever, bring your kids ...” and it *is* the greatest party ever. And we need 150 people to volunteer. So we do all the publicity and then we *beg*. The last week before the Boo Bash we had 40 slots that were not filled and my staff is freaking out! No more. We’re not doing it any more. So here’s what we’re going to do (and we need to do these things – it would be stupid not to) we’re just not going to commit, we’re not going to publicize it until we fill the list of who is in this job and who is doing this role, and if we can’t get enough people we’re going to take that as God saying “you don’t need to do that this year. I have other plans for you.”

Now, some of you hearing this may be freaking out, thinking, “Oh my gosh. I can’t believe...” *Look, it’s codependency. It’s wrong.* And, it’s emotionally unsustainable. We need to get over it, and I’d bet money that you need to get over the same thing in your life.

So, if you need permission to repent, you’ve got it. God wants you to have relationships that replenish you and not drain you, so you should do everything in your power to get those kinds of relationships. Pray for them, look for them. Try to change existing relationships if it’s possible.

But having said all that, as we draw this to a close and our band gets into place, I think some of you may be thinking right now, “Wow, we have covered a lot of ground this morning. We’ve gone all over the map.” And, some of you may be thinking, “Man, this sounds so freeing. I need this so bad in my life, but, what if I can’t do it? What if I can’t find new relationships? What if I can’t really change the nature of my existing relationships beyond saying no to my tendency to codependency? What’s left if this doesn’t pan out really well? Am I just hosed on this?”

No, you're not. None of us are because the greatest replenishing relationship in the world is available to anyone who wants it and is willing to ask for it. I'm talking about a relationship with Jesus.

- With Jesus you're not always in the place of giving. You also get to receive. In fact, with Jesus receiving always comes before giving because God is always in the place of giving. And His capacity is not limited like ours is. "God so loved the *whole world*" the Bible says "that he gave his son Jesus to pay the sin-debt that all of us owe." God's capacity is not like ours, it is unlimited. He can give and give and give. In a relationship with Jesus, you are primarily a receiver.
- In a relationship with Jesus, there is always a sense of joy mostly because Jesus is crazy about you. Jesus created you. He enjoys your company. He likes you, even though you're not perfect, even though you mess up, even though sometimes you don't follow through on the commitments you make. Jesus likes you and I like you too.
- With Jesus, you're always valued for who you are, not for what you do or for who you should be ... because He already knows you'll never be who you should be. So, Jesus doesn't expect you to do anything to prove yourself worthy of his love and friendship. He already lived the perfect life you and I should live and then died the death we should die. So there's nothing left for us to do other than receive what He has done with a grateful heart.
- And a relationship with Christ also *helps you* become more of who you should be, who you're made to be. On the day you say "yes" to Jesus as your savior, the day that you stop playing this game that you've got it all together and that your righteousness before God is enough, the day that you give up that game and say "yes Jesus, you are my savior," what happens is, the Bible says He gives you the Holy Spirit and that Spirit awakens your spirit to a new life. And that Spirit promises that over time, if you keep coming back to Christ in repentance and belief, you will become more and more like Jesus and less like the "you" that's sinful and weak.

Jesus offers the ultimate relationship that replenishes and it's yours and mine simply for the asking. So let's ask! Let's pray together – and as we do our ushers will come forward to receive the offering during the closing song.

ⁱ Luke 8:2-3, 10:38-42