

“Core Group”
Why Bother?
May 22, 2011

In his letter to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul wrote:

Just as a body ... has many parts but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.

If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.

The eye cannot say to the

hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12: 12,17-21, 27 (NIV)

As Kitti said, today we're concluding our "Core Group" series. And "Core Group," you'll remember, is what we called the 50 or so adults and children who worked together to launch this church back in 1994. Everyone *had* a part ... and *did* their part ... because without them *doing* their part, we would have never gotten off the ground.

That became very clear to me on the four Sunday mornings before our Grand Opening Sunday. We had rented New Mark

Middle School as the place we would have our services, but someone had wisely suggested that we do several practice services before the Grand Opening so that, when hundreds of people showed up, we wouldn't be running around trying to figure out how the lights worked or how we would greet people or where we would put the kids.

So, that's what we did. For the first four Sundays in September, we did complete services ... to an empty auditorium. It was empty because every person in the core group was going to have at least one job to do during our services and they were all practicing. Some were in the commons teaching and taking care of the kids. Some were on stage in the band or in the drama. A few were behind the sound board or backstage running lights. Every single person was a part of the body and doing their part. We were committed to Christ, to

one another and to our mission. And God did great things and many people were impacted.

As I was preparing for this message I thought of how deeply my life and the life of my family has been affected because, at some point, some group of committed-to-Christ-and-one-another men and women had come together to create a church:

- I think of Cresthill Baptist Church in Bowie, MD where, at the age of 15, I understood for the first time that I personally needed to respond to Christ by believing in him, accepting him as my savior and then becoming his follower.
- Grace Baptist Church also in Bowie, MD where, from the ages of 16-20, I made so many good friends who not

only kept me on the straight and narrow when so many people were going off of it, but also taught me that living for God was not a burden but a joy and a privilege.

- I think of Lake Arlington Baptist Church, in Arlington, TX where as newlyweds, Jetta and I not only made so many good friends our age, but were befriended by older couples who modeled for us what it was like to have a godly family and to raise godly children.
- Calvary Baptist Church in Matawan, NJ, where we not only learned that all followers of Christ are called to be ministers regardless of their jobs and that God could even use people like us in his service, but that, in Christ, people of different races and ethnic backgrounds could love each other.

And that was the most diverse church we've ever been part of – it was amazing.

- Park Hill Baptist Church right here in the Northland, where I learned that God was as interested in developing my character and my love for people as he was in developing me as a vocational minister.

See, there's no question in my mind that if people hadn't, at some point, banded together to create those churches, I would not be who I am today – and I'm not just talking about who I am as a pastor. I would not be who I am as a person today. My wife and kids would not be who they are today if it hadn't been for those churches who influenced me before they were even part of my life; for the churches that directly influenced them, including this church.

And I tell you all this because the title of today's message, the conclusion to this series, is "why bother?" Why bother becoming a part of a church and then doing your part?

The answer – at least part of the answer is ... *because it matters*. Church matters. Church makes a difference for the people who are already a part of it and for the people who are still on the outside of it. And many of you know that's true because you were once on the outside of it and you came in and found Christ – and your life is not the same.

I told you at the beginning of this very short series that my goal was to try and convince you (knowing that the Holy Spirit is the one who *really* does the convincing) that you ought to make an all-in commitment to

NHCC ... and if not to NHCC, then to some church somewhere that you resonate with and you love ... because every follower of Christ deserves to be part of a church they love and every church deserves to be filled with people who love it.

So, today I want to talk to you about why you ought to bother with making a formal commitment to a church and what that commitment looks like here at NHCC. Then, if you're interested you can take the membership challenge which is a special one-time opportunity to become a member without actually attending the Church 101 class.

Remember, here's the deal.

- Be here for all three services (or, if you missed any, watch or listen to the ones you missed online via The City or our

website);

- Watch an additional video (on The City or the website) that goes along with each week's message.
- And then at the end, sometime this next week or whenever in the future, you submit an application for membership online through The City.

Now, I know some of you have been members for a long time, so you don't need to watch any of the videos (although I suggest it would be healthy for you to do that), but you will need to reaffirm your membership commitment by filling out the membership application. We'll send you a message thru The City to let you know if this applies to you. If you don't hear from us, that means that you have been a member recently enough that you don't need to do

that. So, just stay tuned for that.

Now, while I'm at a little pause point here in this message and since we're at the end of a series, I want to take a real brief time out to tell you a little about what's coming up because we're changing gears here. The next two Sundays after today are going to be what we call around here "movie messages." And a lot of you know how that works. We take a movie and show clips of it during the service and we build the message around it. It's a lot of fun and a nice change of pace.

Next week's movie is called "The Butterfly Circus" and you've probably never seen it and it's very short – about 20 minutes long – so, we're actually going to watch the whole movie as part of the service. Feel free to bring popcorn if you wish.

But the movie the following week – June 5th – is a longer movie that you probably have seen. It's called "*Signs*" and it was a hit back in 2004, so before the service it would probably be helpful – and fun – if you'd watch the movie, although it's not totally necessary that you do because, as I said, I'll be showing clips so you can follow the story and get the point of it.

Now, the reason we're going to do that particular movie on June 5th is because we're going to begin a summer-long journey together with a new series ...

... called "Aware: A 10-Week Guide to Recognizing and Experiencing God's Presence and Activity in Your Life."

Have you ever thought about this? How can you know for sure that God is really working in your life? Is it just a feeling or a hunch you have? Or, are there dependable signs and

“voices” that confirm that for you? And the first part of that series will deal with the signs that God is actually working in your life, and that’s where that movie comes in.

Anyway, you’ll hear more about all of that if you’re on The City but, now, let’s get back to our regularly scheduled message for this morning.

Reasons to Commit

Why bother with making an all-in formal commitment to a church? To this church or to any church? I think there are at least four good reasons ... and the first one I’ve already mentioned.

1. You should commit to a church because church matters.

Church matters, I said, because it helps

people who are already a part of it and people who are still on the outside of it to become more of who God wants us/them to be.

But church matters for many other reasons as well. In his book, *The Gift of Church*, Jim Samra lays out those reasons, two of which I think are worth mentioning in this message.

First of all, church matters, he writes, because it's the means by which we experience God's presence in a unique way.

There's a very interesting passage in 1 Corinthians 14, right after the passage I read at the beginning of this message. Paul is talking to the church about when you gather together for worship; when you all come together to "do church" and to "be church" something happens. He writes ...

If an unbeliever or an inquirer [a seeker] comes in ... they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" 1 Corinthians 14:24-25 (NIV)

Now, you see the picture he's painting here? An interesting question is: why wouldn't that happen somewhere else? Why doesn't Paul say, "when you go out and you're quiet in nature, your sins are going to be revealed to you." No, what he is saying is, there is something unique about how God shows up when the Body of Christ, when a church, gathers together.

And Samra gives a very interesting example of this, he says, think about the difference between listening to a band's music on an

Ipod vs listening to them in concert. The band is uniquely present in a concert environment in a way they're never present on the Ipod. Yes, you are listening to music when you listen to the Ipod, but when you go listen to a band in concert, they are uniquely present because they've said here's how we're best experienced, here's how we want the sound set up, here's how we want the lights set up, here's how we want the crowd to be arranged. In concert, you experience them differently than you do on the Ipod. And church is experiencing God in concert.

That's not saying that God is not present elsewhere. You can go off in to the woods and read the Bible and yes, it's still the word of God to you. But, it is not the same as what happens here when we are all gathered together. Because, God is present in a unique way when we all come together and we do it as church. And that's a huge reason

why church matters.

A second reason why church matters is that it's the means by which God makes Jesus visible for the world to see.

In other words, the world sees Jesus in the church. There's an interesting passage in the beginning of John when Jesus is beginning his ministry and Nathaniel says to Phillip, "You tell me about this guy from Nazareth, but can anything good come out of Nazareth?" It's kind of a dump town, and nothing good comes from there. And, Phillip says, "Come and see. You come and see Jesus for yourself."

John says that later, some Greek-speaking people, who were conscious of what was going on socially, they came to Phillip as well and said, "we keep hearing about this guy from Nazareth. What's the deal?" And Phillip says, "Come and see for yourselves."

And they came to see – they saw Jesus.

Just like Jesus made visible the invisible God (people came to see him), the church makes visible the now-invisible Jesus. God has not left the earth without any way to see Jesus. That's what happens when we gather together and we celebrate him and we do things in his name. We represent Jesus to the world. And that's why the church matters.

Anyway, those are a couple of reasons why the church matters and that's the first reason you should consider making a commitment to a church.

2. The second reason you should commit to a church is because Jesus was/is passionate about the church.

And we've read this passage many times where Paul writes that Jesus loved the

church and he gave himself up for it. And this is kind of an interesting thought because a lot of times what we think is “Jesus loved me and he died for me and he gave himself up for me,” and that’s all true, but Paul also says Jesus loved the church so much that he gave himself up for it. But there’s another passage in John 2 which vividly illustrates this love and passion that Jesus had.

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here!

Stop turning my Father's house into a market!"

But here's the pay off verse. John writes, when Jesus did that ...

His disciples remembered that it is written of the Messiah: "Zeal for your house will consume me." John 2:13-17 (NIV)

Jesus was "zealous" for God's house – not just the building or the temple, but he was zealous for what the building and the temple represented; the "institution" that it represented.

And if Jesus was that zealous for the church don't you think his followers ought to be as well?

3. You should commit to a church because it clearly expresses your intention to belong and support (and when you make

that kind of commitment, that expression of your intention, it makes you accountable).

Now, I'll give you an example of this from my own life. Earlier this year, in January, when everybody says they've got to diet, lose weight, work out, or whatever, well this year, I actually decided to do something about it. I went down to the Snap Fitness right around the corner from my house and I signed up. And as part of the deal, they give you a personal trainer for free for two weeks. So I started working with this guy, Jonathan, for two weeks, and for two weeks he made me miserable. Three times a week, he beat the crap out of my body, let's just put it that way. And, at the end of two weeks I thought, if I were to make a commitment to this guy for three months, what would happen to me. So, I did. I signed up and I paid my money. I became accountable. And when I became accountable I started to see some things

happening in my body. I'm still an old, fat guy – I'll admit that. But, under this fat, there's a heck of a 6-pack developing. And, I'm actually getting some guns. Things are changing in my body because I made a commitment, which made me accountable.

Same thing happens when you commit to a church. You become accountable in ways you never would have if you just remained a casual participant or observer.

4. Finally, you should commit to a church because it's in your best interest, and mine, to invest in something bigger than ourselves.

A friend of mine this week – actually, a mentor of mine, from this church even – put it like this. He said “a better we equals a better me.”

See, if I'm investing in all of us getting better,

and the church being what it needs to be, the process of that investment actually grows and develops me as a person. A better we equals a better me.

Again, reasons you commit to a church ...

1. Church matters.
2. Jesus was/is passionate about it.
3. It clearly expresses your commitment (which makes you accountable).
4. It's in your best interest to invest in something bigger than yourself.

Now, I'm sure there are many other reasons why making a commitment to a church is worth it, but I want us to shift gears and focus in on NHCC – specifically, what it means to make a commitment to *this* body of Christ. I want to talk to you about our

“general pledge” of membership, then about the qualifications for membership and finally, the specific commitments that we ask our members to make.

General Membership Pledge

The “general pledge” is a statement that simply affirms two things: 1. *what our church is all about, and 2. our desire to be a part and do our part in making that happen.* It’s kind of like the doorway to membership. If you don’t resonate with this particular statement, you shouldn’t come in and become a member because, after a while, you’re probably going to become unhappy, maybe even miserable. But, if you *do* resonate with this, not only should you step through the doorway, you should seriously consider joining up and staying awhile.

So, here’s the statement.

“As a member of the family of Christians known as North Heartland Community Church, I wholeheartedly believe in and will support our mission to reach seekers, build a family and plant churches.”

Does any of that sound familiar, especially that last part? I hope so after the past couple of weeks! In fact, let's all say our mission together.

What are we trying to do at NHCC?

- Reach seekers.
- Build a family.
- Plant churches.

So, as a formal member of this family that we're building, you have to be motivated by these things. Your heart has to say things like ...

- “Thank you God that I get to be part of

a 'doorkeeper' church where friends in our local community who are not followers of Jesus get to come and hear the Gospel, maybe in ways they wouldn't in other places, and then become His followers."

- "Thank you God that I get to be part of a radically generous community that loves and cares for its members so well that our friends are drawn to be part of it."
- "Thank you God that I get to be part of a church that wants to plant churches and has planted churches – which is the most effective way to reach seekers and build new families of faith."

"As a member of the family of Christians known as North Heartland Community Church, I wholeheartedly believe in and will

support our mission to reach seekers, build a family and plant churches.”

That’s the general pledge of membership, and if you’re drawn to and you feel good about our mission, then you’ve taken the first step to becoming a member.

Qualifications

Now, let’s talk for a minute about qualifications for membership and as we do I need to tell you that I’m a little bit uncomfortable with this part because NHCC is a grace-based church. Here’s what I mean by that - we believe that there is nothing any of us *can* do or *need* to do to earn God’s favor. Salvation and forgiveness in Christ is a free gift. We don’t do anything to “qualify” ourselves to receive it. You don’t have to clean up your act first. You don’t have to join a church first.

So, when I talk about qualifications for membership at NHCC, I don't want you to hear that as you have to jump through some kind of hoop *to receive God's grace*. These are two different issues altogether.

And I also don't want you to hear that you have to jump through some kind of hoop in order to *participate* in the life of NHCC. You don't have to give a certain amount of money or volunteer a certain number of hours in ministry here before you can come to church services or small groups or potlucks or anything else. What we do here is a free gift to anyone who wants to receive it.

However, *in order to become a member*, a formal member, there are a few hoops; a few qualifications. Actually, there are four. We only have time for the two most important this morning, so you'll need to

watch the supplemental video online sometime this week to get the other two.

Now, the first qualification – and the most important – I think is obvious from the general pledge. Remember, the pledge starts out with “as a member of the family of *Christians* known as NHCC” ... which implies, that in order to be a formal member ...

1. You must be a Christian.

... because we’re a family of Christians. That just makes sense. I hope.

Of course, the question is ... what exactly *is* a Christian? There are lots of opinions out there as to what makes a person a Christian.

- Lots of people think that if you’re trying to be a good and moral person (kind of

like Jesus was a good and moral person), if you're trying to do that and you sometimes succeed at that, then that means you're a Christian.

- Lots of people think that if you believe in some Divine Being or some Spiritual Force out there (but maybe not the God of the Bible or maybe not that Jesus of Nazareth guy), but you *believe*, well, that makes you a Christian.
- Lots of people think that if you go to church regularly or if you were baptized as a baby, that's what makes you a Christian.

But, the Bible gives us a very different definition. For one thing, the two major claims of Christianity concerning Jesus are "He is Lord" and "He is alive."

Therefore, a person who is a Christian believes that Jesus was (and is) God in the flesh (He's Lord) and he died and rose

from the dead, literally, in a new kind of body (He's alive).

Concerning Jesus, Christians believe that "He is Lord" and "He is alive."

But beyond that, people who are Christians have come to a place in their lives where they understand that they, personally, ...

... need a savior because of their sin and they have repented and believed the good news that Jesus is that savior.

And because of that realization and that experience with Christ, their life begins to change – maybe not overnight, but over time, they start becoming more like Jesus and less like themselves in terms of their attitudes and actions.

Now, whenever we do the Church 101 class and I talk about this, there are always people who cannot say that they've had an

experience where they've turned to Christ and affirmed their belief that yes He is Lord and that yes He is alive (that he is God in the flesh and that he rose from the dead); they can't say they've had an experience where they realized that they, personally, are a sinner in need of a savior and that Jesus is that savior.

And so I always say at that point "if you have not confessed and declared these things to God, now is a great time to do so. It's made clear to you what it is to be a Christian. So, when you go home this evening, just get alone by yourself and pray these things and when you do, Christ will come into your life through the Holy Spirit and you'll become a Christian. You'll be forgiven of every sin you've ever committed or every sin you're going to commit and God will begin to make you more like Jesus than like yourself."

So, today, I want to do the same thing because I'm sure that there are more than a few people sitting in this room this morning who are in that same position. I just gave you the framework of what a Christian is and you're thinking "I believe those things but I don't think I've ever done those things."

So here's what we're going to do. I'm going to say a prayer right now, and if you're saying "yeah, that's me, I need to say those things to God," then you just pray along with me. Jesus, I believe that you are Lord and I believe that you're alive ... I believe that you came in the flesh ... I believe that you died on the cross for my sin and I believe that rose again three days later in a new body ... God I also know and believe that I'm a sinner, that I can't do anything to make myself righteous enough before you. And I know that you're the Savior, so, I want to receive what you did for me on the cross. I

want you to come into my life and be my forgiver and leader and I'll follow you as you give me power and strength. Amen.

Now, if you prayed that prayer, congratulations ... the Spirit is now in you and you are a Christian! And maybe a little less importantly, you have met the first qualification of membership here at NHCC.

2. The second qualification is that you must have been baptized (or you're planning to be at the next baptism service, one week from Wednesday).

And the reason we do this is because when you read the NT you see a pattern: people received Christ in the way I just described and then were baptized as a sign that they had done so. It was the way of saying "I'm in on this Jesus thing. I believe and I belong to Christ and to His church."

By the way, some people have asked me, "whenever you do those salvation things or ask people to pray, why don't we have an invitation where people 'walk the aisle' like they do at Billy Graham and at some of the Baptist churches." The reason we don't do that is because in the Bible the sign of a person, the declaration of a person, receiving Christ is being baptized. There's nothing wrong with churches where people walk the aisle, but here, we say, listen, if you've made a decision for Christ, you need to be baptized. And so, just a few minutes ago, some of you prayed that prayer and guess what? You should be baptized next Wednesday evening when we have this "family gathering" – our potluck and worship service.

And, as Kitti said, if you want to do that, you can pick up a packet out there. I would say, just come and talk to me about it. Let us

know if you would like to be baptized at this service a week from Wednesday.

Now, to be a member of NHCC you have to have been baptized or are planning to be at the next baptism that we have. Now, where that gets a little sticky is that a lot of people who come to the point where they realize they need a savior and they accept Christ were *already* baptized as an infant. For example, I was. I was christened "Richard Andrew" in the Catholic Church.

And so for a lot of people, making the decision to be re-baptized as a sign of our belief is even more difficult than the first decision to admit we're sinners in need of a savior because of the family implications. It's like, "I'm rejecting what my family did for me when I was a child. I was Catholic and they were Catholic, and now if I get baptized it's like a slap in their face." And we understand

that, so, we decided a while back that no matter when or how you were baptized you can be a member at NHCC as long as you have personally come to accept Christ. In other words, you don't need to be re-baptized here in order to be a member.

If you've accepted Christ and you were baptized at some point you've met the qualifications - however, we would strongly encourage you to go ahead and be baptized at some point because that's how it worked in the NT. You believed and *then* you chose to be baptized. And over the years, many people here at NHCC who were baptized as infants or children have been rebaptized. Instead of it being done to them or for them, *they* made the decision to do it themselves. They made the decision to follow Christ and be baptized, and it was incredibly meaningful for them.

And if that's where you are, I want to invite you to be baptized as well, at our service on Wednesday evening June 1st. If you're interested, take the response card out right now and write your name and contact info as well as "baptism" and drop it in the offering basket. We'll get in touch with you and tell you how you can participate.

Commitments

So, we've talked about our general pledge and two of the qualifications – the two most important ones. And if you agree with the pledge and you're qualified, then you're now one step closer to being a member if you want to be. The next step is to make the *commitments* of membership.

Now, commitments, just to be clear, are different from qualifications in that qualifications are things that you *already*

are; they're the hoops you've already jumped through, so to speak. Commitments on the other hand, are things that you say *you want* to be true of you. They're the hoops you *intend* to jump through.

For example, when people get married, what's the commitment we all make? "'Til death do us part." Now, when we say that, we haven't done it yet. It's just what we want to be true of us. And no one will really know if it is true of us; if we have jumped through the hoop ... until when? ... death; until one of the couple dies, and then we'll know that.

So, when we ask people to make these commitments around here in order to become members, we understand that they may not be all the way there just yet. These are expressions of intent and so, if you intend to do these things, if you're saying "this is the direction I intend to go", then you

are welcome to become a member.

So, let's look at these commitments we ask our members to make. There are six of them, and I won't take a whole lot of time to go through them because they're pretty self-explanatory.

1. The first commitment is a commitment to DISCOVER and here's what it means: I will regularly attend Sunday services in an effort not only to receive the benefit of culturally-relevant presentations of God's grace and truth for myself, but also to create a welcoming environment where seekers can do so as well.

So what you're saying is, "I'm going to show up to church on a regular basis because I want to discover more about God's grace and truth. But not only am I coming for myself, when I show up, it fills the auditorium and adds energy and adds excitement so that when the seeker guy or gal, who's a friend of the guy or gal sitting next to me,

shows up, they go 'wow, something cool is going on here.'" Kind of like what we read in what Paul had written before. So, first commitment - I'm going to show up to church.

2. The second commitment is a commitment to CONNECT and here's what it means: "I will regularly participate in the family activities of NHCC (small groups, potlucks, etc) in an effort not only to enjoy the 'experience of belonging' for myself, but also to facilitate that experience for others.

Now in the first week we talked about this little phrase "experience of belonging" and we said that's what we're trying to create in our family. So if you join in, you feel like you belong. And we said there are four things that need to happen for people to experience belonging. You've got to:

Know and be known

Love and be loved

Serve and be served

Celebrate and be celebrated

And you can tell from those statements that there are two sides of the coin. There's a giving side and a receiving side. And the commitment we make to connect covers both. "I'll participate regularly in the family activities so that I can feel like I belong. But I'm also going to do it so that when other people join up, they too, can feel like they belong because there are people to be with."

3. Third is a commitment to INVEST and here's what it means. "I will do my part to help NHCC accomplish its mission by consistently giving a God-led and sacrificial percentage of my income, serving as a ministry volunteer and praying for our effectiveness."

This is where it gets a little tougher to be a member. Now, here's what I mean by

Sacrificial and God-led – I mean that you ask God, you say, “God, it takes money to run the church. What percentage of my income do you want me to give?” And you pray about that and you come up with a number. And the number that you come up with costs you something. You can look at your life and go, “you know, we could take a big vacation this year, but, we’ve made a commitment that we’re going to give X%.” For you, it might be 3%, because that’s a sacrifice. But for another person it might be 30% because you can live on 70% and you can do whatever the heck you want to do in this world, financially, okay? So, you bring that to God, and ask, “God, what do you want me to give; how do you want me to participate in this way?”

Volunteer serving – you find out what you’re good at doing. And it may be that the capacity of your life isn’t as wide as some

other people, so you may say, "I can only do this much, but I'm in! This is what I'm doing. This is the part that I carry." Or, it might be bigger. God might increase that for you over time.

Praying for our effectiveness – praying for the leaders of our church. Like right now, you guys know we're searching for a music/arts pastor. Pray for our church. Pray that God leads us to the right person who can do that for us.

4. The fourth commitment of membership is a commitment to UNITY and here's what it means – I will actively seek reconciliation with anyone in the church with whom I have conflict and encourage others to do the same.

In other words, if somebody comes to me and says, "well, he kind of hurt my feelings. We were serving in the ministry together and he didn't like the way I played that guitar

solo." Or, "she said *this* in our small group." Or, "That Rick, he doesn't remember my name." So, what you do, you say, "I'll go with you. I'll help you. I'm going to encourage you to deal with that. We're going to be unified around here." And also, the pledge is, "I'm not leaving the church. I'm not just slipping out the back door without first making an effort to resolve the issue according to Matthew 18." And here's what Matthew 18 says. Jesus said this, he said:

"If your brother [someone in the church] sins against you (there's a conflict or an issue), you go and show him his fault, just between the two of you [you don't gossip, you just go one on one and you try to straighten in out]. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along [if you can't

straighten it out, get some friends, people who know you and know the other person, and they sit down with you and you try to talk it out; try to resolve it], so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses'. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church [if you can't resolve it at that level, go to people in authority - the pastors, leaders, and shepherds of the church. Ask them to help you figure it out; and if it can't be figured out, then you're free to leave. Or maybe the other person needs to leave. Maybe something needs to happen in that way.]

Matthew 18:15-17 (NIV)

So, that's what we mean by resolving an issue according to Matthew 18. That's the commitment to unity. It's incredibly

important.

5. The fifth commitment is a commitment to GROWTH, personally – I will cooperate with the work of God in my life so that I may become more like Jesus in my thoughts, attitudes, actions, habits and lifestyle.

In other words, if I'm a family member, I'm going to grow spiritually because when I grow, we all grow. If all of you grow, our church grows. So I'm in on that too.

6. The final commitment is a commitment to INFLUENCE – I will positively represent Jesus and NHCC to the seekers around me.

There is no way you can be perfect. You're going to screw up. And when you screw up, you just admit it. When you have a bad attitude one day at work, you come in the next day and say, "guys, gals, I don't know what was wrong with yesterday. I'm sorry, would you please forgive me?" You

represent Jesus and NHCC because the greatest attraction to Christ and the church for a seeker is a believer who loves Jesus and loves their church.

Conclusion

Now, I know what some of you are thinking at this point: "Wow, Rick that sounds like you are asking a lot of people who become members. You have to agree to the pledge; you have to meet the qualifications; you have to make commitments to discover, connect, invest, unity, growth and influence. It sounds really hard."

It is. And, actually, it's even harder because I left one thing out of this whole deal. Not only do you have to do all of that, you also have to grant three permissions to the church. You have to give us permission (I can't even say this with a straight face) to look at your W2s,

access to your bank accounts and – I forget the third. Just kidding!!!! Sorry, I'm not very good at that kind of a joke.

You give us permission, as a church, to challenge and encourage you in those commitments. You give us permission to have a member support network person contact you after you join and say, hey let's help you get involved in the membership part of this. And, you also give us permission to terminate your membership, after two warnings, if you become divisive... but we don't have time to go into that this morning, so you'll have to check out the video on the Membership Challenge section of The City or the website.

So, why would anyone in their right mind do this? Why bother?

1. Because church matters.

2. Because Jesus was/is passionate about the church.
3. Because membership clearly expresses your commitment (which makes you accountable).
4. Because it's in your best interest to invest in something bigger than your own little world.

Now, as I've said all along in this series, as much as I hope some of you will sign on the dotted line and become a part of the core group; become a formal member – it might be that the more you've heard what we're about and how we're different from other churches, you're thinking "I'm not sure this is the place for me."

I want to encourage you that that's okay. I want to encourage you that if you say "this is not for me" and you leave to look for another church, we'll still love you. Now, don't throw

us under the bus as you leave. Don't call us "church lite" or anything like that. But if you say, "you know, I just don't resonate with the mission and the strategy and everything you're about" that's fine. Go in peace. And find somewhere where you do resonate. Someplace where you can love and you can go all in.

Now, I know that everytime I have a talk like this, there are people who are listening who go, "oh man, I wish my life was in such a situation that I could make this kind of commitment. But when you talk about these things I'm just not there yet, and I kind of feel like a loser." Let me just tell you, you're not a loser. You start praying, "God, that's what I want to be. God would you mold me and change my life and free me up so I can be all-in somewhere, whether it's NHCC or anywhere. God, make me that kind of person." Don't feel guilt over that. Don't feel

shame over that.

But, then some of you are listening to this, you've heard all three weeks of this and you're going, "Man this is what I've been waiting for." This is where you need to be. This is your place. So I'm going to say to you this morning, "DO IT!" Come on, do it; go all-in.

And here's how you go all-in. Go on the City, after you've looked at the video this week (the extra video-it's 10 minutes long), and there will be an application that you can fill out for membership. And the application for membership is everything that I've talked about today. That's all it is.

Let's pray together.

Now we'll receive our offering. And this is another expression of our commitment to

Christ and to what he is doing. So, our ushers will receive the offering as the band does our final song.

Endnotes