

Shine Through Gospel-Drivenness

Never Give Up

September 4, 2016

**PRELUDE – My Lighthouse
Worship Songs – My Lighthouse / The
Saving One / Transition / One Thing
Remains**

Announcements – Video

Video – “Sower Parable”

In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 13 we read that ...

... Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. He told many stories in the form of

parables, such as this one:

“Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them.

Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots, they died.

Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants.

Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!

Then Jesus added:

*Anyone with ears to hear should
listen and understand.”
Matthew 13:1-9 (NIV)*

Let's pray together.

God, we ask you to give us spiritual ears to hear in the next few moments so that we can listen and understand. We ask that, in our understanding, we might be encouraged in the task that you have given us collectively to spread the Good News of what you *have done, are doing and will do* in and through Jesus of Nazareth, your Son.

We ask these things in His name and for the sake of His Kingdom. Amen.

Beyond “Lighting”

Today, as Shannon said, we are concluding our series “Shine Through Gospel-Drivenness” which, as I said in the first week of this series, is a bit of an awkward title. If you’ve been around over the past four months, you know that we’ve talked about what it means to “shine” through *generosity, graciousness* and *God-centeredness*. And two weeks from today we’ll begin talking about what it means to “shine” through *goodness*. And *those* four words and terms, for anyone who is a follower of Jesus, are fairly common to our vocabulary.

But “Gospel-drivenness?” That’s not terminology we use very often. In fact, until I decided to include the concept in

this series, I had rarely encountered it myself!

But I decided to use it anyway because it so clearly communicates an indispensable aspect of what it means to shine for Christ in this world. And that is: *if you're a Christian* – and I realize that not everyone here or tuning in online is, so what I'm saying this morning is not really directed at you and I'm not telling you that you should do anything about what I'm saying. My hope is that what I'm saying will help you understand more about what Christianity is and how Christians are to live.

But if you're a Christian, Jesus has called you (along with all other believers) to go beyond lighting to inviting ...

... from merely *illuminating the way* life is in God's Kingdom so that others would be attracted to God to *pointing the way* to the Kingdom and to God so that others would be able to actually *hear* the Gospel: to hear the Good News that ...

- The Kingdom of Heaven has already come to Earth in a very small way in Jesus' resurrection.
- That it is right now coming to earth in a larger way as the Holy Spirit transforms the lives of Christ-followers and they then transform the places where they live into little outposts of God's Kingdom.
- That it will come to earth in a huge way – in finality and completeness – when Jesus returns and renews, restores and regenerates everything

marred by the curse of sin on this world, including our dead and dying bodies.

“This is the hope which we were given when we were saved,” the Apostle Paul wrote – not that God is going to take believers away to spend eternity in a robe on a cloud with a harp!

- And to get in on it, you don't have to try to atone for your own sins because Jesus already did that for you on the cross. All you need to do is to repent – change your mind about who God is and what He really wants – and believe that Jesus is the Messiah who died for your sins and rose again on the third day following.

That's obviously part of the good news, too! The good news that we ourselves have received and believed ... and, as Christians, are called to invite others to hear and to believe as well ... which is why we need to go beyond lighting to inviting ... and why we're talking about ...

Gospel-drivenness, which we've defined as the motivation to spread the Good News (i.e. "the Gospel") through the determined, charitable, strategic investment of personal resources.

It's charitable because (as we learned two weeks ago) "charity" means being moved by compassion to give something you have to someone who doesn't have it and needs it. And a Gospel-driven person knows that, in the Gospel - in the Good News of what God has done, is doing and will do through Christ - he or she has something extremely

valuable. And because we care about others, we want them to have it, too.

A gospel-driven person's motivation for spreading the Gospel isn't about being right or about being in control. It's about being *charitable*.

It's also *strategic* ... which we talked about last week.

And to me personally, this is the most helpful and encouraging part of the definition because, for most Christians, when someone starts talking about "spreading the gospel" what we hear is "witnessing" ... which (for those of you who are not Christians) means: "I have to personally proselytize for Christ. I have to go one-on-one with family and friends and

co-workers and strangers and explain to them in detail what the Good News is, then be able to answer all their questions and criticisms, then lead them in a prayer where they say ‘yes’ to Jesus as their savior” ...

... the thought of which, to be honest, to most Christians is just terrifying!

And that’s why, when it comes to the idea of spreading the gospel, most Christians think “that’s the pastor’s job. That’s why we pay him and his staff!” Or, we think “that’s the job of people who are extroverted or people who are intellectually wired to present a case and win a debate. *But it’s certainly not me.*”

But Gospel-drivenness isn’t fundamentally

about witnessing. In fact, to be a Gospel-driven person, you don't have to be any good *at all* at witnessing. All you have to be – and remember, in this series we're talking about how to *be* something not how to *do* something – all you have to *be* is *strategic* because (as we discovered last week) since the earliest days of Christianity, spreading the gospel has never been the job of just a few gifted individuals.

Instead, *the primary strategy* (with very few exceptions) in community after community and generation after generation comes down to one simple word.

And that word is “church” – followers of Jesus joined together in a local fellowship, collectively working together to proclaim in word and deed the Good News to the people around them.

The primary strategy for spreading the gospel is “church” ... which means it’s not all up to you. And it’s not all up to me.

Instead, we take our personal resources as individuals – the spiritual gifts and talents and experiences and personality and education and wealth – and pool them together as a body. We collectively invest them in one another for the purpose of spreading the Gospel.

And what happens, as Paul wrote in his letter to the Christians at Ephesus, is that ...

As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love. Ephesians

4:11-16 (NLT)

As each part does its own special work – not *some other part's special work* – the body of Christ (the church, the local fellowship of believers) is able to proclaim together in word and deed the Good News to the people around them.

Isn't this a great strategy? All you have to be is you. All I have to be is me. And by working together, making our resources available to the cause – doing our own special work – we can impact our community. We can spread the gospel to an extent that none of us could ever hope to accomplish as individuals.

Personal Motivation

In fact, (and some of you know this because you've heard me talk about it before), this was the primary motivation for starting this church back in 1994. I was on staff as an associate pastor at a really good church in the Parkville area, Park Hill Baptist Church, the church that eventually put up \$100K to start this church. But what I discovered while working there was that, as good as that church was, the people that I invited "to come and see" didn't connect with what we were doing and they didn't come back.

I remember talking about this to a guy who was pretty high up in a denominational organization. And he said, "well, if this really bothers you, why haven't you started some Bible studies on your own with these people?" which, of course, made me feel

really guilty. *Why hadn't I done that?*

“If I really, really cared about my neighbors and friends,” I thought to myself ...

- I *could* lead a Bible study in my house.
- I *could* talk Jetta into making cookies and punch every week even though that kind of thing isn't her strong suit.
- I could figure out how to do childcare with the kids of my neighbors and friends – and maybe even do more than that and teach them a Bible lesson.
- And then maybe I could get some musicians and singers I knew to come, too, so we could do a little bit of worship and maybe, every so often, a secular song that people who were not church-people could connect with.

- And then we could have social gatherings and figure out how to invite new people.
- And of course whenever someone's marriage went in the toilet or a loved one died, I could try my best to be a compassionate presence, even though that kind of thing isn't my strong suit.

And then I thought to myself: “*that’s stupid!* I’ve gone to seminary and this idea is overwhelming to *me*, so what the heck is the average Christian person who has a real job in the real world supposed to do with *their* non-churched family and friends?”

That’s when I realized that what I really needed was *help from my church* – those followers of Jesus joined together in a local fellowship, collectively working together. I

needed the help of my church in reaching my neighbors and friends with the greatest news ever; the news that had so totally changed my life as a teenager and had shaped my future. And I figured that if I was in that position there had to be other people in the same boat.

So, when we started NHCC back in 1994 that was the vision. Followers of Jesus investing our gifts and talents and resources and to create something *collectively* that helps each one of us *individually* as we not only *light* but also *invite*.

And that vision is still the vision to this day ... which is why our leadership constantly evaluates what we're doing around here. We want to make sure what we're doing is actually helpful when NHCCers say "come

and see” to family and friends who don’t know Christ.

- It’s why we spend so much time recruiting volunteers for children’s and student ministries. We want not just our own kids to have a great experience but also the kids of those we invite.
- It’s why we spend so much time from week-to-week in planning what happens in our services and why we expect every person on this stage – including me – to be well-rehearsed and prepared to give their best effort. It’s also why we sometimes turn down good-hearted people who want to be on this stage. It’s not possible to be perfect but we know that excellence matters when we’re inviting family

and friends.

- It's why we recruit volunteers to serve coffee and greet people so they feel comfortable.
- It's why we have small groups outside of this time where people can get to know others who are trying to follow Jesus.
- It's why we have social activities like the Guys BBQ Crawl or Ladies Night at the K.
- It's why we do weddings and funerals for people who are connected to this congregation.
- And the list could go on and on.

We do all of this stuff and more – and, if you're a Christian, we try to get you to help with this stuff and to give so we can do this stuff – because I want you, if you're a

Christian, to *experience what it is to be a gospel-driven person*. And you can't do that by yourself. I want the people sitting next to you to be Gospel-driven but they can't do it without you. As the pastor of this church, I want to see *all of us* investing our resources so that all of us – including me – can do together what none of us can do alone. And that is spreading the Gospel.

By the way, last week when I talked about the practical implication of this strategy – which is that ...

A gospel-driven person actually *joins* a local fellowship and invests their personal resources in it. (Duh!)

... and that, as part of that, they will go to the Intro Class of the church and find out more about the church's mission and

culture ...

When I talked about that, several of you wanted to know when our next Introduction to North Heartland class is going to be, so I'll tell you!

The class runs for three Sundays. It meets at 11:00 (which means you come to service at 9:30 and stay for the class). And it starts two weeks from today on the 18th. Details are in the program and we'd appreciate you signing up via our app or website.

We also have a class called Starting Point that begins *next* Sunday and runs for eight weeks. It meets at 9:30 which means you stay for the 11:00 service. Starting Point is designed for people who are new to Christianity or who have been away for a

long time. It will help you understand the basics of what we believe and why. Again, details are in the program and we'd appreciate you signing up via our app or website.

A Greater Purpose

Now, I was saying that, as your pastor, I want you to experience what it means to be a gospel-driven person. Obviously, there's a collective reason for that which is that we *need you*. If you're a Christian and you're not generous with your financial assets, if you're not volunteering your time and talents and helping in some way, there are things we simply cannot do together because we don't have the resources.

But there's another reason I want you to be

a Gospel-driven person – the reason why I have said each week that that once you understand what a Gospel-driven person is, you'll want to be one.

And it comes from this verse (and many others like it).

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of His own, so that you may proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. You once were not a people, but now you are God's people.

1 Peter 2:9-10 (NET)

The Apostle Peter wrote this to the churches under his care; churches made up of people from all kinds of diverse, disconnected and sometimes dissonant

backgrounds.

And what he was saying was, in essence, “before you heard the Gospel and repented and believed in Jesus, your life was only about your life and your little circle of influence. You were just a guy or just a gal trying to make your way in this world.”

“But now you, along with every other guy or gal who is a Christian, have been given a new identity; a new citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven. And because of that, everything you do in this world, everything that happens to you in this world has a purpose and meaning *beyond* just your life because your life is now part of a grand plan – every day – to proclaim the virtues of Christ who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. You’re part of a

team. You're part of a grand eternal cause."

And the great adventure happens when you begin to see your life in that way; when you begin to leverage what you do, how you handle your money and your time, everything for the sake of the Gospel; when you let the call to spread the gospel drive your thinking and your decisions. *And I want you to experience that adventure.*

I remember the first time it happened to me. When I graduated from college with a degree in Math/Computer Science, I got a great job offer to work for AT&T Bell Labs which, at the time, was like getting to work for Apple or Google. But the odd thing was they told me that I could choose any of three locations: Denver, Chicago or New Jersey. Jetta and I weighed all of the various

factors and, in the end, we chose NJ.

The reason? It wasn't the weather. It wasn't the cost of living. It wasn't the pleasant disposition of the natives.

It was because we felt that NJ was where we could make the greatest impact for Christ.

We had been part of a great church in TX in the first couple years of our marriage. We had grown so much as Christians. And we thought that maybe God could use something about our us to help out a local fellowship of believers in NJ who were collectively working together to proclaim in word and deed the Good News to the people around them because evangelical, Gospel-teaching churches in NJ were few and far between.

I specifically remember thinking at the time, “I could never be a pastor of a church but I’m going to make a lot of money with my job and the 10% we’re going to give is going to have an impact.”

The spread of the Gospel was driving our decision. And it truly was a great adventure. Not an easy one. Sometimes a scary one and even a painful one. But a great one because we saw our lives as being about more than just our lives.

And when you’re a gospel-driven person that’s the truth about you.

- When bad things happen to you, instead of being just about how it sucks to be you, it can be “how is God

going to use this situation to bring honor and glory to Himself?”

- When you buy a house or move into a new neighborhood, it can be about “how can God leverage this place for His Kingdom?”
- When you’re on the golf course (or whatever hobby you’re into) and you get paired up with someone you’ve never met, it can be about more than just the game. Maybe this person needs a little of my light. Maybe they need an invite.
- When you have kids, parenting can be about more keeping your kids from making life-altering dumb mistakes so they one day can get a good job and live the American Dream. It can be about raising the next generation men and women who see themselves as

part of the same great adventure you do.

And I could go on and on if we had the time. But the point is, when you're a Gospel-driven person, there is a sense that there is always something greater going on than what meets the eye because, for you, there is! And I want you to experience that.

Dealing with Failure

Now, at this point, I'm pretty sure that some of you are thinking "wow, Rick. I had no idea that a regular person could think like that and have that sense of a greater purpose without quitting their job and going into the ministry. That's so cool. That's what I want. Thanks for telling me!"

However, I'm just as sure that at least some of you are thinking "you know, Rick, I *used* to believe that. I used to be motivated by that. There was a time in my life when I really was trying to be a light in the darkness of my world. And there was a time when I even went beyond just lighting to inviting (as you put it).

"But, honestly, I'm just not that motivated by it anymore because ...

- I have shared my faith with people in the best way I know how and have been ridiculed.
- I've invited people to church over and over and they never come. Or they say they will and they never do.
- I've invited people who have said yes. And they come and they hear the

gospel and they're all excited because this is such a great church but then, after a while, they just stop coming. And they stop talking to me because now they feel all guilty.

- And then I look around and I see other people who have been Christians for a long time who one day decide they don't believe anymore or they don't want to follow Jesus anymore. And so they quit, too.

“Honestly, Rick, I love Jesus and I love His church, but I'm just not sure it's worth the charitable, strategic investment of my personal resources. I mean, I've given a lot of money and a lot of time over the years to this church and to others and sometimes I wonder.”

And if that is what you're thinking, let me say "welcome to the club" because sometimes I think those same things, too.

- When I think back over all the people who have come and gone in 22 years of being pastor of this church ...
- When I think of some of the people who helped me start this church who aren't even following Jesus anymore ...
- When I think of the people who we've baptized here or at Smithville Lake who never came back to church after that Sunday ...
- When I think of the people who I've personally tried to help who then got mad at me and made me the bad guy – the reason for all the crap in their lives ...

When I think about that, it's hard to keep from getting discouraged sometimes. It's hard sometimes to believe this has been a worthy investment not just of my time and money but of yours, too.

Now, some of you are probably surprised to hear me say that. "Oh, no, the preacher is questioning his faith!"

But that's not what I'm saying.

In fact, if you must know, I'm more convinced than ever of the truth of the Gospel; more convinced than ever that Jesus of Nazareth truly was God in the flesh; truly did die on a Roman cross and truly did rise from the dead – literally – on the third day after.

I'm more convinced than ever that, in doing so – rising from the dead in a new body that will never die, Jesus became the first of many – including me – who will experience that same exact thing when He returns as King of Kings and Lord of Lords and makes all things new.

From what I have studied of the historical evidence and from my own personal experience as a Christian, what the NT tells us happened is by far the best scenario when it comes to making sense of all the data.

So, I'm not questioning my faith. Instead, what I sometimes question is the value of investing so much into spreading the Gospel when it seems like so very often it just doesn't "take" or it doesn't "stick."

And that's why there is one more quality – one more characteristic – in our definition of Gospel-drivenness.

Gospel-drivenness is the motivation to spread the Good News (i.e. “the Gospel”) through the determined, charitable, strategic investment of personal resources.

And I know some of you are thinking “why did he put that word first in his definition if he’s talking about it last?”

I don't know. It just sounds better this way.

Anyway ... to be a gospel-driven person you need to be not only charitable and strategic. You also need to be determined – resolute, unwavering, tenacious, and persistent – because, in attempting to

spread the Gospel, *there will be a lot of failure ...*

... which is the point of the little video we saw at the beginning of this message and the parable of Jesus that it visualized. (And I know you were wondering if I had forgotten about that!)

Remember what Jesus said? I'll read it to you again (and you can visualize the animation in your head if that helps).

“A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them.

Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. Those seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the

plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died.

Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants.

However, other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”

Now, when the disciples first heard this parable, their response was “what in the world is the man talking about?”

So they asked him.

And he told them.

“When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and

does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

Matthew 13:19 (NIV)

“The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away.

Matthew 13:20-21 (NIV)

“The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

Matthew 13:22 (NIV)

“But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Matthew 13:23 (NIV)

Now, if you’ve been in church for a while you’ve probably heard this parable before. You’ve probably heard Jesus’ explanation of its meaning which we just read. And you’ve probably also heard sermons speculating on which kind of soils represent those who are “really saved.”

- Is someone who (in the words of Jesus) “lasts only a short time” truly a Christian?
- What about people whose faith gets choked out by the struggles and

distractions of this life? Are they really Christians?

- Or is it only those who produce fruit; those who live a life characterized by generosity, graciousness, God-centeredness, Gospel-drivenness and goodness who are saved?

If you've been in church for a while, you've probably *also* heard a sermon or two about this parable in which you were challenged to examine your life to see what kind of soil you are ... with, of course, the exhortation to "BE GOOD SOIL!"

And that seems like a good application of the interpretation. After all, having heard Jesus describe the meaning of the types of soil, who wouldn't want to "be good soil!?"ⁱ

But Jesus never says that. He never says “be good soil” because *that’s not the moral of the story.*

Not that there aren’t other places in the scripture where Christians are challenged to hear and be receptive to God’s word. And not that we aren’t encouraged to examine ourselves to see if we really are in the faith. But *that’s not what this parable is about.*

So what *is* it about?

It’s about the farmer and his task of seed-sowing which, Jesus says, represents “the message of the Kingdom” ... which is the Good News or The Gospel.

Jesus is telling a story so that his disciples

will understand what's in store as they attempt to spread the Gospel. Jesus is telling a story so that you and I – if we're Christians – will understand what's in store as we attempt, individually and collectively, to spread the Gospel.ⁱⁱ

Jesus is telling a story that teaches two lessons about Gospel-drivenness with one really big implication.

Here's the first lesson.

Most of the farmer's seed fails to produce a harvest ... meaning that most people will not respond in the way that we hope they will.

What you *want*, if you're a farmer, is for every seed to produce a harvest of 30, 60 or a hundred-fold.

What you *get* (at least, in first-century Palestinian farming) is *some* seed – maybe only a small portion – that does that.

What you *want*, if you're a gospel-driven person, is for *every* investment you make of your personal resources in spreading the gospel – your time, talent, treasure – to pay off big.

What you *get* (Jesus is telling us through this parable) is *some* of your investment – maybe only a small portion – that will do that.

That's just the nature of the task. That's how people are towards God so don't be surprised. That's the first lesson of the parable.

The second lesson is this:

The farmer knows the odds are low but is not discouraged by them. He sows his seed anyway ... meaning we should not be discouraged and we should sow anyway, too!

It's not a shock to the farmer (at least, in first-century Palestinian farming) that so much of his seed goes to waste. And that's not a deterrent to him. He does it anyway. In fact, he is extravagant to the point of being wasteful.

And Jesus is saying to his disciples – to his followers, to us – that we should not be discouraged by the odds, either. Yes, there will be days when we feel like we are extravagant to the point of wasting our time and money and our words and our

tears and our prayers. But that is no reason to give up. We should invest ourselves in spreading the seed of the gospel anyway ... because some of it *will* come up – and bigtime!

And that’s the implication of all this.

Gospel-driven people don’t focus on the failures; they focus on the successes – on “the seed” that produces a great harvest!

This is the only way you can keep doing it. This is the only way you can continue to be involved in spreading the gospel.

In fact, and this is the real secret of the parable: this is how *God Himself* does it because *He* is the primary sower in the parable.

See, when Jesus told this parable really he was talking about *his own ministry* in preaching the gospel to the masses:

- Why so many people didn't get it
- Why so many people were excited at first but then fell away when it got hard
- Why so many people got distracted by the cares of the world

BUT He continued to preach and teach the gospel anyway because some of the seed did come up big time ... *in them. They were the reason he continued to do it because the seed of the Gospel was coming up in them - 30, 60 and 100 fold!*

Last winter got to hear and see Dayton

Moore. Greatest lesson a pro baseball player has to learn is how to deal with failure. The best hitters fail 70% of the time. The key to success is to learn what you can from your failures but focus on the 30% of success and not be discouraged.

That same principle applies to you and me and those called to spread the Gospel.

Some people are going to give up on church. Some people are going to give up on God. Some people are going to give up on you. Some people are going to give up on life itself.

But you don't focus on that. You focus on the successes. And you keep doing it anyway. You never quit because you have a God who never quits on you.

- A God who knows it is foolish to spread seed on unworthy soil, but he does it anyway.
- A God who spreads his love with reckless abandon on all hearts of all types of soil.
- A God who throws seed at people like us – who over and over and over again prove that we have hard hearts, stiff necks, and dim minds.
- A God who scatters the seed of the Gospel with wild extravagance, and some of it actually comes up.

In you and in me. And it will keep coming up in some of the people for whom we light and invite.

And for them and because of Him we are

determined, tenacious, unwavering as well as charitable and strategic.

Let's pray.

- Most people will not respond in the way that we hope they will.
- We should not be discouraged and we should sow anyway, too!
- Focus on successes

Feature – Good Fight

CLOSING COMMENTS

- Offering @ Door
- Next Sunday – “15 Years Later” a 9/11 remembrance service featuring prayers for our people, our churches, our schools and our government.

- Pastoral Prayer @front

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://draughtingtheology.wordpress.com/2014/07/13/the-parable-of-the-sower-isnt-about-the-soil-a-sermon/>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.discoveringgod.net/11/>