

Accelerate
What's In Your Hand?
November 20, 2011

“Receivers before Givers”

Message Part 1

I think the first thing I should say is “if you’re a guest with us today – if you’re here for the very first time – you should know that our pastors don’t always come in on motorcycles.” Actually, we never do. That’s the first time it’s happened and I’m quite certain it will be the last! Hey, my wife said after the first service that the next time it will be a horse – I’ll have to ride her horse in. *That* is not happening.

But, as Irv said, today is an incredibly special day for our church because today marks the beginning of a two-year effort to *accelerate* our ability to do the three things

for which we believe God placed NHCC here in the first place:

To reach seekers – men and women who are searching for truth, for meaning, for healing yet are not sure that Christ or the church are the answer.

To build a family of believers – men and women who are finding truth, meaning and healing in Christ and who love and care for each other so well that others want to belong.

And to plant churches – brand new start-up congregations which, studies show, are one of the most effective ways to reach seekers and build them into a family of believers (which is how we started 17 years ago).

As you know, we've talked about this every week, over the next two years, we think it's going to cost about \$4M to accelerate our efforts in those areas, with about half of that amount going towards the things we're already doing and the other half going towards ...

- Expanding the seating in this auditorium by 50% (to 500 seats); Wider aisles (so we can get horses and motorcycles down the aisles).
- Renovating our commons and entryway
- Getting back into a two-year cycle of high-impact church planting (which is what we were doing years ago).

Over the past month or so, I've talked about those things and more in messages, plus we've sent out a very nice informational booklet and created a special Accelerate website, so I won't go into it any further this morning because ... *now is the time to make it happen*. Today is the day for those of us who call NHCC "home" to make whatever commitment God has called us to make in support of this "great adventure." It's time to saddle up the horses (or the Harleys, as you prefer) and hit the road. It's time to

accelerate.

And I want to say right up front that I'm so proud of those of you who have taken this seriously. You've taken the time to think about all of this and you've taken time to pray about your commitment. You've put it all on the table before God and said, "Lord, here's all I have. Here's what I make, here's what I spend, here's what I save and here's what I own. And, it's all yours. So what do you want me to put towards this cause?" And God has given you a number and that's the commitment you're going to make this morning. And because you've gone through all that, you've wrestled with God, you've prayed about this, you've thought about this, I am so proud of you. I really am.

But I have to tell you that I'm also ... a little ... concerned.

- Not concerned about people being unable to fulfill whatever commitments they make because I believe God will provide. Plus, after the first of the year, we're going to offer our four-week financial management course, *Freed-Up Financial Living*, which I'm sure will be a great help for some of us.
- I'm also not concerned about us failing to reach our \$4M goal. Based on the stories I've heard and based on what I saw when our leaders made their commitments a couple weeks ago, I'm quite confident we'll make that goal and maybe even exceed it.
- And I'm also not concerned about people having the feeling that "it's all about the money" (which is one of the complaints a lot of people have about churches in general). I'm quite

confident that it's been very clear in this campaign that while money certainly is involved in a big way, the real issue is *not the money* – it's our hearts and what God is doing in our hearts. And, from how people have responded to the messages in this series, and to the small groups, I'm confident that God is doing something amazing.

So, I'm not concerned about you making your commitment or the church meeting the goal, and I'm not concerned about people feeling manipulated. What I *am* concerned about is this: that in the effort to lay it all on the table before God and make a sacrifice, we might forget that whatever we do is only possible because Jesus did it first. I'm concerned that all this Accelerate commitment and all this cool stuff we're doing, that we might forget that ...

Before it ever occurred to us to lay it all on the table for *Him*, He laid it all on the table for *us* when He gave his life for us.

One of the greatest lies of the Deceiver is that it works just the opposite: *you do something for God and then He'll do something for you* because it's your commitment – how spiritual you try to be, how hard you work to serve others and to stay pure from sin, how much you sacrifice financially for his Kingdom ... it's that commitment that convinces God to finally say "Ok, you're in. You've proven yourself. You're accepted."

Now, don't hear what I'm not saying: commitment, obedience, service and generosity *do* lead to blessing in this life, there's no mistake about that. But acceptance and approval from God; His forgiveness of sin and gift of eternal life are not earned by *our* efforts. Those things are

freely given because of what *Jesus* did for us on the cross “while we were still sinners; while we were helpless,” Paul writes.

And, as your pastor, I’m just a little concerned that with all of the emphasis we’re making on a commitment today, and that we’ve made over the past month, that we not forget that.

Actually, I don’t think I’m alone in that concern. I think the Apostle Paul was concerned about the same thing when he wrote to the Corinthian Christians back in the first century. Over the past couple of weeks, you may remember that we’ve looked at some of the things he told them as it concerns giving:

- To avoid giving out of a sense of duty or obligation because God isn’t interested in our begrudging compliance.

- When you give, think about it proportionately; give a percentage of what you earn and give that before you spend on anything else.
- That when you give, God is going to provide for you so that you can keep on giving so that He can provide for you, so that There's a cycle here.
- That their financial harvest would be in proportion to what they sowed in their generosity.

And that's all well and good and I know it's been inspirational for a lot of us.

But before Paul got into any of that, this is what he wrote:

You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty

he could make you rich.
2 Corinthians 8:9 (NLT)

And I think Paul put this little statement in front of everything he said in this section of the letter for a reason. In fact, in every one of his letters, there is a pattern, and this is the same pattern. Paul says "God has done *this* for us; therefore, we are now able to do *this* (whatever 'this' might be) for Him."

You are forgiven by God; therefore, forgive one another just as Christ has forgiven you.

You are loved by God; therefore, love one another just as Christ has loved you.

The Apostle John echoed that same idea when he wrote: "We love because He first loved us."

That's why we say around here all the time that ...

Loved people love

Forgiven people forgive

Blessed people bless

We don't love, forgive or bless because we *want* to some how earn love or blessing or forgiveness from God. We love, forgive and bless because we have already *received* love, forgiveness and blessing from God.

And the same thing applies when it comes to generosity. We're not generous because we *want* God to be generous to us. We give because he first gave to us. "Freely you have received," Jesus once said. "Now freely give."

And I just want to make sure that is abundantly clear today because in giving

what for some of us is the greatest financial sacrifice of our lives, we have got to remember that we are first of all *receivers* from God. I want what David prayed as he and so many of the people of Israel gave to build the very first Temple in Jerusalem to be in our minds this morning. He prayed:

*Who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us! 1
Chronicles 29:14 (NLT)*

Translation: we're giving. We're making sacrifices. But the truth is that we're really the receivers in this deal.

So, this morning before we turn in our cards and we make our commitments, I want us to take a few minutes to focus on God's grace – the acceptance, the approval and the favor

we do not deserve, we cannot earn and don't even need to try to earn because of Christ.

To help accomplish that, we're going to do two things. First, as most of you know, a little over a month ago, we experienced one the most amazing church services ever. The most amazing church service I've ever been a part of in my life. We called it *Mystery Sunday* because we didn't tell anyone what was going to happen but we did say it would be one of the most incredible days in our history. And that's what it turned out to be. God showed up in a big way and person after person said "yes" *on the spot* to Jesus' invitation to be baptized as a sign that they had received the grace and mercy he poured out on the cross and in his resurrection. Even for the first time, some people prayed to receive Christ in that moment.

We took video of that day and one of our highly creative volunteers put it all together so we could watch it this morning. I want us to see this again, because it's a vivid reminder that everything about our faith – including these cards we're about to turn in – isn't as much about our commitment to God as it is about His commitment to us; his willingness to give us a way of salvation when we could not save ourselves.

Let's watch. Let's remember. Let's rejoice.

Video – “Spontaneous Baptism 2011”

Wasn't that awesome? Could we show our appreciation? <applause>

Now, during the video, I'm sure you noticed the little elves walking around setting up the communion stations. That's because in just a few minutes we're going to receive

communion together.

Now, ironically a lot of people get confused about communion. I want to explain this because I've heard this so many times, and every time we take communion I feel like I just need to say this. People think, "Oh, I probably shouldn't take communion today because I did something really bad. I'm not good enough to take communion. I haven't been as committed as I should have been."

Whenever I hear people say that, I always say, "*Exactly*. That's the point. You're a sinner (and I am, too) and that's why Jesus gave his life. We don't take communion because we're finally 'good enough.' We take it because, in this life, we're *never* going to be good enough. We need a savior and Jesus is that savior. Communion reminds us that we need to receive, we are receivers, of mercy and grace because we

can't atone for our sin."

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he took the bread and said "eat this and remember that *my body* is broken for your sins." Then he took the cup and said "drink this and remember that it is *my blood* that brings about atonement for your sins."

And, so, again, before we turn in our cards and make our commitments, I want us to take a few minutes to remember that. I want us to focus on God's grace – acceptance, approval and favor we don't deserve, cannot earn and, in fact, don't *need* to earn. As our band plays, you're invited to come to the table and remember the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who though he was rich laid it all on the table for our sake and became poor. And by his poverty he has brought us salvation and acceptance and blessing and favor.

Children's & Student's Commitments

Message Part 2

OK, now with *that* clear – that we are receivers first from God before we are givers to God, I think we're ready to make our commitments to give.

And to kick things off, I've invited Irving Muller to come and share with us what our middle and high-school students have been doing in this effort. They've had their own version of the campaign going over the past couple of weeks and some amazing things have happened with them.

Q&A w/Irv (2)

Ok, let's thank Irv and also express appreciation for our students, who will be

turning in their cards with the rest of us in just a few minutes. <applause>

But before we get to that, I've also invited Julie Smoldt to come and share what our *Adventureland* kids have been doing as part of *Accelerate*. Like our students, they've had a version of the campaign going and some great things are happening there, too.

Q&A w/Julie (2)

Now, because there are so many children and we want them to experience the significance of what they're doing, we're going to have them come forward and place their banks on the stage. So, I'm going to get out of the way as they do.

Can we encourage our kids at this point by expressing our appreciation? <applause>

“What’s In Your Hand?”

Message Part 3

OK, it’s finally time for the rest of us to make our commitments.

Many of you came this morning with the commitment card you received in your *Accelerate* booklet. If not, there was one on your seat when you came in. What I’d like for you to do right now – everyone – is take the card and hold it in your hand. Got it?

I want to ask you a question about this – the same question God once asked Moses when he invited him to play a part in moving God’s Kingdom forward in a big way. The Bible tells us that God had appeared to Moses and said, “Moses, I have a job for you. It’s time to deliver My People from captivity in Egypt and I want you to be the man who leads them out.”

And the Bible tells us that Moses put up all kinds of objections. "I have a bad track record ... I'm not a very good speaker ... I'm more of an introvert than an extrovert ... and, to top it all off, the people won't believe that You sent me."

So, God said, "Moses, what's in your hand?"

Moses was holding a shepherd's staff.

God said, "Take that staff and throw it down on the ground." Moses did and it turned into a snake and he ran from it. But, God said, "Pick it back up" and he did, and it turned back into a staff. Then God said, "If people doubt that I sent you, do *that* and they'll get the picture."

But the greater point God was making was "Moses, trust Me. Say yes to my invitation

because I can take what's in your hand and do things *in* you and *through* you that you would have never believed."

And this morning, the same thing is true of what's in your hand right now – the *Accelerate* commitment card.

Through your commitment, God can provide resources that will lead to amazing things happening here at NHCC. So, what's in your hand right now is, in many ways, the future of NHCC. Through you, God is going to bring about the future of our congregation.

Let's take quick look at it.

Notice at the top that this represents what you're planning to give for the next two years, beginning in December.

In fact, giving begins on the first Sunday in

December which we're calling "Big Give Sunday." On that day, we hope to have the largest offering ever in our history. We're asking everyone who makes a commitment to give as large of an offering as possible. You'll be getting more details about that in the mail this week, as well as info on how you can sign up for automatic contributions through The City or your bank. *So, don't forget to put your name and contact info on the bottom of the card so we can send you the information!*

Notice also on this card that our commitment is what we already give, plus what we're going to add plus any "stored resources" like stock or a lump sum of cash or property. (This week, I got an email from a guy saying he's going to sell his boat and donate the proceeds from that).

So, for example, if you give \$12,000 a year,

and plan to add \$6,000 a year (\$500/mo), you would write down \$18,000, multiply by 2 to get \$36,000. Then add in what you think your boat is worth – say, \$3,500 – and your total would be \$39,500.

Of course, you may have a different way of calculating that – maybe God just said, give \$50K over the next two years. And you're just going to write \$50K on the bottom of your card. That's fine, too.

So, what's in your hand right now? It's the future of NHCC, determined by what you allow God to do *through* you.

But you know what else is in your hand? It's *your* future because, as we've said all along, this experience – this journey, this commitment – is as much about what

happens *in* us as it is what happens *through* us. Through this card, you are saying "yes, God, I am open to you shaping and forming me as I step out in faith and make, what is for me, an *exceedingly generous* commitment."

Paul said we're going to reap the spiritual and financial harvest of generosity in proportion to how much seed we sow – through how generous we are. "*Sow little,*" he said, "*and reap little. Sow exceedingly and reap exceedingly.*" As your pastor, I want you to reap exceedingly. I want to get to the end of this two year period and for you to look back at your life and say, "Wow! I cannot believe what God did in my character and in my faith and in my finances through this commitment, through this sacrifice." *But that's only going to happen if what we're doing really is a sacrifice that requires you to trust God.*

So, for just about a minute, I'm going to be quiet and we're going to make some room for the Holy Spirit to work and to one more time check what we've written on our card. I know a lot of you came in and had already prepared a number, and I want to ask you to use this time to say, "God, here's what I think you asked me to do. Did I hear you right?" And even ask yourself, "Do I feel joyous about this?" Because, if you have a number down there that's begrudging compliance, then you need to lower your number. If you have a number down there that's not faith, then you probably need to increase your number.

Some of you haven't really thought about this yet, you're going, "Oh man, I haven't been to church in a month and I walk in and it's Commitment Sunday. What am I going to do?" Well, you may not know today what

you're going to do. You may need to take this home and read the booklet and pray over it and come back later with this.

But, some of you today might be sitting here and God might be whispering a number to you right now. And you need to write that on the card. Or, maybe you and your spouse are thinking about these things and need to talk together during the time that we have left here.

Whatever you need to do, you do it. Nathan is going to provide a little bit of background music, then I will come up and give you further instructions.

Let's pray together.

God, we're thankful that you invite us to be part of what you're doing in this world;

that sometimes you invite us to look at everything that's on our table and take a risk with that, to take a leap of faith with that and begin a great adventure that will not only accomplish your purposes in others and your purpose in your Kingdom, but also in us. So, God, as we make this commitment we're excited to see what you're going to do both thru us and in us. We thank you that we get to give not out of duty or obligation but out of the joy that we have received so much from your hand beginning with what you did for us in Jesus of Nazareth.

In His name and for the sake of His Kingdom, Amen.

Ok, let's bring our commitments to the Lord. The band is going to play and when you're ready, just come to one of the boxes and drop your card in. Here we go.

I told you earlier that I'm so proud of you guys, and I really am. I mean, we just went through a really big deal as a church. And we're about to go through another big deal and I'm just so proud of you guys for hanging in there and being willing to put it on the table and let God speak to you. So ... Yay, you guys! Yay, North Heartland! Let's give ourselves a hand!

As we close this morning, we're going to sing a song together that, again, is a reminder of God's love and grace and acceptance in our lives and everything that happens comes out of that. And, right after that, as you leave this morning ...

- We have a very nice celebration reception in the dining hall and a little gift that I really want you to stop by and

pick up, otherwise I'm going to have hundreds of them at my house (I'm trying to avoid hoarding). So, get your kids then stop by the dining hall for a few minutes and pick up one of these cool *Accelerate* coasters.

- Also, as we leave this morning, our ushers will receive the offering at the door. If you came prepared to give this morning, remember that it's a response to God's grace in your life.

OK, let's stand and let's sing and we'll be done. Thanks for being here today!