

Sabbatical Reflections
A Confession, A Resignation
and a Declaration
September 1, 2013

Prelude The Love of God

Worship Immortal Invisible

Turn & Greet

Kitti Welcome & Announcements

Feature Surprise from Arts

It's great to be back here at North Heartland. Before we get too far, I wanted to take a moment for those who might be new to NHCC to explain where I've been and what I've been doing.

At NHCC, we have a policy that after 5-7 years in ministry, our staffers are given 5-6 weeks off with the specific purpose to renew,

reflect and restore. As most of you know, ministry is not a 9-5 job so this intentional time off allows the staffer to reconnect with God and their family in ways that strengthen them to return to NHCC healthy and grounded in Christ. I hope you will find that is true of me.

I took the challenge seriously and was able to do a great deal in 6 weeks.

5th place at CEO race

I know it's only 5th but I was impressed with myself.

Wasn't that crazy? My brother saw that on the TV while we were out to breakfast and told me I had to take a pic and tell you all I did that race.

Well if you know me you know I absolutely

did NOT run a race and if I would have I most definitely would not have placed 5th.

So let's start with a picture show. Here's some of what I did with my time for 6 weeks.

Slide of Steven and Maya

I spent a lot of time with my kids. I had the opportunity to be a volunteer at Steven's band camp helping them with uniforms, lunches, and such. It was so great to meet so many amazing students and spend time seeing the young man my son is becoming and we celebrated his 16th birthday. Sigh.

Maya and I did crafts, watched movies, took the dog for lots of walks, had hangouts with her friends and did a little too much looking in an addictive girls clothing store-Justice.

Slide of FRC

Most of what I will share with you today will

be as a result of time spent here. I was able to spend 3 days in solitude on a retreat at the Franciscan Retreat Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado. God was able to break through some serious baggage and bring a level of brokenness I haven't experienced in quite a while and was long overdue for. We'll get back to that in a bit.

Slide of Price and I

After my retreat, I drove to Denver to pick up my husband, Price and we headed west to our favorite spot in the US, Glenwood Springs, Colorado. We had such an amazing time just relaxing, reading, talking, hiking and exploring Colorado. We even got crazy and drove to Moab, Utah one day. So much beautiful scenery. This was the first time since our honeymoon 19 years ago that we have been alone on a trip. We have always been with family, friends or our children. It

was so very good for us and for our family. During my time off, we also celebrated our 19th wedding anniversary.

Slide of Family pics

Thanks to my sabbatical time I was able to spend extended time with my in-laws in Little Rock and my parents, siblings, and extended family in St. Louis. It was so great to reconnect with each of them in uninterrupted time.

Slide of Church

I also had the opportunity to experience once again what it feels like to walk in for the first time to a church where you know no one. Can I take a quick sidebar? (that's a rhetorical question☺)

Some of you know what this feels like because you are new today or relatively new to NHCC.

I was reminded that it is really really hard to walk into a church for the first time when you are new. It was even hard for me and I'm an extrovert who has a "place to belong" at a church.

How much more difficult it must be for those who are searching, who don't feel like they fit yet, or who are hurting.

As a person who was alone and didn't know anyone, it meant a lot to have someone acknowledge my presence. I didn't need a deep conversation just a friendly smile saying Good Morning. It meant even more when that came from "regular folks" who were not "on". So can I take a moment to remind all who call NHCC home to smile, to say hello, to try and meet someone new when you come into services.

It was also comforting to have volunteers who

were friendly and willing to direct me to the correct location. It really meant a lot when they were outside the church building.

Case in point, at one church, I parked and couldn't find my way in. I walked around and finally found a place where people seemed to be heading in. I followed the signs in to their services without one person acknowledging me. Afterwards, I experienced the same thing. Had I been searching for a church home, I'm not sure I would have returned. I didn't feel like I was welcome there though I could see people were friendly no one was friendly with me. It's like it was a club where I didn't get the invite.

I know this happens here too. We have times when a guest will experience this which is why our First Impressions Ministry is so vital to what happens here on Sunday mornings and why we are always looking for more

friendly faces to join our team. The vision for the First Impressions ministry is to make sure that from the parking lot to the auditorium, our attenders and guests are welcomed, assisted, and provided with warm hospitality that says You matter to God and we are so glad you are here.

Next Sunday, Sept. 8th this ministry will be gathering together for vision casting and training. If you have been wondering about getting involved and are interested in helping others feel welcome, would you please join us? There is info in your program about how to sign up.

Being a guest reminded me that there are many obstacles one must overcome just to even get to the inside of the sanctuary. Church let's be committed to helping people experience the warmth and love of Jesus. Let's help prepare each other to experience

this time together by being welcoming and hospitable.

Okay, I'll get off my soapbox😊

Slide of KC Art

When I wasn't traveling the US, I was at home in KC where I spent time exploring KC with my family and many hours alone with God and my journal at Rozelle Court in the Nelson.

Speaking of time alone with God. Let's talk about how God spoke and what He did in me in my time away.

When I first started at NHCC, I was challenged and encouraged to begin journaling. I journaled prayers, key scriptures that were encouraging or challenging and the highlights and lowlights of what was

happening in my life. In my first sabbatical, 7 years ago I took time to read back through those journals and found them to be super helpful in seeing patterns and issues that had cropped up.

So as I prepared for this sabbatical, I had decided I would do that again. Read all my journals from the past 7 years since my last sabbatical. I had this great plan that I would try to read through them all prior to leaving for Colorado on Saturday of that first week but the week was full of to-dos: dentist, doctor, auto repairs, kid commitments, appliance repair and preparing for our family to head different directions for a week. I tried to squeeze in some time to prepare but that just didn't happen a whole lot.

So I was still a little amped up as I made the journey to Colorado Springs to begin a time of silence and solitude. I arrived there in the

evening. It took a little bit to wind down as I walked the grounds there.

Slide of FRC grounds

Finally I was able to settle in and I spent the evening until late reading those journals and making notes. I woke at sunrise the next morning to continue. As I came near the end of my journals, it was time for me to head to church. I drove down the mountain to a church I had been told about called Woodmen Valley Chapel.

I was pretty distracted as I arrived there as my heart was heavy with all that I had read.

See in reading my journals, I realized that the past several years had been filled with a lot of pain, sadness, fear, rejection and hurt. I had gone through several years of medical issues and numerous surgeries. Even more difficult

than that for someone like me-who is highly relational, I had lost many friends. Some walked away, some moved away, and some passed away. I suffered a lot of loss in my relational world and the pain of that was ever present as I entered the church for service.

Slide of Woodmen Valley Sanctuary

As the worship began, I started leaking tears. It wasn't the music itself. It wasn't the words. It was a woman, I was watching. One of the background vocalists. She wasn't overly expressive, she was just standing there with her arms by her side but she was exuding joy and worship through her eyes and smile. It was as if she was looking directly into the face of God. She was grinning from ear to ear, smiling as she sang praise and worship to our God.

I found myself thinking How long oh Lord?

How long has it been since I really worshipped you? How long has it been since I was filled with the joy I see in her eyes?

This verse came to mind,

*My soul thirsts for you;
my whole body longs for
you in this parched and
weary land where there is
no water.*

Psalm 63:1 (NLT)

My soul felt so dry. It was as if the culmination of all that pain had just sucked the life right out of me.

The congregational singing ended and the teaching pastor got up to speak. His message was very good but it wasn't until the pastor transitioned the service into a time of reflection and the opportunity to come and be prayed for, that God just nailed me. The band

played several songs and it seemed as if with each song a sledgehammer came down on my heart and a flood of emotion poured out. I was no longer just leaking tears. I was sobbing. I'm certain the gal sitting next to me was wondering what I could have possibly done wrong that I was so broken.

During that reflection time as people went down front to be prayed for, God was breaking me. He was revealing to me the places that needed healing. And so I followed that model we talk about so often, I knew I needed to confess (what had been going on that was wrong); repent (change my thinking) and believe the truth about God and myself. I wrote this all out in the form of three statements: I confess, I resign (repent), and I declare (believe).

There were at least 3 songs played live and then the lights dimmed and the congregation

got up to leave. The band started packing up their gear while music played on the sound system.

And there I still sat, 2nd pew, crying my eyes out and journaling. I'm certain they were just about to call security on me when I finally took the cue from God to get up, to go confess and to ask for prayer.

I really didn't want to go up. I kept arguing, "I got this God. I don't have to admit this to anyone. I don't need to ask anyone for help. I can do this." And yet, He would not relent. It was as if I could not move unless I moved to the front to be prayed for.

Even crazier, I thought well God I will go to that guy or that gal but I will not go to the guy in the middle, he looks too much like my friend's new husband and what if somehow it's magically him and he tells everyone at

NHCC what a mess I am (yes I know that's crazy but it sure seemed real at the time).

And of course, I end up with that guy. Never tell God what you will or won't do, eh?

So I go to this guy and he says My name is Jon I'm an elder here how can I pray for you? And the flood gates open again, I'm sobbing, snubbing (demonstrate what snubbing is). He tells me to take my time. I think boy he must wonder what I am going to say.

I finally get out the words...I'm Shannon and I'm a pastor...sob. More crying.

I'm on sabbatical from a church in KC. It's been 7 years since my last sabbatical and then I blurted out.

“The past seven years have been so difficult for me. My heart is so hurt. I ache from losing

friends, from watching marriages fail, from walking through death with so many people, from watching people walk away from the church and some even walk away from God. To make matters worse somewhere in all that, I have assumed the burden for all of it. As if somehow it is all up to me and if I just worked harder, I could have saved them, saved their marriages, took away their pain. I've violated my Sabbath, I've acted as if I am unlimited, I've robbed my marriage and my family of time, and worst of all, I've stopped really worshiping God. It's like I've become a machine that just "works for God." How did I come to this?"

And he simply looked at me and said, Shannon-God loves you. And I understand. Let me pray for you. He did and there was much more crying but the pressure was gone. The years of pain and yuck and junk were finally being released.

So as I reflected on what had happened that morning, I wrote down what I sensed God was showing me. He revealed to me how I got to where I was by believing a lie and how living according to that lie had left me in this place of feeling empty, depleted, dry and so very thirsty.

As a result I wrote down so I would not forget what the lie was that I had believed, as well as my confession, my resignation (what I needed to repent of) and my declaration (what I believe and must not forget).

What God began to reveal to me that day was that so much of the pain I was experiencing was really caused by me. Something inside of me would have to change in the inner most place.

See at one point the pastor said something

like this “when are you going to stop pretending you can do anything to get God to love you more than he already does? Stop striving, stop working so hard for something you already have.”

Somewhere along the way I started buying the lie that God and other people only loved me for what I could do for them. I confused need with want. I believed that God and others didn't want me around but they certainly needed me around.

Over the past year, I have been seeing a Christian counselor. I started seeing her when my dad was diagnosed with oral cancer because I needed some help processing what to do about sharing my heart with my dad given that he is really not in to having deep conversations, especially ones that have to do with spiritual matters and God.

I thought that is why I was going to see her but as we would talk she would push on things and it was slowly becoming more and more clear that I had some faulty thinking at the core of my being. During the course of our time together, she would often refer to a book she thought I would benefit from called,

“The Enneagram: A Christian Perspective.” By Richard Rohr and Andreas Ebert.

I decided to order said book and take it with me on my retreat though I have to be honest it looked like a textbook from my master’s degree classes and so I was less than excited about reading it but that day after my meltdown in that church, I decided to go back to the retreat center and start reading it. I devoured the book in a day and a half which is unheard of for me because I’m not a huge reader. There is so much packed in there but for the sake of time suffice it to say that this

book takes a look at 9 core motivations. Nine different types (kind of like personality types) of people who respond to the world and others in a certain way that they often don't even realize.

Slide of Diagram

So before we can get to the point of what God was showing me about the lie I believed, let me share with you this quick selection from the book,

“Based on our predispositions, parental and environmental influences, as well as societal factors, all of us create in the course of our development certain ideals, whose realization we pursue. Our self-image is determined largely by these ideals, which we also use to measure other people. Feelings of guilt arise when we do not live up to these ideals.

Likewise, we reproach others if they disregard our ideas. Unfortunately these internalized accepted ideals are often false or at least exaggerated. It is in just this attempt to realize our ideal that we are in danger of running right into the dead end of our pitfall and sins. (pg. 211)

Take a moment to look in the center of your program there are a list of “ideal” statements. These are the 9 base line self-images and ideal statements that people usually use to define themselves. They are often so engrained that we aren’t even aware that is what is motivating us and how it may be wreaking havoc on our lives because we are allowing ourselves to be defined by that self-image and ideal instead of by the image that we belong to God.

See in my mind, I had to strive to be the second one.

I must help. I’m good (and therefore loved

ONLY IF) I love (others instead of myself), am selfless (acting as if I don't have a self and am simply a machine programmed to do the will of others) and helpful (even to the point of doing for others what they could or should or even just want to do for themselves). If people and God don't need me then I have no value.

I'm not worth anything unless I'm needed and therefore I must help.

Clearly there is nothing wrong with being helpful. Being helpful, loving and selfless is a good thing but not when the equation is messed up.

See God was pointing out that I was trying to prove my worth to Him by being helpful, by doing all this good stuff for other people.

He had to point out to me that my equation

was wrong.

He said Shannon you are following this:

If I am helpful then people and God will have to love me because they need me.

I want you to erase that equation from your head and follow this one:

I am loved so deeply and so much that Jesus came to suffer and die for me. He sacrificed himself so that I would know, really know, just how much I was loved. And it is because I know and believe that I am so deeply loved that God can use me to help others-to love them, to value them, to be gracious to them.

The lie that I was believing (that if I am helpful then people and God will have to love me because they need me)... That lie lead to striving and straining and working to prove

myself which leads to my confession.

So here's my confession.

I have been so busy working “FOR” God that I neglected being WITH God. I have ceased being a worshiper at North Heartland and of God. I have settled for being a worker.

Most people don't realize this but Price and I moved to Kansas City and became members of NHCC in June of 1998.

It wasn't until March of 1999 that I left my career to come work for North Heartland, at that time as the Director of Administration.

I love this church. I love the mission. I love the vision. I love the people.

God has done so much in my life as a result of the people, teaching and life I have

experienced here at NHCC. And yet somehow, it's like I lost sight of that and started just working here. I was so busy doing for God that I forgot to be with God.

I'm reminded of the story found in the gospel of Luke Chapter 10.

It's the story of two sisters Mary and Martha. Jesus is coming to eat at their house and Martha really wants everything to be perfect and who can blame her Jesus is coming. But she gets really outdone with her sister who is sitting and listening to Jesus. She demands that Jesus tell Mary to get up and help her.

Here is his response,

“My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has

*discovered it, and it will not
be taken away from her.”*

Luke 10:41-42 (NLT)

God reminded me in that moment, there was something more important than doing FOR God and that was being WITH God.

So I have made a commitment that taking time each Sunday to be with God worshiping here as a member of NHCC would take priority. With that said, please don't take it personally if I excuse myself from a conversation to say "I'm off to service to spend the hour with God, worshiping and being with Him."

I really do love spending time with others but I can't get so wrapped up in "helping" that I neglect the best thing which is to be with God in worship and in solitude.

The other book I read over my break was

called

“I Quit: Stop Pretending Everything is Fine and Change Your Life” by Geri Scazzero. In the book, the author has a whole section on a self-care tool kit which is imperative for someone like me who struggles to spend all their time and energy caring for others while neglecting themselves.

She used an awesome word picture, when you are flying the airline attendant always mentions that in the event of the loss of cabin pressure, individuals should put their oxygen mask on first and then assist someone else. If you were to attempt their mask on first you could run out of oxygen and then neither of you would survive.

The author pointed out that the same is true in our spiritual lives, if we have not first attended to our spiritual health we certainly

can't help anyone else. Yet far too often, those who are motivated by being the "helper" will do just that. They will not put on the oxygen mask of self-care first whether that's going to church, having down time, being alone with God, sleeping, exercising, etc.

And friends that is exactly what I did, someone would need love, care, compassion, counsel, fill in the blank and I would attempt to give it to them at the expense of my own spiritual, emotional or physical health. I was busy sucking wind while attempting to help someone else get air-not a great plan.

Do you see how that lie that I can only be loved if I am helpful is at the center of what was going on? If I felt needed, if I was helpful then I was good and loved.

In Jeremiah 2:13 it says,

*“My people have committed
two sins: They have*

*forsaken me, the spring of
living water,
and have dug their own
cisterns, broken cisterns that
cannot hold water.*

See back in the day, people would have cisterns (maybe some of you have actually seen one?) to collect water for drinking. So basically it's like I've been saying nah I'll pass on that delicious, clean spring water you have and just take a big ole drink of this nasty, stagnant water from this rainbarrel. Yum.

And yet that is exactly what I was doing. I was trading time with Jesus (living water that would replenish my soul and allow me to love, serve and help others) with doing stuff "for God" and others in hopes that if I could just help enough if I could just give enough then I would feel valuable, worthy and loved.

Are you following this?

At the core of who I was I bought a lie that I could only be loved if I helped which means I did that at the expense of my own spiritual health.

So I had to confess that I had given up being WITH God to do FOR God which brings me to my resignation.

No not my literal resignation. Rick certainly wouldn't allow me to resign without him being up here.

I mean that I am resigning as Savior of the World.

Apparently the position had already been filled and I somehow forgot that.

It was really hard to admit as I sat there in that church that I have been prideful acting as if I'm better than Jesus.

Now I would never say I'm better than Jesus. I would never say people should worship me or encourage folks to start a new religion where I'm the center of the universe, the one true being who can fix everyone. I'm not that delusional and yet I have behaved as if I was better than Jesus and I could fix everyone.

I mean Jesus took time to be alone with God. Not me, I routinely violated my Sabbath (which is when we call an intentional time out to be with God to be reminded that we are human beings not human doings) to answer calls, texts, emails, meet with people who were having struggles. After all isn't that what a good pastor and a good Christian does?

Jesus took time to sleep, to eat, to be with friends. As for me, I routinely violated my physical limits acting as if I could work 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Because if you want to feel like you matter and how you

know if you matter is based on what you do for others and how helpful you are, you best get to work.

Jesus did not give everyone what they wanted. He stayed focused on the path the Father set before Him. He stayed true to the eternal perspective. Yet, I routinely put pressure on myself to have all the answers, to meet all the needs, to fix everyone and do everything RIGHT NOW often without asking God if it is even something I am supposed to be helping with.

So let's recap, God revealed to me that I was buying the lie that my worth, my value and my ability to be loved came only if I was helpful, if I was needed.

Because of that lie, I had to confess that I had gotten into a terrible habit of working FOR God instead of being WITH God, and

therefore ceased being a worshiper and active participant in this body of Christ.

And because, I was believing that lie that I have to be so every helpful to the point of sacrificing time with God and my family, I began acting as if somehow everything was up to me. It was up to me to save, fix and transform everyone and everything which meant I needed to willfully choose to resign from a False Savior... for there is only one Savior, Redeemer and Lord and that is Jesus Christ, not Shannon Horn.

And finally that day sitting in that church, I made a declaration.

**I declared that my hope is ONLY in
Christ's body broken for me and
Christ's blood poured out for me**

And taking it a step further, I declared that:

I can't save, transform or fix myself or others.

God CAN save, transform and heal me and others.

I will let God be God and I will be his beloved daughter Shannon.

And as difficult as that will be for me, and it will be very difficult at times, I will have to remind myself and others that I don't have all the answers. That I don't have all the wisdom. That ultimately they don't have to answer to me for the choices they make. That I am limited. That I can't fix everything. And that ultimately they need God, not me.

Which brings me back to that lie. That lie which ultimately comes down to this...

My worth=My performance+other's opinions

And I'm pretty sure that I'm not the only one in this room who believes that lie. Maybe your performance isn't based on how helpful you are, maybe yours is based on how perfect you are or how successful you are or how dutiful you are. When it comes down to it, the enemy will try to distract us.

He will try to convince us that God can't just love us because of who we are. He will try to convince us that others can't love us for who we are. He will try to convince us that we are only loved when we perform a certain way or do certain things. And it's just enough to get us off track and so instead of, say, helping because we have been helped we are trying to help to be loved, instead of loving because we have been loved, we are trying to love so you can get love in return, instead of being selfless because our heart is overflowing with gratitude and we wish to be generous, we try to meet everyone's need so they will love us.

We don't see that whenever we are not secure in God's love we start trying to drink water from a cracked cistern. We are left thirsty and parched because we aren't seeking the living water.

Do you trust that Jesus really does love you even when you aren't good? Even when you aren't helpful? Even when you don't succeed? Even when you aren't happy? Even when you aren't tough? Even when you aren't perfect?

If you are finding your worth in ANYTHING other than God's deep love, mercy and grace for you then you are going to dry up. You are going to be so very thirsty. You will feel burdened.

Do you believe that you have to do or be something in order to be loved by God?

As we listen to this next song I'd like to ask you to consider these questions:

What Lie Do I Believe?

What Do I Think Makes Me Worthy?

What do I need to confess?

What do I need to resign from or repent of?

What do I need to declare or believe?

“Redeemed” Big Daddy Weave CD with Stefanie dancing

I declare. I am redeemed. You are redeemed. God said, I will buy you back. I will recover what is lost by Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. Friends if we will confess that we are looking to anything other than God to justify ourselves and then repent agreeing that there is not one darn thing we can do to make ourselves right before God and accept

the free gift of grace-Jesus' body broken for us and his blood poured out for us then God will redeem us. He will buy us back. He stands there waiting and saying we can stop fighting a fight that's already been won. Jesus loves us not for what we do or how well we behave but for who we are. He loved us first. And when we really grasp that we can be set free from the chains and allow him to do the healing and redemptive work in us and through us.

Thank God Redeemed.

As we close today, we are going to stand together and sing this next song. Reminded that it is God who changes us from the Inside Out. He is the one who Redeems us. His grace is sufficient for us. When we really know that not just here (points head) but here (in heart) we can lose ourselves, we can stop holding on to some ideal we will never meet 100% and

let him consume us from the inside out
transforming us into the men and women he
created us to be and as he does we will love
because he first loved us. We will forgive
because he forgave us first. We will give grace
because he gave us grace first.

Let me pray for you.

Let's stand and sing together.

“From the Inside Out” (Hillsong)