

**Build Something Great**

***Lose the Mask***

**August 20, 2017**

**PRE-SERVICE VIDEO**

**Worship Songs – Remind Me Who I Am /  
Beautiful things**

**Video – NHCC Behind the Scenes**

**Drama- Regarding Rodney  
Feature – “I Don’t Want to Be”**

Good morning everyone.

I think that drama and that song (in particular)  
is great way to begin this second message in our  
series “Build Something Great.”

I’m tired of looking ‘round rooms  
Wondering what I’ve got to do  
Or who I’m supposed to be  
I don’t want to be anything other than me.<sup>i</sup>

And yet ... if we were honest, most of us would have to admit: *that is just so hard to do.*

Even though we may not want to, so often we find ourselves trying to be something “other than me.”

- *We're* the liars.
- *We're* the imposters.
- *We're* the ones having the identity crisis.
- *We're* the ones who hide our weaknesses and our failures.
- *We're* the ones who try to look better than we really are.

But if we're going to build something great – whether it's a business or a family or a church or a team or even our own lives ... we have to do exactly the opposite. We have to *lose the mask* that hides the truth about us.

And that's what I want to talk about with you

this morning.

## **Series Background**

But before we get to that I want to give just a bit of a background into this series: why we're doing it and, more importantly, where it came from.

Throughout our history as a church, after people have been around North Heartland for a while, quite often they will say to me something like, "Rick, I'm not sure what it is but something about this church is different from other churches."

- When they say that they're typically not referring to our doctrine or theology. We're about as traditional "conservative evangelical" as you can be. I graduated from a Baptist seminary, we were planted by a Baptist church and we belong to the

Clay-Platte Baptist Association (as well as the Willow Creek Association).

- And when they say that they're typically not referring to how we do our services, which usually *are* different. I doubt any other church in our community is doing a Gavin DeGraw tune before the pastor speaks today.

Instead, what they're almost always picking up on is our *collective culture* and, specifically, our *values*: those things that are important to us as we go about doing life together as a body of believers; what we emphasize (and what we don't) as we attempt to produce ministry that ...

- Reaches seekers – people who don't know Jesus and are searching for something in their lives.
- Builds a family of believers – people who

do know Jesus and need the support and encouragement of one another as they grow and develop to be more like Him and less like themselves.

- And impacts our community in a way that increases both the reputation of Jesus and His bride, *the church – us, collectively*.

That's our three-fold mission statement: reach seekers, build a family and impact our community. That's why we're here.

But *the way we go about* accomplishing that mission; what it *feels like* to be part of that mission – that's our *culture* which is the product of living according to our *values* ... which, surprisingly, didn't become clear to us until about six years into our existence – around the year 2,000 – when we went through a bit of a rocky time as a congregation.

At that point ...

- *“Mobile church” was getting old.* We’d just moved our services to Park Hill South High School after having met at New Mark Middle School for five years. And it looked like that was going to continue indefinitely.
- *There were a lot of unmet expectations.* It seemed like people were constantly upset and disappointed about something.

In fact, one of the defining moments in the history of our church is what some of us old-timers affectionately refer to as the “spittin’ and cussin’” meeting: that day when our pastors and leadership team, after receiving a barrage of criticism (which made us all want to spit and cuss) ... that day when we sat on the deck of my house to debate whether with so many unhappy people *we should even continue* this thing called North Heartland Community Church. (Obviously, we decided that we should).

But it was right about then that a very wise person suggested to me that I call timeout for a while and get crystal clear on what exactly we were doing (and *not doing*) – our mission – and on what mattered (and *what did not*) as we carried out that mission – our values.

So, that's what I did. I went up on the mountain – literally, in Colorado – and I began to think about the things that God had impressed not just on me but on our pastors and key leaders through the first five years ... because, as I said last week, we learned so much about things we never imagined would be part of starting a church and growing a church.

And during that time on the mountain, it became very clear to me that there were six things that we kept coming back to over and over; six values God had led us to emphasize that gave us a unique perspective and a unique culture as a church.

And let me be clear about that. These six values don't make us better than other churches, just different. And different is good where church is concerned because it takes all kinds of churches to reach all kinds of people. And there are people, for instance, who will connect with NHCC who won't connect with Vineyard or Restore or Fellowship of Grace – and vice-versa ... even though all of us believe and teach basically the same things.

So, anyway, I came down from the mountain with what I thought were our six core values based on what God was doing in us and I presented them to our pastors and our Advisory Council. And after a little bit of tweaking here and there, we said “Ok, this is it. This is how we are going to shape our culture as a church going forward.”

And that's what we've tried to do over the years. And if we have at all made any move beyond



mediocrity towards greatness as a church, this – at least from a human perspective – is why. It’s our values.

And as a pastor, I obviously want to make sure you know (if this is your church) what these values are and how they shape our thinking ... which is one reason I’m doing this series.

But there’s another reason. After we nailed down our values and began to emphasize them consistently (especially among our leaders), we discovered something quite interesting; that these values are *transferrable*.

In other words, not only do they apply to what we’re doing as a church, they also apply to other organizations and systems such as businesses and teams and families.

In fact, my kids have on several occasions said that as they look back on their childhood, they can see how the way we “did church” influenced

how we “did family.” What was important to us in this culture spilled over into our family culture and it made our family different – *and better* ...

... which is why I said last week that whether you’re building a family, a business, a team, a ministry or just your own personal life ... these six values and their application are powerful. They are transformative. They will change *you* and whatever it is that you are building. They will help you move beyond *mediocrity* towards *greatness* - – which is the other reason why we’re doing this series.

Now, last week we talked about the first value which is a holistic perspective on what it means to be “successful”; broadening our definition to include *all three* elements that are present in whatever we’re trying to accomplish: the people, the process and the production.

If you were not here I strongly encourage you to

watch, listen to or read the message in the media section of our app and website – especially if you are in any kind of a leadership position (including family leadership). It will help you be a better leader.

## **The Value of Authenticity**

But, today we're going to talk about a second key to building something great ... which is to “lose the mask” – to be real with other people instead of pretending to be something you are not.

Around here we refer to it as the value of *authenticity* which we define a little differently than you might think of it, especially in the church world.

A lot of people when they hear that word in a Christian context take it to mean “oh, this person is always a true Christian through and

through at all times without hypocrisy.”

But there’s no such thing because every Christ-follower is in some way or another a hypocrite. Every Christian fails in some way or another to live up to the standard of God’s holiness and perfection. In fact, you can’t even *be* a Christian unless that’s true of you and *you admit to God* that’s true of you!

And to be authentic in a Christian sense means *not* hiding that; *not* pretending that isn’t true of you.

***Authenticity as (we define it) actually means being “appropriately transparent and vulnerable about our weaknesses and failures so that we give an accurate impression of what it means to follow Jesus.”***

We want to encourage and enable a culture where people who follow Jesus are appropriately transparent and vulnerable their

weaknesses and failures *so that* we give an accurate picture to the world around us of what it means to be a Christian.

And the reason we care about that; the reason this matters to us; the reason we want this to be characteristic of us collectively as a church is three-fold.

**Reason #1. First of all, the New Testament presents it as the normal pattern of behavior for Christ-followers.**

In other words, those of us who are Christians are *supposed* to be transparent and vulnerable about our weaknesses and failures.

The brother of Jesus, the Apostle James said it straight out:

*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. James 5:16 (NIV)*

And the healing he's talking about isn't just physical. It's healing from the damage that our weaknesses and failures have caused. But you can't pray about that with someone unless they are transparent and vulnerable; they confess their sins to you!

And then there's the example of the Apostle Paul the greatest Christian leader ever (other than Jesus) who shared throughout his letters that:

- He was the worst of sinners
- That he wanted to do right but kept doing wrong
- That God had said no to a prayer in order to keep him humble
- That he was wounded and angry at the rejection and mistreatment he had received

**Paul didn't wear a mask at all. In fact, he went so far as to say.**

*I will boast all the more gladly  
about my weaknesses, so that  
Christ's power may rest on me.  
2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)*

And then there's the example of Jesus Himself. Though he never sinned, he wasn't hesitant to share with his disciples those times when he felt weak.

**On the night before he was crucified, when  
He went to the Garden of Gethsemane ...**

*He took Peter, James and John  
along with him, and he began to  
be deeply distressed and  
troubled. "My soul is  
overwhelmed with sorrow to  
the point of death," he said to  
them. "Stay here and keep  
watch." Mark 14:33-34  
(NIV)*

If you're a Christian, appropriately sharing your weaknesses and failures is normative. It's just

what followers of Jesus do. And that's the first reason we care about this at NHCC.

The second reason we care gets more to the point of giving an accurate impression of what it means to follow Jesus. And that is that ...

**Reason #2. Many people wrongly believe that “church” is for those who have their act together.**

It is not.

When the religious leaders of Jesus' day complained about the kinds of people He hung out with – the tax collectors, prostitutes and other notorious sinners – Jesus answer was very direct:

*“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” Luke 5:31-32 (NIV)*



In other words, “I didn’t come for the people who think they’re already good enough but for those who know they are not.”

And when we who are Christians are not transparent and vulnerable about our own weaknesses and failures – when we wear the mask that hides the fact that we still struggle to be who God wants us to be – we can give off the impression that it’s the other way around; that those of us who are part of the church and follow Jesus *really are* a cut above everyone else ... which perpetuates the misconception that’s out there ... which has the effect of keeping away the very people who need Jesus.

I can’t count the number of people through the years who’ve told me they will not come to church because they think they’re not good enough compared to everyone else.

Even worse, not too long ago I heard about someone (a person who’s been part of this

church for a long time) who went through a messy divorce and was thinking about not coming to church anymore because they felt like they shouldn't be here. And it just broke my heart.

But more than that, it made me marvel at just how strong the perception is that church is for perfect people. It's not.

So that's the second reason authenticity is important to us.

The third reason we care about it also has to do with giving an accurate picture of what it means to be a follower of Jesus but from a slightly different angle. And that is that ...

**3. It is possible to give the false impression that the Christian life is one of continual bliss; that "knowing Jesus fixes everything."**

It does not. And Jesus was very direct about this as well.

*“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

*John 16:33 (NIV)*

And until He comes back and sets all things to rights; until He returns to renew and restore and regenerate everything – Christians are going to get sick and die like everyone else. We’re going to be cheated and mistreated just like everyone else.

Now, the difference is and the promise is that Jesus will be with us and give us strength to walk through the valley. But there is no escaping the valley. That’s reality.

And if those of us who are believers in and followers of Jesus never talk about the valley when we experience it; when we wear the mask of “happy, happy, joy, joy” because we think that’s what’s expected of Christians – we

perpetuate the myth ... which has the effect of making people think “something must be wrong with me” (or worse, “something must be wrong with God”) when life isn’t all roses and there is pain and suffering.

## **Side Benefits**

So, I think you can see why it matters to us as a church that we give an accurate impression to people about following Jesus, a real and true picture – and why losing the mask, being real, being appropriately transparent and vulnerable about our weaknesses and failures is so critical to accomplishing that.

But let’s get out of the “church world” for just a minute. How will this make a difference for someone who is building a family or someone building a business or a team? How does this help in building something great?

Three ways – and actually, these things also happen in the church world. In other words, as pastors and leaders of this congregation, over the years we've seen these benefits impact our ministry as well.

**Benefit #1. Being real – being appropriately transparent and vulnerable – makes you more approachable and trustworthy.**

And if you're a parent or a boss or an owner or a coach that's a good thing.

And I'll let Peter Lencioni, who studies businesses and writes excellent books such as *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, explain why this is true:

“Most executives have more than enough skill and intelligence to be wildly successful. What sets the best ones apart is their ability to know their limitations, surround themselves with others who fill their gaps, and perhaps most important of

all, freely and openly admit to others that they are aware of and comfortable with their shortcomings.

“These leaders attract and retain the best employees, and inspire them to be vulnerable too. As a result, they build companies that clients trust, stick with and enthusiastically recommend to others.

**On the other hand, he continues:**

“In business and politics [and I would add families to this] we watch leader after leader defend themselves, deny responsibility for mistakes, and reject offers of assistance seemingly unaware that the long-term impact of their defensiveness is a growing distrust among the very people whose support and loyalty they need.”<sup>ii</sup>

Being real makes you more approachable and

trustworthy.

- Leaders who share where they have had to overcome obstacles or are struggling with hard things are more easily followed than the ones who look like they never had to struggle.
- Parents who confess their failure and can say “I’m sorry,” are a lot easier to identify with and trust.

We simply cannot trust people who are too “perfect.”

**Benefit #2. Being real encourages others that they can overcome, too.**

And people need that encouragement.

Not too long ago, I counseled with a guy who has a lot of personality characteristics that are similar to mine. And I shared with him some of

the things I've struggled with especially in how I relate to other people including my wife and my kids. I got pretty detailed on that stuff.

And then I talked about some of the ways that the Lord and others have helped me grow in those areas so that I'm not as bad as I used to be.

You know what he said?

“Well, if Rick McGinniss can get better at these things, then I can too because Rick McGinniss is no more special than I am.”

And I said, “That's exactly right. I am no more special to God than you or anyone else.”

**That's because ... as the Apostle Paul explains:**

*We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.      2*



*Corinthians 4:7 (NIV)*

And when you're appropriately transparent and vulnerable about the jar of clay – your own weaknesses and failures – that has the effect of illuminating where the power is coming from. It's not me. It's God.

And if God's working in me, he can work in you, too.

Now, obviously, that's a Christian example but the principle works in any area.

**Benefit #3. Being real with others allows *them* to help *you* move beyond mediocrity towards greatness.**

When I share with someone about how I struggle with being insensitive or too easily angered, it gives them freedom to speak into my life about that issue when it's necessary. And that's a good thing.

*As iron sharpens iron so one  
person sharpens another.  
Proverbs 27:17 (NIV)*

We need people in our life who will be honest with us, telling us where we are wrong and where we need to change ... without condemning us.<sup>iii</sup>

And we get that by first being honest with them.

## **Getting Real**

And I wish I had more time to talk about that one but I know that right about now some of you are thinking:

“Rick, this is a very nice picture you’re painting for everyone but let’s get real: *you’re not being real about being real with people because it’s not all sweetness and light.* When you take off the mask and you let people see the real you – your weaknesses and failures, you’re taking a

huge risk. You're trusting those persons to handle what you share with them in an appropriate manner.

“And let's be honest: *people don't always do that*. Sometimes they break confidence and blab it out to those with whom you would not want to share it. And sometimes they actually turn around and use it against you.

“So, no thanks. The risk is not worth the reward.”

And if that's what you're thinking, let me assure you *I get that* because over the years, I've been burned, too.

One of the things people often say about my preaching is that they like that I share some of my struggles with being the person God wants me to be.

I once had a person get onto our Advisory

Council because she had heard me talk about my insensitivity to people. And she wanted to fix me and fix the church. And when I didn't handle a certain situation the way she thought I should, she wrote me a long angry letter quitting the council and leaving the church because of it.

And it hurt. Not because what she was saying didn't have some truth to it, but because it was the first time she'd ever said anything about this character flaw until she opened up with both guns and mowed me down.

On another occasion, I shared with the Advisory Council in confidence (I thought) about a struggle we were having with one of our daughters and a boy. About a week later, someone from the church stopped me and gave me their opinion of why what Jetta and I were doing in that situation was wrong.

I said, "How do you even know about this?"

He said, “Our small group discussed it last week.”

Turns out that the leader of that group was a member of our council.

I said, “I don’t think that’s any of your business.”

He said, “Well, you’re the pastor. Everything you do is our business.”

I was not happy. And it was tempting to say, “OK, that’s it. I’m going to keep the mask firmly in place. No more transparency and vulnerability.”

## **Best Practices**

And that *is* an option. But there’s another way – one that doesn’t remove the risk but mitigates it.

**Actually, the risk never goes away. As one author puts it:**

“To be vulnerable is to voluntarily place yourself in a situation that might bring pain for the sake of a larger purpose.”<sup>iv</sup>

... which is all of the benefits we’ve been talking about to this point ... because in what whatever it is you’re trying to build – whether it’s your family, your business, your church, your team or your own personal life – you’re not going to move beyond mediocrity towards greatness without losing the mask.

So, what we need to do is to be wise in how we do it ... which is to be *appropriately* transparent and vulnerable about our weaknesses and failures ... because there are some things that are *inappropriate* when it comes to authenticity.

And I could give you a long list of that kind of thing but instead I’m just going to give you four things we’ve learned around here; four best

practices when it comes to the value and application of authenticity.

**Practice #1. Share general weaknesses and failures widely, but specifics with only a few (your “circle of trust”).**

It’s interesting that even though the Apostle Paul didn’t hesitate to write that ...

- He had issues with coveting what others had
- That he struggled with sin and lost
- That he had a “thorn in his flesh”

... even though he writes about those things, he doesn’t provide the details of *what* he coveted, nor what his deepest sins were, nor what the thorn was.

That information he reserved for the Lord in prayer and maybe for people like Titus and Timothy and the personal friends and

companions who did life and ministry with him every day.<sup>v</sup>

For me, I've decided that only a few people will hear all the specifics ... Rusty Savage for example.

**Practice #2. Never share a “live issue” beyond the circle of trust.**

Being authentic for all the good purposes and benefits we're talking about today doesn't require that and, in a lot of cases, it's actually counterproductive.

Stories I've told you this morning are months, years and even decades old. They're not live issues. There's no possibility that me telling you this is going to hurt any of those people. Most of them aren't even here anymore.



But even though they aren't live, they've been helpful to you. They've given you an accurate impression of what it's like to follow Jesus even when you mess up.

So, best practice: don't talk about your current struggles with just anyone. Hold it until later when you have resolved it and it can be told without incriminating others.

I think the closest I've ever gotten to this line was when I talked about my mom and healing a few weeks ago. It was a live issue for me and it was very risky – I was very nervous because I knew she was listening and I didn't want to hurt her ... which, thankfully, I didn't.

**Practice #3. Share only with those who can bear what you share.**

And that's not everyone; maybe not even everyone in your circle of trust.

Years ago, there was a couple in this church who were having marital issues and they believed in authenticity to a fault and so they called their family together and said, ““Kids, mom and dad are struggling and we might get a divorce. But stay tuned.”

Now, they didn't get a divorce. They worked it out. But it was very unfair and inappropriate to put that kind of burden on those kids. They could have been honest but they didn't have to share at that level.

Share only with those who can bear what you share or tone it down. Some people don't need to know everything.

**Practice #4. Beware of using authenticity as an excuse *not* to grow.**

As wonderful and freeing as it is to be willing and able to appropriately share our weaknesses and failures, it can also become a trap if it is seen

as an end in itself.

“When our community is built upon our collective brokenness, it [can] become uncool to pursue wholeness. When we unite around our sin, it [can] become more uncomfortable to break out of it—we feel like we’d lose our community in the process.”<sup>vi</sup>

The purpose of authenticity (and I’m speaking to a specifically Christian purpose) is to say to others “I’m a jar of clay – a cracked pot – but Jesus loves me just as I am and He will love you, too, just as you are.”

And that’s good news but it’s not the whole good news.

The *whole* good news is that Jesus loves us just as we are but He loves us too much to *leave us* just as we are.

The ultimate purpose of being authentic and

transparent and vulnerable is *redemption*.<sup>vii</sup>

## God and the Mask

And that redemption that begins by being authentic and honest with God first about our weaknesses and failures; taking off the mask with Him.

And then, trusting that because of Jesus and what He did for us on the cross, we are no longer defined by those weaknesses and failures – let’s call it what it is: *our sin*; we’re no longer defined by that but by God’s acceptance of us. He knows our deepest, darkest secrets, yet still chooses to love us and transform us.

He’s the God who, as we sang earlier in this service, “makes beautiful things out of the dust” and He will do that for you if you will be real with Him.

Let's pray.

## Feature - The Real Me

### CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Next week – If you want to build something great you have to *Put the First Thing First* (maybe the hardest value we have)
2. As you are leaving check out the “small group fair” ... a great way to get into a community that is actually intended to be transparent and vulnerable.

### Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> From Gavin McGraw's song, I Don't Wanna Be

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[http://www.jobdig.com/articles/1790/The\\_Most\\_Important\\_Leadership\\_Trait\\_You\\_Shun.html](http://www.jobdig.com/articles/1790/The_Most_Important_Leadership_Trait_You_Shun.html)

iii

[https://drcloud.com/article/how\\_safe\\_relationships\\_are\\_built\\_on\\_boundaries\\_and\\_vulnerability](https://drcloud.com/article/how_safe_relationships_are_built_on_boundaries_and_vulnerability)

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- iv Strong Women, Soft Hearts by Paula Rinehart. Quotes at <https://www.namb.net/flourish-blog/vulnerability-the-currency-of-bravery>
- v <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2013/november/redemptive-vulnerability.html>
- vi <http://www.millenniaevangelical.com/dismantling-the-facade-of-authentic-vulnerability/>
- vii <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/give-your-weakness-to-god>