

COVID Church
Playing the Long Game
September 27, 2020

Good morning everyone. Whether you're onsite or online, I'm glad you've taken the time to join us today.

That song is such a great way to begin this final message in our "COVID Church" series because it provides a really good framework in which to summarize the main idea from each week.

Specifically, in the first week of the series we talked about how Jesus befriended an outcast, sinful, traitorous tax collector by the name of Matthew ...

... who then turned around and threw a huge party for all of *his* outcast, sinful, traitorous tax collecting friends and their families so that

they could meet Jesus and get to know him like *he* had gotten to know Jesus ...

All of which totally freaked out the religious leaders of His day because *they* said, "people like *that* aren't worthy of God's attention."

They said, "people like that don't matter and should be shunned."

Of course, that how "religion" always works. It constantly tells us, "you don't matter unless you measure up."

But Jesus saw it differently.

What *He* said – and what He *says* is ...

"You don't measure up ... but you still matter to Me."

"You are still loved. You are still valuable. You

are still worth saving. Your salvation is worth dying for.

“And *that* is who *I* say you are.”

And only as we root our identity in *that truth* and *that grace* will we ever become what God intends for us to become and what we ourselves want to become.

... which leads to what we talked about *last* Sunday in the second message of this series – what God intends for us to become.

And when it comes to *that*, what God says is ...

“You were made for more.”

You were made to be more than you are right now.

You can be a better man, a better woman, a better spouse, a better friend, a better student. You can be a better everything than you are today.

You can be more loving, more creative, more hopeful, more focused, more courageous, and more forgiving than you are today.

In fact, if you're a Christian – someone who believes that Jesus of Nazareth was God in the flesh and who follows in His way of life ...

If you're a Christian, *that's what's supposed to happen to you.*

God says that who you are is someone who, over time, looks more and more like Jesus in your thoughts, attitudes, and actions ... and less like you.

Or, as we put it last Sunday, the great

expectation of your salvation is your transformation.

The great expectation of your salvation is your transformation.

Now, the point of *last* Sunday's message – as well as the *first* Sunday's message in this series – was that ...

- Regardless of what happens with the coronavirus going forward ...
- Regardless of what happens in the upcoming election ...
- Regardless of what happens with regard to racial justice or BLM ...
- Regardless of any other crazy thing that might happen ...

The heart of North Heartland will still be to do what Matthew did for his distant-from-God friends and their families:

To create an *environment* and an *experience* where we can bring people to the “party” and have them meet Jesus.

... which is why we *do* what we *do* ... and *don't* do what we *don't* do ... that a lot of other churches *do do*.

In addition, regardless of whatever happens in our world, we as a church are still committed ...

To providing *environments* and *experiences* where people who were “made for more” can *become* more.

And here at North Heartland, those are pretty simple and straightforward but, if you consistently engage in them, over time, what it will do for you is profound. It will change

your life.

Specifically, what we invite people to do – what we invite you to do – and help you to do (whether you're a Christian or not) is to ...

- *Connect with God* by coming to services or watching online.
- *Join a small group* because you can't grow spiritually unless you're connected relationally.
- *Develop your potential* by increasing your knowledge and learning new skills through various core and special interest classes we offer.
- *Impact the world around you* by ...

... well, that's what I'm going to talk to you

about today.

Called to Be a Giver

Because not only does God say ...

- You are someone who still matters to Him in spite of your sin and failure to measure up ...
- And you are someone who is made for more than whatever your life is right now ...

God *also* says ...

And, by the way, I should let you know that what I'm about to talk about is directed at those who are Christians.

If you're not a Christian, you're not obligated to believe this or embrace this in any way.

You're *welcome* to if you want to. But you don't *have* to.

If you're a Christian, in addition to being ...

- Someone who matters to Him ...
- And someone who is made for more ...

God *also* says that ...

“As one who has *received* much, you are called to *give* much.”

As one who has received much you are called to give much.

And, if you're a Christian, you *have* received much.

- You have received the free gift of forgiveness for all your sins – past, present, future, known and unknown.

- You have received the promise that God will work all things together for your good because of His love for you.
- You have received the presence of the Holy Spirit and membership in the Body of Christ, the church, both of which empower you to become all that God wants you to be.
- You have received the hope of future redemption and eternal life in a new kind of body that will never get sick or die.

And the list could go on and on because, as a Christian, you have received much.

And, as one who has *received* much ... you are called to *give* much.

BTW, Jesus *literally* said that.

"From everyone who has been given much, much will be required.

*"And from the one who has been entrusted with much, even more will be asked."
Luke 12:48 (NET)*

If you're a Christian, you're not just a receiver.
You're also a giver.

That's who you are.

That's who God says you are.

And until you understand that and believe that and embrace that, you will not have the life you were meant to have. You will not become who you were meant to become ...

... which is why, on that list of environments

and experiences that we try to provide at NHCC ...

We include that fourth one: “impact the world around you.”

... because impacting the world around you doesn't happen unless you become a giver.

It requires you ...

- To become *concerned* about things beyond your own little world – *your family, your career, your hobbies, your comfort, your whatever.*
- And then to *take* something from your world ...
- And then to *contribute* that to the world beyond your world.

If you're a Christian, you're not just a *receiver*.

You're also a *giver*.

What We All Have

So, the question is ... what is it that you have that you can give?

Well, there are lots of ways to describe it but, for me, the one that is easiest to remember and covers 95% of what we *all* have that we can give is sometimes called "The Three Ts."

Time, Talent and Treasure.

Time, talent and treasure.

Now, obviously, we all have those in differing amounts.

- Some of us have lots of time and some have not so much.

Some of us are retired (or we've been laid off because of COVID).

Some of us simply don't have to work because we've been blessed with lots of treasure.

Some of us are past the child raising stage or, we don't have kids.

But some of us are overwhelmed by kids.

And some of us are in jobs that extremely demanding, especially right now.

And we don't have a lot of time.

- Some of us have lots of talent and some have not so much.

Some of us can sing or play an

instrument.

Some of us have a creative eye and ability: we know how to build things.

Some of us know how to talk to people in a way that brings healing in their life.

Some of us love on people through food and making them feel at home.

And some of us ... well, let's just say we should never get near a stage or hold a hammer or stand next to a stove ... unless it's on fire and we're putting it out.

We don't have a lot of talent.

- And some of us have lots of treasure and some have not so much.

Some of us have \$1M in our 401K, some

of us have \$5M and some of us even have \$10M.

Some of us have vacation homes and boats and cars and all kinds of things, which is awesome. We have received much!

And some of us, well ... we'll probably never see those kinds of numbers or possessions listed beside our name.

Point being ... we all have time, talent and treasure in differing amounts.

But – and this is the important part ...

All of us have all three of those things at some level.

And, at whatever level we *do* have them, *all are gifts*. All of what we have – time, talent, treasure – has been received.

And if we're Christians, since we're not just *receivers*, we're also *givers* ...

"Whoa whoa whoa ... hang on just a minute, Rick!"

"I'm not sure I agree with what you're saying because, quite frankly, I've worked *hard* for what I have. I *developed* my talent. I *earned* my treasure."

OK. I won't argue with you about that.

But what if you'd been born in Syria? Or China? Or in some other backwards, unindustrialized, repressive, or war-torn country. You'd have nowhere near what you have today.

Truth is you were way ahead at the very beginning of the game.

You were *privileged* to be born in this time, in this place, with these opportunities to maximize your time, talent and treasure in the way you have.

And *that is* a gift you've received.

And, if you're a Christian, since you're not just a *receiver*; you're also a *giver* ...

... some of your time, your talent and your treasure should be given to God for the benefit of people and causes outside of your own little world.

“Giving” Defined

So, how do you do that, specifically?

Well, there are so many ways and, quite frankly, we could spend hours brainstorming about it.

But because my purpose in this series is to talk about ...

- How North Heartland can still *be* North Heartland
- And *do* what North Heartland is supposed to do ...
- ... even in the middle of a pandemic ...

I'm going to narrow the focus.

I'm going to talk to you about what we do to help people give of their time, talent, and treasure to God's work among us and in this community.

And, remember, that's what pastors and ministry leaders are supposed to be doing ...

... which is why the Apostle Paul once wrote

...

These are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers.

Their responsibility is to do God's work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

No, wait a minute. I read that wrong.

That's what most people *think* pastors and ministry leaders are to be doing, but that's not what Paul says.

He says that God gave ministry leaders to the church, and ...

Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the

body of Christ.
Ephesians 4:11-12 (NLT)

Contrary to what most people think, it's not the pastor's job to do God's work and build up the church. *All of us* – assuming we're Christians – are responsible for that.

The pastor's job – my job (at least part of it), and part of the job of every person on our ministry staff ...

- Is to teach you and train you and help you (if this is your church) ...
- Give of your time, talent, and treasure ...
- So that *the church* (meaning all of us) ...
- ... is built up.

Paul continues ...

*As each part does its own
special work ...*

In other words, as each person in the church is equipped by the pastors and ministry leaders ... and giving of their time, talent and treasure ...

*... it helps the other parts
grow, so that the whole body
is healthy and growing and
full of love. Ephesians 4:17
(NLT)*

And when *that* happens – when the church is healthy and growing and full of love, we collectively impact the world because ...

- We're able to be a place where we can invite our distant-from-God family friends to meet Jesus and know Jesus like we know Jesus.

- And we're able to a church that helps people who were "made for more" become "more."

It's a pretty incredible plan.

Now, obviously, if you're not a Christian, you probably don't care about that. But, if you are, this is fundamental to your growth and development.

Sometimes around here we say that ...

Getting the work of God "done" is one of the ways that God gets *us* "done."

Getting the work of God "done" is one of the ways that God gets us "done." Giving of our time, talent and treasure is one of the processes that God uses in our transformation.

And that's amazing because not only do we

help the church grow and impact the world, we also help ourselves grow. It's a win-win in every sense of the term.

So, what are we doing here, at NHCC, to help people experience that?

It's really pretty simple. It comes down to two main things.

When you give away some of your treasure, that's called *generosity*.

When you give away some of your time and/or your talent, that's called *volunteering*.

Therefore, one of our goals as pastors and teachers and ministry leaders is to make it possible for people ...

- To be generous with their personal

financial assets ...

- And to volunteer in some area of our ministry.

And what I want to do in the rest of this message is talk to you about how you can be involved if you're not already.

Our Motivation

But, before I get to that, I need to say a few things about the motivation behind all of this because "giving" (whether it's of our time or talent or treasure) is where a lot of people fall into the ditch when it comes to church.

And the way it happens is they start coming to a church and they like the music or they like the preaching or they like the people they meet or they just like the vibe of the whole thing ...

And then the pastor starts talking about financially supporting the ministry of the church through generosity and enabling the church to accomplish its mission in the community through volunteering.

And they start feeling pressure.

They start hearing things the pastor isn't really saying like, "if you're not giving X percent of your income, you're a terrible Christian. If you're not serving every week in Children's Ministry, you're a terrible Christian."

Or they start thinking, "All that pastor cares about ... all he wants from us is our time, talent and treasure. Time, talent, and treasure, that's all we ever hear about.

"It's just a big money grab. It's just so he can

make a name for himself by having a big church and all that.”

And I understand why people would think that because, sometimes, pastors – myself included – don’t do a very good job of communicating about these things.

Or, sometimes, because we feel pressure about these things, we subconsciously communicate that pressure and then everyone else feels it, and things go downhill from there.

So, before we go any further, let me be clear about the spirit in which we invite people into generosity and volunteerism at North Heartland.

That’s not to say we always get it 100% right. Sometimes we don’t. But this is our heart. And these are the words and ideas that guide

those of us who are leading this church.

First of all, Paul once wrote:

You must each make up your own mind as to how much you should give. Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure.

*For God loves the person who gives cheerfully. 2
Corinthians 9:7 (NLT)*

Paul is saying that God gave to us willingly and we should give back to Him in the same manner. And if we can't, we shouldn't.

So, at NHCC, if you feel like you're being pressured or taken advantage of or manipulated, we don't want you to contribute financially or to volunteer.

We really don't because that will eventually lead to bitterness and to burnout. And

bitterness and burnout are terribly destructive to your heart and to your spiritual life.

Now, that doesn't mean that being financially generous or serving in a ministry area is always going to be easy. It doesn't mean it's always going to be sweetness and light.

In fact, sometimes, it's going to be hard. Sometimes, to contribute financially or to volunteer is going to push you to your limit.

But that's OK because, Paul says ...

*God will generously provide
all you need. 2
Corinthians 9:8 (NLT)*

One of the absolute laws of the spiritual world is that you cannot give away what you do not already have ... which means that God has to be giving it to you before you give it back to

Him.

That's what Paul is saying God will do.

So, at NHCC, if God isn't providing the financial resources for you to contribute and isn't providing the energy for you to serve, then we *don't want you to do those things.*

Otherwise, you will become bitter and burned out. And bitterness and burnout are terribly destructive to your heart and to your spiritual life.

In fact, do you know what the absolute worst thing is that could happen here at North Heartland?

It wouldn't be if we didn't have enough money or enough volunteers to do ministry. We can figure out how to handle both of those scenarios. And, through the years, we *have*.

The absolute worst thing that could happen would be ...

For people to do the work of God in a way that destroys the work of God in them.

If people who are contributing financially or serving in ministry were to become so bitter or so burned out because of their generosity or their volunteering that they lost their love for God and for people ...

That would be the worst thing that could happen at North Heartland.

And those are not idle words or some pious platitude. This is a non-negotiable for us.

In fact ...

- There have been times when we have cancelled major events and shut down ministry programs because that's what

was happening to the staff and volunteers who were running them.

- There have been times we have asked people to stop volunteering for a period of time because that's what was happening to them. They were becoming bitter and burned out.
- We've even asked people to resign their staff position over this.

That's how serious we are about it.

We are committed to the principle that no one here will do the work of God in a way that destroys the work that God is trying to do in them, which is to make them more like Jesus.

And, as I talk about getting involved in generosity and volunteering, I want you to have that in mind because that's what's in the

mind of those who are responsible for leading this church.

Oh, and one more thing that is in our thinking.

And this one comes from Jesus, who once said ...

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal."

Matthew 6:19-21 (NIV)

Jesus is saying that you and I – if we're Christians and following Him ...

Jesus is saying that you and I can play the short game or the long game when it comes to our time, talent, and treasure.

- We can spend it all on making our present life pleasant and comfortable. And when we die, it will all die with us – assuming that someone doesn't take it from us before that happens.

That's the short game.

- Or, we can invest our time, talent, and treasure in the work of His Kingdom where it will pay eternal dividends in the life to come.

That's the long game.

And I want you to play the long game. *I want to play the long game.*

And I don't want you to look at me in Heaven someday and say, "Rick, why didn't you guys provide the opportunity to give in ways that would have impacted our eternity? You could have invited us to invest our time, talent, and treasure in the work of God. But you didn't."

So, this is part of our motivation as well. I want you to take some of it with you when you go.

At NHCC

Now, with all that said, I think I'm *finally* ready to talk to you about generosity and volunteering here at North Heartland.

And, again, if you're not a Christian or this is not your church or if this brings up bitterness in you, then you can take a pass on this.

Of course, if you're *bitter* about this issue, as your pastor, I would suggest that you figure

out how to deal with that because, according to Jesus, you're actually *hurting* yourself in the long run by not giving of your time, talent, and treasure to God's work.

Now, generosity is pretty simple to understand.

Generosity is the premeditated, calculated, designated emancipation of our personal financial assets.

By *premeditated*, I mean that you have you have *planned* to be a financial contributor. You've organized your financial life, and this is a major part of it. So, you don't give only on the spur of the moment or when motivated by guilt.

By *calculated*, I mean you have decided *when* and *how much* you're going to give. You've chosen to give a specific amount or percentage of your income and you give that

every week or every month.

By *designated*, I mean you have decided where you're going to give. And, at NHCC, you have several choices which I'll explain in just a minute.

And by *emancipation*, I mean that you are setting some of your personal financial assets free so that you are free. By emancipation, I mean that you are not possessed by your possessions.

That's what generosity – giving of your "treasure" – is.

Now, to do that at North Heartland ...

- If you're onsite, you can drop a check or cash in the offering boxes we have set up around the building. Because of COVID, we don't pass the basket

anymore. And it's going to be that way for however long.

- And whether you're onsite or online, you can also go to the giving tab on our website or the serve/give tab on our app, where you can automate your contributions AND also choose *where* to give.

As you can see in the dropdown list on that page, we have several funds to which you can donate ...

... although I should say that the one that's most important to our ongoing ministry and operations is, shockingly, our "ministry and operations" fund.

If no one gives to *that*, then the other ones really won't matter because we won't be here.

So, if you're just starting out in your generosity involvement at NHCC, that's where you should give first.

I should also mention that we're almost to the end of a ...

... a special project called *The Cool and Dry Summer Challenge*.

As you can see on the slide, our goal was to raise \$700K to replace our roof and our ancient and temperamental boiler/chiller system.

At this point, we've raised about \$430K which will allow us to do the roof and, hopefully, upgrade some parts of the building that are heated and cooled by the boiler/chiller system.

And we're so appreciative of everyone who has contributed to this point, but I'm bringing

this up because I suspect that some of you – maybe some who have those big numbers in your 401Ks – have forgotten about this.

Or maybe you were waiting until the end to see how much you should contribute to help us finish it off.

If that's you, then I'm here to tell you that the time has come. Summer is over.

And if you want to contribute, go to the giving page and select “Cool & Dry” from the dropdown list.

I should also add that you can directly donate stock or other assets which will avoid taxes on the sale. To do that, please contact our office directly.

So, that's how you can give of your “treasure” here at NHCC.

Now, as to *volunteering* ... this one is a little more complex. This one is a little more involved because there are so many ways to be involved and so many different levels of commitment that those ways require.

And because of that, I think it might be helpful for you to have a more personal context, so I want to show you a video we made this week of a few of our volunteers.

And then, after that, I'm going to talk to you about how to get involved with volunteering, as well as about *a huge challenge* we are now facing because the recent increase of coronavirus cases in our area.

And this is a really big deal. It's no exaggeration to say that we're at a crossroads.

So, watch this video. And if you're watching online, don't go away. Stay with us and I'll be back.

Here we go ...

Now, I think you can see from those fine folks some of the benefits of volunteering and serving in ministry and I hope it encourages you, if you're not volunteering, to at least think about it.

And if you would like to know more about being involved, there are two main opportunities I want to make you aware of.

The first one I would say is our preferred method.

It's our volunteer class which happens

Sunday Oct 18th from 12-2pm.

We picked that day because there's no Chiefs' game which will make it a lot easier for everyone to attend.

Now, the reason this is the preferred method is because we teach in that class, among other things, how to serve in a healthy way so that you don't get bitter or burned out.

We also help you figure out how your talents and your interests match up with our ministry needs, which is really important because, when there is a match, it's a lot easier to avoid bitterness and burn out.

So, if you want to sign up for that, you can do so under the "Sign Me Up" tab on our website or the Events Tab on our app.

And you can take the class in person or

virtually via Zoom.

The Challenge

Now, I want to talk to you about the second opportunity to get involved in volunteering *which is not our preferred method* of getting people in the game.

But it's necessary for us to do it this way because of an immediate and critical challenge we are now facing.

Back in the beginning of July, we decided to "re-open" at a reduced capacity for three reasons.

1. We heard from so many people – about half of our congregation – how much they *needed* to be here onsite.
2. Cases in our area were almost non-

existent.

3. And we could, through masks and distancing, avoid contributing to the spread.

And since we have re-opened, so many people who have come onsite have been so appreciative, even to the point of tears. In the same way that moving so much of our ministry online has met a critical need, resuming in-person ministry has met a critical need.

And we're really happy about that.

But we have a problem.

- We are doing the same amount of ministry onsite as we were doing pre-COVID.
- Plus, we're also providing additional

ministry to connect with those who are offsite (which is about half of our folks).

I'm talking about things like additional virtual activities and the food truck events. Basically, we're trying to maintain two congregations, which is fine.

- But we're doing all of this with half the volunteers we had previously (because half of our congregation doesn't feel comfortable being onsite).

And just to be clear, if you're worried about being onsite, that's OK. We get it. There's no shame in that ... unless, of course, it's an excuse to be lazy and watch services in your jammies just because you can.

But that's beside the point.

Because, the bigger problem is, the scenario I just described is a prescription for bitterness and burnout.

And it's going to get even worse because, as most of you know, coronavirus cases are increasing in our area ...

... which means that, going forward, some of our current staff and volunteers are going to be out of the game because they've tested positive or they're having to quarantine.

In fact, it's already happening. I'm the only staff person who has had it to this point, but last weekend we were down two staff members *not* because *they* were positive, but because they'd been exposed to *others* who had tested positive.

On top of that, we were also down several key volunteers because they had tested positive.

So, I'm not exaggerating when I say that last Sunday was *the most stressful day* we have had in years because of the shortage of volunteers.

And over the next couple of months this is likely going to increase as more people become positive or are exposed to those who are positive or, quite frankly, simply become more nervous about being here.

... which means that, as a church, we're at a crossroads and we have a decision to make because *we're not going to do the work of God in a way that destroys the work of God in us.*

And we are dangerously close to that already and quickly heading in that direction.

So last Wednesday, I told our staff that we have two options.

**Option 1 is to roll back to “online only” or
“live studio audience” ...**

... where we don't have hospitality or greeters or coffee or children's ministry or student ministry and everything else on Sunday morning.

And when I said that, I'm telling you there were tears.

“No, we cannot do that! Do you know how many people are desperate to be here? Do you understand what this means to them?”

I said, “Yes, I do.”

“But I also understand that we – meaning staff and volunteers – cannot do the work of God in a way that destroys the work of God in us. We can't keep doing what we're doing ...”

**... which leads to option 2, which is to
recruit a bunch of short-term volunteers ...**

... people who would agree to serve for a season; for 12 weeks; from now until the last Sunday of December so that we can get through this crisis.

So, what are we going to do?

We're going to ask God to lead and guide us. And here's how we're going to do that. Two things.

1. First, we're taking a one-week pause from onsite ministry next Sunday.

We're going to get off the treadmill for one week and spend some time connecting with God and restoring our souls.

In fact, that's the title of next week's service: *Restoring Your Soul*, which is week one of our next series "Get a Grip" – *taking control of your emotions before they take control of you* ...

... which, quite frankly, is what I need in my life right now and you do, too.

So, don't show up onsite. No one will be here but me, the band and a handful of tech people.

But don't use that as an opportunity to go to the lake or ride your horse or play golf.

Instead, tune in online at 9:30 or 11:00 along with every other person who calls NHCC "home."

And, if you have kids, have them watch with you because it will only last about 40-45

minutes and there won't be a sermon, just a time of guided worship that helps us, well, restore our souls.

So, next Sunday, a one-week pause. That's the first thing we're doing.

2. Second, we're asking everyone to consider saying "YES" to volunteering – onsite or offsite – for 12 weeks, from now through the last Sunday in December.

... because there are things that those who are offsite can do in this effort, too.

And we'll see what happens.

If God generously provides (in the words of the Apostle Paul), we'll keep doing what we're doing.

If not, then we will take it to be His will for us to do something different for a season and

trust that, even then, He will enable us to be who we're meant to be as a church.

Conclusion

Now, here's how we're going to end this service.

The band is coming out to do a song which reiterates why it matters that we give of our time, talent and treasure.

And while they're doing this song, if this is your church (or even if it's not), I want you to take out your smartphone or your tablet or your laptop and go to our website – www.northheartland.org.

And this is what you'll see.

The main page has been replaced by the

SAY YES page.

And what I want you to do is to click on the button which says "JOIN US" ...

... which will take you to *this* page.

And when you get there, scroll down and read the descriptions on the right side of the page.

It says "Attendee Types" but you can pretend it says "volunteer opportunities."

Look through those – including the OFFSITE opportunities to volunteer at the bottom of the list (there are quite a few of those) ...

And then scroll back up and hit the register button ...

... which will take you to *this* page.

And when you get there, click on the

dropdown list ...

... which will show you the list you read on the first page ...

... and pick the one that you're willing to talk to someone about ... and then follow the prompts to submit your response.

And just to be clear, you're not actually signing up to *do* anything. You're signing up *to be contacted* THIS WEEK by a ministry leader who will explain what the volunteer position entails.

And if you decide to say yes, they'll give you the short version of training and get you hooked up with the existing team and get you going ... whether we continue doing onsite ministry or make a change to something else.

Let's pray.

Endnotes