

I. Introduction

- A. Thank you for worshipping with us today. Before we get into today's message, I want to do some church upkeep. We want you to know a few things that are going on and ask for your help and prayers.
- B. Jesus told His church to go into all the world and make disciples of everybody possible. This is Christ's great commission to every generation of Christians. The mission of Neighborhood Church is to mobilize an army to fulfill the Great Commission. We are here to multiply disciples. It's team effort.
- C. We have a great team. Literally, over a thousand people who regularly pray, serve, work with children, lead worship, clean, set up, counsel, feed, love and give. Your sacrifice makes our church what it is.
- D. Proverbs 27:23 says, "Be diligent to know the state of your flocks." We do our best and we want to celebrate the fact that last year, in calendar year 2007, we saw a whole lot of people, young and old, receive Jesus as their Savior.
- E. Do you want to know the number? We don't do this to brag, but to celebrate, say thank you for your part and give all glory to God. Last year, 536 people received Jesus as their Savior in our ministries here at NCR.
- F. In the last three years, there has been 1,452 professions of faith. We don't claim to know people's hearts. We don't know how genuine those professions are. But God knows and we're so glad for each one of you who crossed the threshold into new life with God.
- G. Now, the big focus of your life needs to be growing up in Christ. Spiritual growth. I'm going to talk about that in a minute.

II. Speaking of growth

- A. Speaking of growth, we've had some major numerical growth spurts recently. In fact, last weekend we had an all time record attendance at Neighborhood Church. We had over 2,200 people through our buildings. Counting worship services only, 1,750 people attended.
- B. We don't really advertise, we're not out drumming up worshippers and we don't have an evangelism program [yet]. It is really God at work.
- C. As exciting as it is, it creates a lot of problems.
- D. Last weekend, at our biggest service (10:45), we had people who couldn't find parking. When they did find parking, they couldn't find seats. Our auditorium was full and our Video Cafe was almost full. We actually had people who turned around and left because they couldn't get in.
- E. It's not a matter of shuffling people to other services as our smallest service at 9:00 only has room for 80 more people and then it's full.
- F. We said we were going to focus on spiritual growth for four months and not do anything to grow numerically. Then God, who is very, very funny, sent us a growth spurt.
- G. We're not going to turn away from our focus on spiritual growth. We still have six weeks to go and we're going to stick with it. Actually, today my whole sermon will be about that.
- H. There are two things I want to ask you to do.
 1. Please be patient with us during this time. On weekends when it's full, please help get people seated by filling in empty seats, if you're comfortable with that. I'm asking you to be patient. We are going to live with the pain of growth for a long time and we're sorry if it's a hassle for you. We promise to jump on some solutions, but not for six weeks.
 2. My second request has to do with parking. Listen to this description: You're able-bodied; do not have small kids; are a regular attender or you stay for more than one service. If those qualities describe you, would you please park on the gravel parking lot? It will open lots of spaces for newcomers and people with kids.
- I. I believe in numerical growth, it's super important. Every person saved reduces the population of hell by one. It's a good thing and it's why we're here. The Bible talks about pulling people from the fire (Jude 23) and we believe in that.
- J. Nothing we do could ever make our church grow, only God gives that increase. We just get out of the way. Our job is to stand ready to embrace, love and serve every person God chooses to send our way. God gives the increase. That's why numerical growth is important.
- K. Spiritual growth is important, too, and that's what I want to talk about right now.

III. Spiritual Growth

- A. *"Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God."* Hebrews 6:1, NAS95
- B. Let us press on to maturity. What exactly is God saying?
- C. Zero in on those words, let us press on to maturity. God brought you here today to tell you these words and hook them into your consciousness till you can't shake them away.
- D. If Jesus sat down at a table with you, just you personally, I don't know what He would say, but I don't think He would leave the table until He urged you to grow up, grow strong, grow deep, grow mature as a follower of Jesus.
- E. Let me say the same thing in three different ways:
 1. In our church, evangelism has to be followed by discipleship.

2. In your life, salvation has to be followed by sanctification.
3. In your life, receiving Jesus as Savior has to be followed by responding to Him as Lord.

F. Dear Christian, grow up. Let us press on to maturity.

IV. What is Maturity?

- A. The Bible gives a powerful illustration of maturity.
- B. The Jews were slaves in Egypt and God sent Moses to set them free. With a great display of power and mighty miracles, the Jews left Egypt for their ancestral homeland. They were heading for the promised land or, as the Bible puts it, they were going to a place of rest, a land that flowed with milk and honey, a place where they would enjoy maximum blessing from God and God would receive maximum glory from them. The promised land.
- C. The journey should have taken one, maybe two, years at the most and, in fact, that's all it took. God brought them to the Jordan River, the boundary of the promised land and told them, "Go and possess the land. I have given it to you. Every place your set your foot, that I have given to you."
- D. It was a great land. Rich, fertile, fields and vineyards they didn't plant, houses and cities they didn't build. It was the land of their wildest dreams and they couldn't wait to get inside.
- E. Except for one little problem. There were already people in the land. Squatters, giants even, and those interlopers did not want to leave.
- F. God promised, "I will drive them out before you."
- G. The people didn't believe.
- H. They turned around and wandered in the wilderness for 40 years until, and the Bible puts this so delicately, their carcasses fell in the wilderness.
- I. Then, it was time for the younger generation to go in and inherit the land and they did.
- J. The Journey to the Promised Land is just like your journey to maturity.

V. Growth toward Maturity

A. *There's a clear beginning: Begin Your Journey*

1. Would you please take out the map inside your program. If you are listening to this sermon on the internet, you need to go to:
 - a) www.ncredding.com/LifeMap.html
2. You can follow along.
3. As church leaders, we wrestled for a long time with how to illustrate discipleship. We came down to this map. We are releasing it as a beta test. That means it's not a finished product. It's not a done deal. We're just testing it and, guess what, you're the guinea pigs.
4. We have dozens of groups, ministries, opportunities and RESOURCES for your spiritual growth. But it has always been really complicated to figure them out.
5. So, here is your map. This your Personal Life Map, your PLM. There's even a place for you to write your name and make it yours. We have them in print, but we really want you to use the one on the internet. It's a lot cheaper for us and a lot better for you. I'll show you in a minute.
6. When the Jews left Egypt, they had a starting point and a finishing point.
7. The starting point was redemption.
8. The ending point was the Promised Land, the place of rest.
9. On this map, your starting point is called Begin Your Journey. If you open the map all the way, you will see that Begin Your Journey is for you if you are investigating Jesus, if you are a new Christian or if you are a Christian but you have never oriented your life to Jesus. You've never gotten a good start as a Christian.
 - a) Then there is a list of five different resources for you if you are at this point in your journey.
 - b) Here's my challenge to you, to every person in our church, find yourself on this map and then figure out the next stage in your spiritual journey. What is the next step for you? Don't worry about twenty steps, don't think way ahead. Just think of the next one or two steps. Figure out those steps.
 - c) Then, I'm going to ask you to make a commitment to do those steps. Sign up, get involved, get baptized, do the Starting Point class, baptism, New You seminar, Intro to the Bible or Prayer Basics.
 - d) Begin strong. You say, "Hey, it's too hard. I'm too busy. I don't have enough time."
 - e) You know what? Your job is to step out in faith. God's job is to part the sea and He'll do it in amazing ways. You can trust Him for miracles if you tell Him, "God, I will press on to maturity."
 - f) Let me show you this on the Internet.
10. Let me be really, really clear. You cannot be a disciple of Jesus until you are a child of God. You must be born again. You must cross a line called "getting saved." That line is absolute; it is not fuzzy. It is as clear as the threshold you step across to enter your house. Either you're in or you're out. There is no journey without that first step. Begin your journey. Receive Jesus as your Savior. Leave the slavery in Egypt, be

redeemed. Cross the Red Sea. Cross the threshold.

B. The second journey you need to do is Do the Repairs.

1. See it on your map? This journey is for you if you're recovering from loss, trauma, addictions and other life problems.
2. Our culture is so broken down most of us need to be reparented. Broken families, fragile relationships, addictions, heartbreak, neediness.
3. God loves you, cares for you, and we want to help you.
4. So, you'll see a whole bunch of ways we stand ready to come along side you. We can help you with food and clothing. We can help you get your finances in order. We can help if you struggle with alcohol, drug addiction or depression. We can mentor you to a better marriage. We can help you if your heart is heavy with grief. We can help you with pastoral counseling.
5. The Bible says the strong should bear the burdens of the weak. Before you can really be a solid disciple, you might need to do some real healing in your life.
6. Let me show you this on the internet, too.
7. Remember, it's all under construction. This is a beta test.

C. The third stage of your journey is to Join the Team.

1. So, you're saved, you're getting made whole, you're connected with God, but now you want to connect with other people.
2. This is crucial. God designed the church to be a community of men and women who are involved in each other's lives.
3. Our main way of doing this is through iGroups and we're so excited that Roger comes on board this week to help out in this ministry.
4. Right now, half of our church is in an iGroup. We have groups for high school students through senior citizens. We have groups that pray, study the Bible, hunt, fish, scrapbook and serve others.
5. We want to help you get involved. The way to get started is to step up and tell us.
6. We want to have a balance. It's important for people to feel free and safe to check us out without pressure.
7. We never want you to feel like we're cramming stuff down your throat. At the same time, we have a God-given mandate to urge you to grow up in the Lord.
8. You will not grow up without connecting with the people of God. You have to step forward, tell us you're here and tell us you want to get involved.
9. My dream is that we will have a church so connected with one another the only way a person falls through the cracks is because they want to.

D. Journey four on your Map is called Be Yourself

1. This is where you really discover God's purpose for your life.
2. The unique way God made you, your gifts and strengths and then put them to use for God's kingdom. I won't go through all the options right now, but something amazing happens when a church has the right people doing the right things.
3. Maybe God didn't wire you to be a preacher. That's okay, He didn't wire me to be a counselor or work in the nursery. But, I can't do what I do unless you do what you can do. God weaves our strengths together to create a mighty church.
4. And the gates of hell will not prevail against us.
5. Again, each of these options is clickable on the internet. You have the chance to come out of the shadows. You have the chance to sign up and get involved.

E. Journey Five is called Lifelong learning.

1. Turn to Acts 17:10.
 - a) *"Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men."* Acts 17:10-12, NKJV
2. I love this story, because of the picture it paints in my mind. I picture a lot of people, young and old, sitting around with Bibles, wearing Bibles out while finding what is true, real, lasting and leads to Christ.
3. You are never too old to learn more of the Word. Nobody has learned it all. We want to be lifelong learners.
4. Our goal is to challenge you to grow more in Christ. We want to reach the newest, most inexperienced rookie and the most mature, long-term veteran and challenge and equip you to grow more and more like Jesus.
5. Training in evangelism, theology, group leadership, mentoring and discipleship.
6. We long to offer that kind of church and we really need veterans to stand up and get involved. I hope you wear out many Bibles as you press on to maturity.

7. As a lifelong learner, you're also ready for the last phase of the journey:

F. Lead the Pack

1. Look at the end of the map. Journey number 6 is the ending point. It says, "Lead the Pack." That's what happens when you're a strong Christian, you become a leader of others on their journeys.
2. Listen to this Bible verse:
 - a) *"For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food."* Hebrews 5:12, NKJV
3. You ought to be teachers; you ought to be leading the pack. If you are a veteran Christian and you have pressed on to maturity, then your life will help rookie Christians grow in the Lord, too. That's the end point. Your life leads other lives into a deeper relationship with Jesus.
4. This is the ultimate blessing, the ultimate expression of grace in your life.
5. Jesus said,
 - a) *"If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. 'By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.'" John 15:7, 8, NKJV*
6. Bearing fruit till God calls you home. Be a supporter and encourager of your church, don't be a critic. Anybody can be a critic. That's easy. But to do the hard work of leading others into a deep relationship with Jesus, that's a miracle: Spiritual reproduction. Paul said,
 - a) *"My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you."* Galatians 4:19, NKJV
7. He went through labor pains to see Christ formed in other people. That's the kind of disciple we long to develop. Those who reproduce a deep walk with God, a deep love for Jesus and for one another.

VI. The Personal Life Map

- A. Here is our Personal Life Map and I believe it can revolutionize your life.
- B. No two journeys will be the same. There are literally thousands of ways to pick out resources from this map. Your journey will not look like anybody else's journey and that's okay. It's for you to choose, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He will guide you.

VII. Homework

- A. So, I have a homework assignment for you and I want you to do a favor for me. If you have a Neighborhood Church friend who wasn't here today, please do me a favor and show them the map. Take them to the internet and talk them through it.
- B. Your homework assignment and next weekend is a quiz!
- C. I want you to pray over this map. I want you to ask the Holy Spirit to guide you, as never before. I want you to tell God you're ready for the next steps in your spiritual journey and you want to press on to maturity.
- D. I want you to check out the internet. Don't sign up for ten different things, just one, two or three at the most. No more, narrow it down.

VIII. Press On

- A. Hebrew 6:1 says, "Let us press on to maturity."
- B. God brought you here to challenge you to press on to maturity. There are three dangers
 1. The danger you may stop too soon because you think you've arrived. You know what? You haven't. You need a teachable spirit if God is ever going to make you like Christ.
 2. The danger of discouragement. You have to press on through the discouragement. It's not easy to grow deep and strong in the Lord. Don't quit, don't be weary, don't give up.
 3. The danger of thinking you have to do it alone. You don't. You are carried on wings of eagles. You have the power of Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Word of God in you. Your job is faith and God gives the increase.
- C. 1,452 professions of faith in Shasta County. That's a great start. Only 100,000 more to go.
- D. Church, it's time to mobilize.
- E. It's time to deploy.