

Good morning everyone, my name is Shane Gould, and I serve as one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance. As we enter a new year, it's a natural time to look back and then look forward. I'm still getting use to writing 2011 whenever I date something. As I've been looking back, it's been a real year of experiencing God's goodness for Linda and I. God added to our family by bringing us a beautiful baby boy, Simon, and has shown his goodness to us in so many ways this past year. As I reflect back on the year, I also see how God has been doing a real work of transformation in me as he has been teaching me about his faithfulness and his perfect timing, especially as that has related to Simon being born. It's an amazing thing to realize that God has been with me this whole past year and that he has been using all of its ups and downs to grow me and teach me about himself.

Someone sent me a text wishing me a happy new year and signed off with the tag, "More Of Heaven In '11!" I've decided that I'm adopting that as my theme for the year. Wouldn't that make a great bumper sticker?! I don't know about you, but I want to see more of heaven this year, in my life and in the life of our church. In fact, since the end of summer, God has been growing a sense of anticipation in me, that there are breakthroughs and new expressions of Jesus' grace and power that God wants to bring to our church.

Before we jump into this morning's message, let's take a moment to pray.

Pray.

In life, we are constantly confronted with the need to make decisions. Even when we decide not to decide, we realize that was a decision! A new year simply brings new decisions. Our daily decisions are incredibly important because they shape our lives, taking us in one direction over another. I have heard it said that a person's life can be thought of as simply one long line of decisions.

Life often feels that way doesn't it? As individuals, we're faced with hundreds, maybe thousands, of decisions every day. Some of those decisions are small like, Will I order a latte or just stick with today's

dark roast? What shirt will I put on? Some decisions are much bigger, Should I accept the job offer that has just come my way? And some decisions are truly life changing, Will I go 'all in' by submitting myself fully to Jesus' leading for my life?

Now, as important as our decisions can be, I believe that what is even more important to recognize are the values that drive our decisions.

For instance, when it comes to coffee, how many of you value pleasure over saving? If you value pleasure, you're going to decide to go for the latte. If you value savings, you're already mentally in line at Tim Horton's! How about clothing? How many of you value style over function? Be honest! I value style, so I'm going for the slimfit dress shirt every time. For those of you who value function, you're wearing the leisure suit. In valuing style, I often care way more about how I look than how comfortable I am.

How about another area of life, like choosing a career. If it's money that I most value, then I'm going to take the job that's offering the bigger salary, even if it doesn't excite me nearly as much as another kind of work. Ideally, we want to find the job we love that pays great, but we don't always find it, so we must choose, a choice that is dictated by what we most value. If I value God's purposes over my own comforts, then I'm going to go 'all in' in seeking Jesus' leading for my life even though I know it won't be popular or always easy.

Now, almost everyone in this room drinks coffee, wears clothes, goes to work, and contemplates a relationship with God. But depending on our individual values, our lives end up looking similar and yet very different from one another.

It's really our values that drive our decisions.

Every local body of believers has the same purpose but lives out that God-given purpose a little differently depending on its values. And so we are taking this morning and next Sunday to talk about "The Values That Drive Us" here at North Shore Alliance Church.

The message this morning is a little different in the sense that, as pastors and elders, we wanted to take the opportunity to share with you some of the things God has been speaking to us about in terms of what kind of church we believe God wants us to become. So, this morning I am speaking with more of my leader's hat on.

The job of a pastor or an elder is not so much to lead but rather to model what it means to follow. Jesus is the leader, he is the head of the church. We are his followers, his body. Good spiritual leaders are first and foremost good followers. As pastors and elders, we want to be good followers and good listeners. So over the last year or so, we have taken time to pray, listen, and dialogue about the kind of church God wants us to become. As we have been pressing into that question, God has been speaking to us about our core values as a church: the values that drive our decisions and ultimately shape our ministry as a church, what we do and how we do it.

Now, as we started pressing into this about a year and a half ago, we weren't exactly starting from scratch. We were already clear on the purpose God wants us to serve as his people. As a church, we serve the same purpose every local body of believers is called to: namely, to live out the Great Commandment and to fulfill the Great Commission. Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). So, as a church, we exist to love and be in relationship with God, giving him all of ourselves. This is what our series on Three Dimensional Worship was really all about.

At the end of Matthew's Gospel, after Jesus' resurrection and just before his ascension to heaven, Jesus gave his disciples, and every future follower of Jesus a final commission: in speaking to the disciples, Jesus said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20).

As a local body of Christ, our purpose is to live a life of worship, where we together give Jesus all of ourselves. And our second purpose is to make disciples by reaching out and leading others to do the same. Those two things are the purpose of every biblically faithful church.

As leadership, we have been asking God how he wants us to live out these purposes uniquely here at North Shore Alliance Church. In other words, what are the key things that God wants us to value as we go about doing all the things a faithful church should do.

As we kept praying and dialoguing with one another and with ministry leaders, God kept taking us back to five things:

1. Authentic Relationship
2. Leadership Development
3. Interdependence
4. Mission
5. Transformation

This morning I want to talk about the first three. Next week, Pastor Dave is going to walk us through the last two.

1. Authentic Relationship.

The two greatest commands, on which, according to Jesus, all the others depend, are concerned with relationship, with God and with one another (Matthew 22:36-40). Because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, we find in the New Testament a constant emphasis on reconciliation, our need to be reconciled with God through faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, and our need to be reconciled with one another out of the grace Jesus has shown us.

If God is asking us to make authentic relationships a high value, then we need to start thinking of our church as really God's community on earth. The New Testament is constantly concerned about relationship. And what God kept impressing upon us a leadership is that we should be too. Relationships take time, go through ups and downs, but without them, we really don't have anything.

Every person who gives their life to Jesus has been grafted into his forever family. The Church isn't an organization, it's a community of spiritually connected sisters and brothers who are called to be reconciled and on a journey together of being made into the closest of communities where everyone is welcome and Jesus is the centre.

Statistically, it has been estimated that 44% of the letters of the New Testament are about how we should get along with one another. A subject like spiritual gifting only gets about 4%. Relationships are a big value in the scriptures. *It needs to be the same for us.*

There is one phrase in the New Testament you will encounter over and over again. It's the phrase "one another." It comes up 59 times and is attached to a command every time. Here's a few examples:

love one another (John 13:35 - 16 times)
be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10)
honour one another above yourselves (Romans 12:10)
live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16)
build up one another (Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11)
be likeminded towards one another (Romans 15:5)
accept one another (Romans 15:7)
admonish one another (Romans 15:14; Colossians 3:16)
care for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25)
serve one another (Galatians 5:13)

And the list keeps going. As you see the list, you get the point. Relationships are really close to God's heart. So, we want to be a church filled with real relationships. We want to be a church that values relationship in everything we do.

Why use the word 'authentic'? Well, it's our attempt to remind ourselves that it's not just any level of relationship that God has designed us for. God has made each of us with a need for deep, meaningful, God-centered relationships. In coming to Christ and becoming a child of God through faith, we've become family. Some of you didn't realize what you were getting into! But spiritually

speaking, it's true. We've been adopted as a daughter or a son of God, now belonging to a community connected by the Spirit of God. The connection we have been given with one another is profound and is greater than any differences we might have on the surface of our lives.

I like the definition of church given by theologian Andrew Kirk: *"What the New Testament means by the Church is not an institution which owns property, performs rites and organises meetings, or even one that plans strategies to evangelise unreached people. Rather, it is a group of ordinary people who, because they are experiencing the immense grace of a compassionate God, are learning how to overcome hostility between people, forgive and trust one another, share what they have and encourage one another in wholesome and joyous relationships."*

When we think of the church in organisational rather than relational terms, we aren't really talking about something we see in the scriptures. We need to be organized, that's not wrong. But according to the scriptures, what's at the heart of what it means to know God and to experience church is relationship. When church is reduced to going to a service, getting some good teaching and music, and having minimal surface interaction with others, we haven't experienced what it means to be the church.

Now, if you have been around North Shore Alliance Church for any length of time, you know that not everyone knows everyone. And that it takes a little bit of time to establish a strong relational connection. That's okay, that's natural. But our desire is that everyone would become relationally connected at some level in a ministry of some kind. All of our ministries, apart from Sunday mornings break down into small groups, whether it be children, youth, young adult, or an adult ministry such as Alpha, Celebrate Recovery, Living Room Mental Health Support, or our Wednesday Morning Women's Ministry. This is not by accident, this is so people can begin to experience relationship.

Many of you belong to a Home Group, a small group of people becoming spiritual friends, meeting regularly together to grow and serve each other, to live out all those 'one another's' we find in scripture. You can't do that in a crowd or on your own. Relationships become authentic in the context of a small group.

Should God grow us by making us bigger, adding more people to our community, we are asking that God would at the very same time help us grow smaller. We want to reach as many people as possible, but we want to do it in a relational way, one person at a time.

At every level, we want to foster authentic relationships based on the love Jesus has first shown to us.

2. Leadership Development

The term leadership can sound intimidating, even corporate in the business sense. But that's not really what we mean. When we talk about the value of leadership development, what we're talking about is valuing the pattern of ministry that we see in Jesus. Jesus spent the majority of his time raising up and training just twelve disciples. Jesus was constantly teaching, training, correcting, and sending out his disciples, so that they would be ready to carry on his ministry after he physically left them.

Jesus spent a lot of time teaching the crowds and meeting individuals, such as Nicademas, Zaccheus, and the woman at the well. But he made intentional time and gave priority to developing his disciples.

In giving attention to the importance of building spiritual leaders, Jesus laid a foundation of leadership that changed the world long after his earthly ministry was completed.

The Apostle Paul did the same. Paul was probably the greatest builder of churches we read about in the scriptures, and he was very concerned that the churches he founded had good leadership. Without faithful leaders, Paul knew that the work he had begun would not go far. On his first missionary journey "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders" (Acts 14:23).

As Paul was about to leave the church in Ephesus for the last time, he spoke to the leaders he had raised up there to carry on ministry. As he spoke to them, he reminded them of the things he had modeled for them, he reminded them of the cost of ministry, and he encouraged them to fulfill the call that was on their lives:

"You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. **19** I served the Lord with great humility and with tears and in the midst of severe testing by the plots of my Jewish opponents. **20** You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.....

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. **29**Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears." (Acts 20:17-31).

In fact, developing leaders is what the Great Commission is all about. Jesus instructed his disciples to go and make disciples – to raise up others who would follow in their same footsteps.

Sometimes we see certain people serving in the church and we might think, 'Wow, they seem to know so much. They seem to be close with God.' But no spiritual leader I know thinks of themselves that way. And no one ever just wakes up that way. I'm a pastor today only because a Sunday school teacher took interest in me, connected with me outside of Sunday. I'm only here because I had some incredible mentors during high school who poured into me and prayed for me. There have been dozens of people who have in one way or another helped develop me.

I still feel like I don't know that much and that I am still stumbling forward in God's grace. But I know that what I do have with God and what God has done in me has been accomplished through the spiritual attention others gave me and is something I now need must give away to others.

Being a leader in the kingdom is about being a servant. It's not about a title or about gifting. It's about quietly obeying and serving God where he plants and directs you. The leaders we see in scripture were unlikely people and often reluctant. But God used them despite their fears and weaknesses.

We want to be a disciple-making church. Leadership development is for everyone. Leadership development is simply giving away to someone else what God has shown you.

Think of leadership development this way: it's like a ladder. There's always someone a little further down the journey with Christ than you. And there's always someone just a little behind you. That's true no matter where you are at in your journey with Jesus. You may have become a follower of Jesus yesterday. Well, there's someone in your life that has yet made that decision – reach out to them and begin spiritually raising them up, leading them to give their life to Jesus. And there's someone here this morning you can begin to connect with to learn from, in a home group, or through a ministry like Alpha.

Everyone should be reaching up and reaching down, embracing this value of spiritually developing others, so that ministry is continually being multiplied and extended. That's leadership development.

3. Interdependence.

The final value I want to talk about this morning is interdependence. Interdependence is another way of saying that there are no Lone Rangers in the kingdom of God. We recognize our need for one another in following Jesus. Paul says that the Body of Christ is a like a human body, made of many different parts, all of them different, and all of the valuable and vital to the health of the body.

Paul gives us the illustration of a human body to help us understand how important each one of us are to the life of the church and to one another. Listen to Paul's words from 1 Corinthians 12:14-20:

“Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.”

And then Paul finishes the illustration by giving these words:

“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” (1 Corinthians 12:26-27)

God has given everyone a special place in the body with a unique gift and a unique story to tell. God is weaving a beautiful tapestry of our lives together. To value interdependence is to value the participation of every person in the life of our church. Interdependence means we value depending on each other. That means that there can't be any spectators if we are going to become a vibrant church.

You know, sometimes there's this idea that ministry is for the professionals up here. And that's simply not the case. Pastors have an important role, but unless everyone else is beginning to step out and serve in both formal and informal ways, we will never truly move into the kinds of things that God has for us.

If we only value certain kinds of gifts or certain kinds of roles, we will completely miss what it means to be the church. We need everyone. No one person has all the gifts. God has put us together in such a way that we have to be dependent upon one another, from young to old.

I love the way Jesus promises how we will find his presence: “For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them” (Matthew 18:20).

In a few moments, we are going to celebrate the Lord's Supper together, where we are reminded that the basis for anything we might have together as a church comes out of Jesus laying his life down for us.

God's foundation for our lives and for our church is the grace he has extended to each one of us through Jesus' death on the cross.

I want to now invite those who are serving to come forward.

As you come forward to receive, seeing the break as a symbol of Jesus' broken body and the juice representing his shed blood, invite the Holy Spirit to renew his life in you, and invite the Holy Spirit to fill our church with greater expressions of his grace. This is a table everyone is invited to.

Pray.

"How Deep The Father's Love."