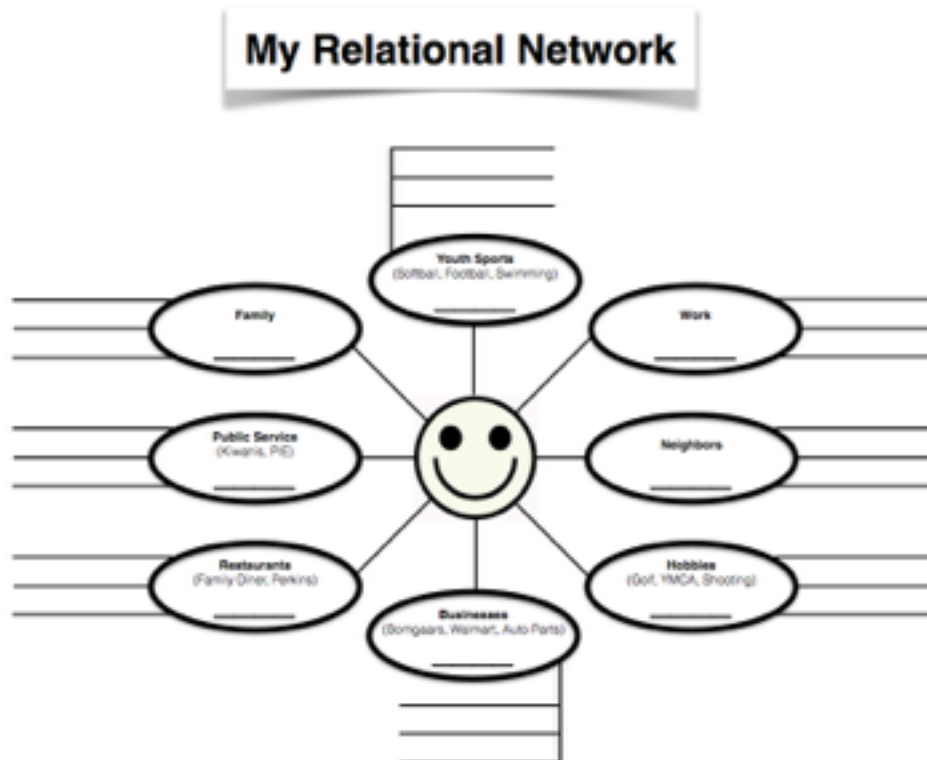


Compelled To Invite

Wednesday, March 25, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. This morning is the last week of our mini-series, "Compelled By Grace." In this series we learn how the crazy love of God compels us to do crazy things.

Before we get to our study, I want you to turn to the handout in your bulletin titled, "My Relational Network." You will recognize it by a smiling face in the center. That is you. Around you are eight circles which represent areas of your life where you build relationships. In the circle place the number of the people you know in that circle that do not know Jesus. For example, you may know five of your neighbors. Two of them do not know Jesus. Write down the number two. On the lines next to the bubble write down the three names of people in that sphere of your life that do not know Jesus.



Before we go any further, I will give you two minutes to fill this out. In the circle write the number of people you know in that area of your life that do not know Jesus. On the lines write the top three people in that area you know by name who do not know Jesus. Don't worry. You won't turn this homework in for a grade. Take the next two minutes to complete your homework
(Wait 2 Minutes)

Now that you are done, set that aside. We will come back to it later in the message.

What made Hush Puppies famous?

How many of you remember Hush Puppies, the classic brushed-suede shoe? How many of you wore Hush Puppies? In Malcolm Gladwell's book Tipping Point, he tells the Hush Puppies story¹.



Prior to 1994, the Hush Puppies brand was dead. Wolverine, the Hush Puppies parent company, planned to eliminate the shoe because sales were less than 30,000 pairs a year. Then something strange happened. From 1994-95 Wolverine went from selling 30,000 pairs to 430,000. A year later it sold 1.6 million. By 1996 Hush Puppies were standard footwear for young American men. Wolverine was congratulated with marketing awards for bringing a brand back from the dead. Thankfully, it told the truth. The company had no idea why the public had a sudden interest in Hush Puppies. It didn't do anything to make it happen.

¹ Malcolm Gladwell, Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference, pages. 1-5.

After some research, the company found the answer. A handful of kids in downtown Manhattan started wearing Hush Puppies to be trendy. They liked them so they told their friends. Their friends told their friends about Hush Puppies. Like a virus, Hush Puppies fever spread through the teenagers of Manhattan, New York. One of the teen's parents worked in the fashion industry. He bought a pair and liked them so much he decided to use Hush Puppies as the feature shoe in his spring fashion show. That spread Hush Puppies fever from the teenage world to the adult world. After that, it was only months for Hush Puppies fever to spread nationwide.

This story illustrates the power of the relational network you completed at the beginning of the message. If you influence your family, friends and neighbors who in turn influence their family, friends and neighbors, we can change the world.

My relational network has the power of geometric progression.

Another way to look at the power of our relational networks is through math and something called geometric progression. Telling all your friends something and then they tell all their friends something and then they tell all their friends something functions in a geometric manner.

One way to illustrate the power of geometric progression is to take a simple sheet of paper and fold it. As we know, it gets a little thicker each time it is folded upon itself. How thick would a piece of paper become if we folded it 50 times? This is similar to friends telling friends who tell their friends but continuing it 50 times.

How many of you think it would be as thick as a phone book? How many of you think it would be as tall as a refrigerator? How many of you think it would be as tall as a building? While there is some debate on this, a piece of paper folded 42 times would cover the distance from the earth to the moon.² A piece of paper folded 50 times would be just short of the distance from the Earth to the sun.³ A piece of paper folded 94 times spans the breadth of the universe.⁴ Geometric progression is very powerful. It illustrates the power of what happens when everyone in your relational network passes something on to everyone in their relational networks. That is what turned Hush Puppies shoes from a dying brand to the favorite shoe of American men in only two years with almost no formal advertising.

How does this relate to our study this morning? In this series, Compelled by Grace, we are discovering how the crazy love of God compels us to do crazy things. Last week we saw how God's crazy love for us compels us to party with those far from God. God's crazy love compels us to eat with those far from God so we can build a relationship with them to talk about Jesus and his church.

This week we see how God's crazy love compels us to recommend Jesus to the people in our relational network. Simply recommending Jesus to our family, friends, and acquaintances, like teenagers recommended Hush Puppy shoes to their friends, is a very potent way of sharing the gospel.

² <http://scienceblogs.com/startswithabang/2009/08/31/paper-folding-to-the-moon/>

³ <http://gladwell.com/thinking-about-yawns/>

⁴ <http://scienceblogs.com/startswithabang/2009/08/31/paper-folding-to-the-moon/>

We see this in action when we look at the way Jesus called his first disciples. One place we find this in the Bible is John 1:35-51. Turn to that passage and follow along as I read God's Word.

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." John 1:35–51 (ESV)

Let's work our way through these verses and see what we can learn.

1. Recommend Jesus to my friends. *Andrew and John met Jesus through John the Baptist.*

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" John 1:35–36 (ESV)

Why did John the Baptist believe in Jesus?

In this passage the John we are talking about is John the Baptist. At this point in the game only John the Baptist knew Jesus' true identity. The only

reason John knew Jesus' identity was not because he was particularly smart but because God supernaturally revealed it.

And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God." John 1:32-34 (ESV)

I am sure John the Baptist freaked out after that baptism. John baptized a lot of people but Jesus was the first one where God the Father and God the Holy Spirit showed up to celebrate.

John the Baptist saw Jesus walking by and told two friends in his relational network that Jesus was the "Lamb of God." .

What does it mean to say Jesus is the Lamb of God?

At that time, they slaughtered lambs when people sinned because God told them the only way to handle sin was by death. The lamb's death figuratively paid for their sins. The people in the Old Testament understood in a very graphic way that the only payment for sin was death. The Old Testament also said that one day everything would change. We would no longer provide many lambs to die only figuratively for sin. One day God himself would provide one final lamb that would actually take away sin for all the past, present and future.

When John the Baptist told his friends Jesus was the Lamb of God, this was a very high claim John the Baptist made for him. He claimed Jesus was the one who came from God to die for our sins, a once-in-the-world event.

Did John the Baptist's disciples know Jesus before this? They probably only knew Jesus as an acquaintance. Even though John the Baptist gave Jesus

a huge recommendation, like anybody else, they needed to check things out for themselves before they believed it. They began following Jesus around.

Before we go much further, let's figure out the identity of these two disciples.

Who were the two disciples?

The text later says one of them was Andrew. The other guy didn't name himself. Scholars think it was probably John the Apostle, who wrote this book. I think they are right. When John wrote about a scene he was involved with, in humility, he left his name off the roster. It is safe to assume it was Andrew and John.

Andrew and John moved from John the Baptist's recommendation of Jesus to the observation of Jesus.

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. John 1:37 (ESV)

John and Andrew were watching Jesus from the outer ring of the crowd. They were peering around the end cap at Wal-Mart to see what he bought. They were watching from a safe distance. At the end of a day of watching Jesus from a distance, Jesus turned and talked to them.



Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour. John 1:38–39 (ESV)

The first question Jesus asked was, “Why are you following me? You guys act like stalkers.” What we find is they move from just observing Jesus to wanting a relationship with Jesus where they learn more about him.

They want more information. That is why they called him, “Rabbi.”

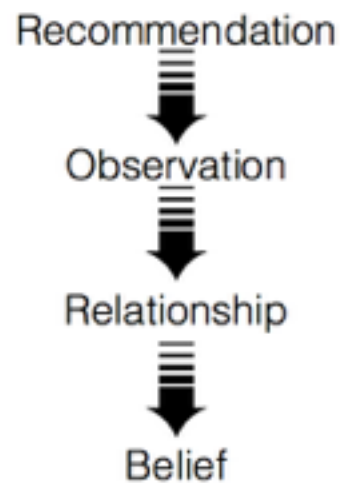
Why did they call Jesus Rabbi?

At that time “Rabbi” was a term of respect. It meant teacher. Later in history rabbi became an official title of earned credentials, similar to a doctorate today. At this time, if you called someone rabbi, it was a way to say you looked up to someone and wanted to learn more from them.

Andrew and John have gone from the John the Baptist’s recommendation of Jesus, to observing Jesus from a distance, to calling him a rabbi which means they want to learn more.

They also did what I always tell my children not to do, they invited themselves over to someone’s house for dinner. For my children this is rude. Here it is biblical. It was the tenth hour, which means it was 4 p.m. They wanted to eat with Jesus.

It was during that meal they moved from recommendation, to observation to relationship and finally to belief.



Don't underestimate the power of recommending Jesus.

The average person is submitted to 3,000 advertisements a day. They are at the gas pumps, the movie theater, and the outfield of our baseball games. You

can't even use a public restrooms without staring at an advertisement telling you to buy a corn dog when you are done. Even outer space is not free from advertising. Recently the Russian space program launched a rocket with a 30-foot wide Pizza Hut logo on the side.⁵

How do we handle this advertising flood? We filter it. One of the ways we filter advertising is through friends. If someone we trust says something positive about a product, we start noticing the advertising of that product. If we like what we see in that advertising, we eventually buy it. We ignore the rest of the advertising that hits us. We use our relational network to help us sift through information and decide what is important. It is what we do when we buy a car. We buy a Chevrolet Cavalier, and we suddenly start to notice other Chevy Cavaliers on the road.

This is what happened with Andrew and John. They trusted the recommendation of John the Baptist. They watched Jesus because of it. They became interested in him so they talked to him. Then they believed in Jesus.

This is the way people still come to Christ today. People in our relational networks trust us. If we speak about Jesus, CrossWinds Church and the Bible to them, they will start to think about Jesus. They may watch a sermon online. They may even stop in for a service. They are in strictly observer mode. They are spectators from a distance.

Next they take the step of building friendships with people in the church or actually reading the Bible. It is from there faith in Jesus is born.

⁵ http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/marketing/advertising_everywhere.cfm

We don't need to prove Jesus. Just let people spend time with him.

I love the way Jesus did this. He said, "Come and you will see." All he did was begin to build a relationship. That is one of the things I love. When it comes to people believing the identity of Jesus and becoming Christians you don't start by pulling out facts and statistics. You don't start with philosophical arguments for the existence of God. You don't start by recommending Josh McDowell's Evidence that Demands a Verdict. You start by inviting them over for dinner. All Jesus says is, "Come, and you will see." In other words, "Spend time with me and you will see if I am the one John the Baptist said I was." Spend time in the Bible. Spend time in prayer. Spend time in the church with God's people.

Too many times we begin with trying to prove the Christian faith. I think that is the wrong approach. We shouldn't focus on proving Jesus. Just focus on inviting people to spend time with him in the church. Invite them to "come and see" for themselves. See if God starts to convince you. Listen to the Word of God and see if it is different. Let the Holy Spirit begin work in your heart. Come and see. Jesus is man enough to prove himself. That is all Jesus is asking us to do. It is that simple.

2. Recommend Jesus to my family. *Peter met Jesus through his brother Andrew.*

One of the two who heard John speak and followed Jesus was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of John. You shall be called Cephas" (which means Peter). John 1:40-42 (ESV)

Andrew, one of the two guys who spent time with Jesus, immediately used his relational network. He ran out and grabbed his brother Simon and took him

to Jesus that very night. Peter said, “If Andrew, my brother, thinks he found the Christ, I better take this seriously. Jesus must be worth meeting because my brother wouldn’t steer me wrong.”

Can you see how it is through recommendations in their relational networks that people are introduced to Jesus? It is not a slick marketing campaign. It is not billboards. It is not door hangers. It is through each of us recommending Jesus in our network that people meet Jesus.

With Andrew and John we saw it took time for them to place trust in Jesus because Jesus was only an acquaintance. They needed to observe from a distance and build a relationship. With Peter, it went much quicker because Andrew and Peter were family. Peter trusted his brother Andrew.

What we learn is the network in which we have the most relational influence is our own families. Our own families are the people most likely to accept our recommendations of Jesus and invitations to attend church. Remember, we don’t need to prove Jesus. Jesus will prove himself. We just need to get people to spend time with him. When people observe Jesus and his church they eventually believe in him because Jesus proves himself to them.

3. Recommend Jesus to my coworkers and neighbors. *Philip met Jesus through Andrew and Peter.*

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. John 1:43–44 (ESV)

Philip was from Bethsaida. When translated, that means “fish city.” Andrew and Peter were both from Bethsaida. It was a small town. Andrew, Peter and Philip worked in the same business. They were coworkers and

neighbors. Our recommendations of Jesus to our coworkers and neighbors is another powerful circle of influence.

A few times a year I get together with other pastors for meetings. I listen closely to what they say because they understand what it means to be a pastor. I can relate to them because we are in the same business. I trust what they say.

It is the same for many of you. Some of you work at Polaris and when you get together with other people who do the same job as you, you connect. Some of you work at Pure Fishing. When you get together with people in your same line of work you connect. Teachers in our schools connect with other teachers in schools. This is what happened with Philip. He was called by Jesus but he doesn't need a lot of time for observation or time to build a relationship because he trusted Peter and Andrew. He knew them. They were neighbors, and they worked together.

When it comes to recommending Jesus and inviting people to church your most powerful network is your family. The second most potent network is your neighbors and coworkers, the people you live and work with. Recommend Jesus and the church to the people who know you and trust you. You will be surprised how they listen.

4. Recommend Jesus to my doubting friends. *Doubting Nathaniel met Jesus through Philip.*

Jesus used Philip as the bridge to a guy named Nathanael.

Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." John 1:45–46 (ESV)

Philip found his friend Nathanael. He told Nathanael they found the guy everyone was waiting for. They found the one Moses wrote about, Jesus of Nazareth.

Nathanael is your typical skeptic. “Nazareth? Nothing good comes from Nazareth!” Nazareth had a reputation like Detroit. Nazareth was a dinky town where everyone was related. It was on the way to nowhere. It was dirt poor. It was so small people had to marry their relatives.

Could anything good come out of the one-horse town of Nazareth? Philip didn’t have a great answer other than the same one we heard earlier. “Come and see! I am giving my recommendation. Come and observe Jesus and his people. Build a relationship with Jesus and his people. If you do, you will see that Jesus is the Lamb of God. He will prove himself.” That is exactly what happened.

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” John 1:47–49 (ESV)

Jesus said, “Here is an Israelite in whom is no deceit.” Nathanael was freaked out. “How do you know me? I never met you.”

Jesus said, “Before Philip called you, when you were sitting under the fig tree, I saw you.” In that day, when people wanted to find a place to get alone for Bible reading and prayer, they sat under the shade of a tree. One of the best trees to sit under was a fig tree because the branches were wide. The foliage

was thick. The ancient rabbis even coined the phrase “Sitting under the fig tree” to mean someone was spending time with God. Apparently Nathanael was busy reading his Bible and praying under a fig tree that morning. He thought he was alone as he talked with God.



Jesus said, “I saw you having your quiet time.” We don’t know what Nathanael was studying or what he was praying. We simply know Jesus knew all about it. Jesus proved his identity to Nathanael.

Nathanael had a complete turn around. He went from doubting to believing. Nathanael said, “Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel.” This all happened by Philip’s simple recommendation and Nathanael taking the time to come and see Jesus for himself.

How does the story of Jesus continue?

The CrossWinds mission statement is reaching our region, and beyond, with the life changing message of Jesus. Do you ever look at our area and wonder how we will reach our region for Jesus? Even if we did reach them, how do we convince them Jesus is the son of God? The task seems overwhelming. This passage shows us how to accomplish our mission.

1. My mission field is my relational network.

What was Jesus’ plan to reach the world? It wasn’t billboards and door hangers. His plan was to use relational networks. We are to recommend Jesus and his church to the people we rub shoulders with on a daily basis. They are our family, friends, neighbors, coworkers, and even skeptics like Nathanael.

We listen to the recommendations of the people we trust. That is how the good news of Jesus will spread like Hush Puppies fever through northwest Iowa. It is through you and me recommending Jesus and his church. It is not through mass advertising. It is through us. It is through building relationships and having meals.

Remember the Hush Puppies story? Remember the power of geometric progression? The relational map you drew is your mission field.

2. Understand the simple process of coming to faith.

People typically come to faith by following the simple pattern of recommendation, observation, relationship and belief. Sometimes this pattern is shorter. Sometimes it is drawn out.

This shows us what we should do with people in our relational networks. We should either recommend Jesus or it may be time to invite them to attend church either in person or virtually on the web. Let them observe Jesus in a non-threatening matter. Invite them over for a meal and help them build a simple relationship with Jesus and his people. The end result, whether at a specific point in time or organically as they spend time with Jesus, many people will place their faith and trust in Jesus because Jesus proved himself to them.

3. Remember I don't need to convince people about Jesus. I only need to invite them to meet him.

Release yourself from the pressure of needing to prove Jesus. All we need to do is recommend Jesus and let people build a relationship with him. Instead of starting with heavy-duty proofs of the gospel, start with a meal.

This morning, the application is simple. You have in your hand your mission field. You know the steps to introducing people to Jesus. Now go and do something about it.

Conclusion

In the late 1960s, psychologist Stanley Milgram wanted to know how connected we are through our relational networks. He had an idea. He took 160 random names from an Omaha, Nebraska, phonebook and mailed them a letter. Each recipient was told to sign his or her name and then mail the letter to a friend that would move the letter close to a stock broker in Boston. The idea was that when the letter arrived at the stock broker's home, he could see how many hands it passed through. The result would show how many degrees of separation existed between a stock broker and 160 random people in Omaha, Nebraska.

On average, the letters arrived at the stock broker's home after passing through only six people. From that, we developed the concept there only exists six degrees of separation between us.⁶ Remember that was before the Internet and Facebook.

If two people on opposite sides of the country are only separated by six steps, the people in the Lakes region are much closer. This means if we used the map of our relational universe as our God-given guide to tell us who we need to reach, it wouldn't take long to reach our region for Jesus.

In a moment, we are going to respond to God's Word by taking communion. As you take the bread and the cup, I don't want you to just thank

⁶ Malcolm Gladwell, *Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, pages 34-35.

God for his crazy love for you. Think about what you are going to do about it.

The crazy love of God compels us to do some crazy things.

It compels us to befriend those far from God and have a meal with them. It compels us to recommend Jesus to those in our networks and invite them to simply come meet Jesus at CrossWinds Church.

I believe God will bring specific names to mind in that time of holding the bread and the cup. May his crazy love compel you to move out of your comfort zone and do crazy things for him.

Prayer

Jesus, we come to you today just sort of amazed that you use the very ordinary stuff of life — family, friends and acquaintances — as the way you change the world. Thank you for the relational networks you put us in. Thank you all we need to do is invite people to come and see. You will take care of the convincing. Amen.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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