

Introduction: Pg. ____

Let me read you a Manifesto from a very successful company and see if you can guess the company.

“On the walk to work, at the weight room or in the last mile. Somewhere between the first tries and finish lines. That’s where you find fitness.

Every moment matters and every bit makes a big impact. Because fitness is the sum of your life. That’s the idea [we were] build on— that fitness is not just about gym time. It’s all the time.

How you spend your day determines when you reach your goals. And seeing your progress helps you see what’s possible. Seek it. Crave it. Live it.” Name that Company... that’s right - FITBIT (The Fitbit Manifesto)

This is a FitBit. Fitbit is an activity tracker that counts your steps to measure movement and motivate greater health.

Did you know the average American takes about 5,000 steps a day? Fitbit has a standard goal of 10,000 for it’s users, but there are some Fitbit fanatics, right here amongst us that take it to a whole other level.

Several friends here in Redemption Hill started a Group Challenge and one young lady in particular seemed to dominate the field. Let me introduce you to **[PIC] Vanessa “You’ll Find me Steppin” Obei**. You know what Vanessa is doing right here? You thought this was an engagement picture but this is really her laughing victoriously over yet another triumph and specifically her archrival, **[PIC] Mr. William Pope**. Is Will grabbing dinner with friends? No, he is preparing for battle, energizing himself for his next 5,000 steps!

She confirmed her success to me in a private text message interview over the weekend (that is now, no longer private :)): “Vanessa: tell me about how you dominate Will in Fitbit Challenges.” Her response, and I quote: “Haha! I crush him.”

Let’s get that picture one more time: **[PIC] Vanessa “I will crush you” Obei**

Well, this all came to a major tipping point recently in one climatic tilt. Though it was a Group Challenge, we all know it was a showdown between these two rivals. We heard from Vanessa. Let’s hear from Will.

He begins: “Ok, well I had lost to Vanessa twice before, and I figured out that she starts stepping at 10:30pm after my day is over to beat me by a few steps.” Lol! I just want to pause there. Vanessa, you are brilliant. I want to be like you when I grow up...

Now, this knowledge pushed this desperate man over the edge. He continues...

“When we challenged again I said to myself I wouldn’t stop stepping. I had 8 thousand steps after work. I got home and told Alex I won’t be back till late. Vanessa caught on to what I was doing and it became a race till midnight. I ran 5 miles at the gym and walked from South Medford to Davis Square and around the neighborhood. I beat Vanessa by 22 steps and we both ended the day over 27 thousand steps.

Its one of the greatest achievements of my life but I was wiped out for a day afterwards.”

This is classic RHC folklore at this point. Priceless. I might get in on a battle or two this year fam.

Alright, why are we talking about Fitbits and counting steps? Here's why:

Because **STEPS CHANGE STORIES.**

This can be true in terms of our physical health. There are more than a few stories of how using a FitBit has brought physical transformation, but this is also true on a spiritual level.

Steps Change Stories.

When we take God-inspired steps, we will experience God-transformed stories, and when God writes stories, they are dynamic and electrifying and surprising and beautiful (even when the beauty is in every day details of life or it comes through conflict, struggle, and trial.)

So, here's the dream for the people known as Redemption Hill Church: let's become a church known for the story of God as he writes story after story after story after story in every single person that comes into our midst.

Before we get to the heart of our 2017 Vision, we want to continue taking a look at a man named Paul who took a lot of steps with and for Jesus, and consequently, had a unbelievable story that honored Jesus.

Let's read *Philippians 1:19-23*.

I. Take steps with Jesus for your story to honor Jesus. (1:19-23)

- Paul begins with a statement of confidence. Even though he is in prison, chained up like a criminal, he knows he will ultimately be delivered. Though Paul probably is referring to a future release from prison (believing God will see to that), he also seems to be looking ahead to something higher, and better, and truer: ultimate and final deliverance, his ultimate & final salvation before God.
- Then he tells us what is driving him in verse 20.

20 as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

- The greatest ambition of Jesus People is that their life would "honor Jesus." Other translations say, "exalt" Christ or "glorify" Christ.
- Paul's greatest passion was for people to see the magnificence of Jesus through his life.
- This was all consuming: whether by life or death.
- Verse 21 explains it further...

21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (NIV & ESV)

- "For me" - incredibly personal for Paul. We all have to decide personally: are you curious as to who Jesus is and what he was all about? Perhaps you are cautiously interested? Or are you saying what Paul is saying: Jesus is life.
- Verse 21 provides one of the most profound statements in the Bible.

- This rhythmic statement is really hard to translate this fully because there is no verb in the Greek
- Paul essentially says: living (equals, means, is) Jesus, dying (equals, means, is) gain”
- One scholar describes it like this: *“Life means Christ. Life is summed up in Christ. Life is filled up with, occupied with Christ, in the sense that everything Paul does—trusts, loves, hopes, obeys, preaches, follows, and so on—is inspired by Christ and is done for Christ. Christ and Christ alone gives inspiration, direction, meaning and purpose to existence.”* (Gerald Hawthorne)

App:

- Life is Christ. What about you? What do you live for? What is your greatest passion? How would you finish this sentence? **“For me, living is _____”** my family. Sports. Academic accomplishment. Art. My kids are my life. (H/T: Chan/Merida)
- Jesus people live for Jesus, and Jesus people die for Jesus. They actually believe death is profitable, advantageous, GAIN. Because Jesus is better than anything life can give or death can take away... (newbigin, I think)
- He goes on in 22-23 and says more about living is Christ (22 If I am to live in the flesh, *that means fruitful labor for me.* Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell) and dying is gain (23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and *be with Christ, for that is far better.*)

Transition to [PIC] Discipleship Strategy Map

Because Jesus is better, because Jesus is our life, we should seek to reflect him comprehensively, and that happens increasingly over time: One step after another step after another step.

We deeply believe that steps change stories. That’s why we have built a strategy designed to help people identify and take their next steps.

Look at the Vision Card you received. (Ushers hand out...)

This is our: *Discipleship (Following Jesus. Living for Jesus) Strategy*

“Helping all people (ALL people) become mature and multiplying followers of Jesus.” Jesus is the goal! This map attempts to show how anyone in our city can explore Jesus through Redemption Hill and make a difference in our world through him.

- Pathways... Quick explanation
- Sunday Experience: Front door Quick explanation
- NEXT: Quick explanation
- Groups:Quick explanation
- Teams:Quick explanation
- Covenant:Quick explanation
- Multiply:Quick explanation

Under all of this, you have Administrative Systems, Communication Strategy and Finances (2017 Goal is \$330,000)

T: Here's what happens... as we begin to understand Jesus is life, we want to bring others in on this. It's not only, "Hey, I need this, but so do they!" Not only will these steps change my story, they will change someone else's story. That's what Paul shows us in Philippians 1:24-26

II. Take steps with Jesus for your story to impact their stories. (1:24-26)

This was Paul's life. Read *Philippians 1:24-26*

- Paul's life was not self-centric, but others-centric. That is the natural consequence of following Jesus, because Jesus, as we will see, was the ultimate example of a selfless, sacrificing for others kind of life.
- There is crazy potential for you to influence others. Some of you are thinking. Maybe them, but not me. Maybe you pastor T, after all you went to school for stuff like this, but not me. No, you have incredible potential. You want to know why?
- Jesus in us becomes Jesus through us, but it's not just Jesus in us becoming Jesus through us, but more specifically: it's Jesus in us, through us, for them.

So how are we going to see this Map light up this year, with thousands of steps changing hundreds of stories? It all starts with an invitation.

So today I want to invite you to...

The Point: Receive the invitation to an invitational life.

Check out the other side of your **2017 Vision Card**.

In 2017, Because we know... Steps change Stories, we want to see each person who calls Redemption Hill their church take some bold steps by extending...

12 Irresistible Invites into the story of Jesus through Redemption Hill.

How is that going to happen? Each one of us is going to present one, compelling, meaningful, and personal invite each month within their relational networks. We all have friends, neighbors, co-workers, classmates, family who are not fully connected into the story of Jesus or connecting to a Jesus loving church.

You say, Well, what am I inviting them to? Take your pick. Sure, for most people, Sunday is their first real preview of who we are as a church (what we value, what we believe about Jesus, how we seek to live in light of who he is), BUT... you don't have to give all twelve irresistible invites to our Sunday experience. It might be a Serve Medford event, a Connecting event, a Group, or you inviting them into your life and sharing the story of Jesus.

Consider this: When we get about this TOGETHER... roughly 2,100 collective invitations will cover our city!

The vast majority of people get involved with the story of Jesus through a church because of personal invitation. A recent study by Lifeway Research shows: "63% of Americans say a personal invitation from a friend or neighbor would be very or somewhat effective in getting them to visit a church." Something

tells me that number dips under 50% here in New England, but the odds are not completely stacked against us. :)

The question is how will we do it. **Will our invitations be ignorable or irresistible?**

Let me just say from the outset. I know the word irresistible could make some of you nervous.

- Of course the invitation can be resisted... Not only have we been resisted, Jesus has been resisted.
- Our focus is on the quality of our invitation. Some invites are easy to ignore. Others are much more difficult to turn down.

12 Irresistible Invitations

1. Personal

- There is power in personal invitation.
 - I can pass a billboard. I can throw away a flyer. I can scroll past a Facebook ad. We easily ignore the impersonable, BUT when a person who I know cares about me, looks me in the eye and gives a personal invitation, that's a different ball game.
 - Think about your deepest friendships. All things being equal, those are the people most likely to respond.
- It can be very awkward and uncomfortable when you step into a new circumstance. That's worse when you don't have someone to experience that with you.
- But that is eliminated through the power of friendship. This is why I'm so thankful for our First Impressions Team that helps create a welcoming environment here on Sundays and provides friendship for those who visit solo on Sundays.
- Yes, there is a place for inviting people in the first conversation we have with them, but in most cases it is not only much more effective, it is much more natural and genuine when we invite people into our lives before we invite them to church.
- One pastor said, "Don't invite people to your church before you invite them to your home." That's good.
- T: Related to this, our invitations will be much stronger, when they are...

2. Meaningful

- When you invite people, consider them. Tailor it to them. I hope people can walk away knowing what's in it for them.
- We have some great people (community). God is doing some extraordinary work in the lives of ordinary people (transformation). Our church really loves to Serve our city. I think you'd love our Serve Medford initiative
- It's okay to go for the easy ask. One friend may be ready to come on a Sunday. Another friend just wants to watch the Pats win the Super Bowl two weeks from today, so they'll show up for one of our Groups' Super Bowl parties as their first step. Another friend might want to go distribute Soup to families around our city.
- Show people you've actually considered them, rather than throwing out a generic, shallow invitation.

3. Compelling

- "Hey, wanna come, bro? I mean if you have nothing else going on and are really bored, this would be a slight upgrade." Ignorable!
- "Hey, I would love for you to come with me. This is one of the best investments of my time each week, and I believe you'd really like it. In fact, if you don't feel like you benefit from the experience, I wouldn't expect you to come back." Much more difficult to resist.
- It's not (little motion of the finger). It's (arm wave, sweeping arm motions). Let's do this man!
- If you lack passion, people will probably not be compelled.

- But when they see this means something to you. Better than that, when they see what God is doing in you, how your life is changing, how you handle stress and work through frustrating relationships and extend generosity not only with your currency but your calendar, their head will turn. That's what's up!
- Show them how much you want them here.
- **[PIC]** Take their phone (don't steal it, just borrow for a couple min) and put a planned drive on their **Waze** app to 30 Forest St. On Sunday at 10:00am. Ha!
- If you know people are more interested in good food than Jesus... Hey, I'm going to pick you up (personal and meaningful), and I'm going to take you to Ball Square cafe, Donuts with a Difference and Mystic Coffee on our way, or lunch afterwards at Tenoch (that's compelling), and I'm gonna pay (much more compelling).
- It's even more powerful in community: when two friends pick up a friend, go get some food, and then go serve the city together.
- Number 4: We got have some...

4. **Courageous**

- **I realize this may be a stretch for some. The goal is the rhythm of one a month. If six irresistible invites is big for you, go for six. We'll celebrate every step! For others, you're not thinking 6, you're thinking 36, because that's who God has made you to be.**
- **Either way, we need some God-given courage and some God-given confidence.**
- **Because you know what is going to happen. When you say "to live is Christ," and you start praying for people and start asking God to give you courage, the Spirit of Christ is going to tap you on the shoulder in that conversation with a neighbor and say, "Here you go. Now."**
- **When a culture of invitation sweeps our church, we will be planning for this and we will roll with the promptings of God.**
- **Courage. To tell stories we've never told, we need to take steps we've never taken.**
- Listen: if dropping a card on a co-worker's desk with your name on it is outside your comfort zone, roll with it. You know Pastor T got your back.
- God can and will use us in our timidity, but let's ask him for courageous confidence as we, #5...

5. **Loving**

- The love of Christ compels us to love people in compelling ways.
- In love, Jesus invited us in! That's why we invite others.
- Love does not judge, but reaches out to all. Love does not relent, but reaches out a 7th, a 8th, a 28th time.
- Love expects the God of love to work through us. That's why I try to always have invite cards on me, you know what I'm saying. Locked and loaded with love.

Now, we want to help you with this... There are other pieces of Redemption Hill that are vital to us being a healthy church in 2017. **(Remember the map - PIC Disc. Strategy)**. And those are designed to help you and help you help others.

So here are... **new PIC**

4 Story-Changing Steps (More on this next week...)

- 1. Spend transformational time with God daily. It all starts here.**
- 2. Energize our Sunday experience by serving with a Team (1x/month).**
 - Help us reach our potential on Sundays. How? Use your God-given potential to serve others.

3. Connect with a Group for mutual encouragement in community (3x/month).

- 1st week of every month...
- Connecting events... great to invite.

4. Share your story and the story of Jesus with one person by Easter!

- How is Jesus changing you? That's your story.

Conclusion:

Today is an invitation to the invitational life. Just imagine... 2100 invites. Even with 1 of 6 saying, I'm in. That's 420 meaningful opportunities. If 1 of 4 join the fam, that's 105 new people connected in 2017. When that happens, Medford and RHC will never be the same.

- I expect to be meeting a lot people I've never seen.
- We're going to create a new syndrome around here: New Name Fatigue...
- I plan to get tired of learning new people's names, you know what I'm saying.
- I can't wait to introduce you to some of my friends you've never met...

What story will God write in you?

What story will God write through you?

Steps change Stories.

Will you take this step with us in 2017?

"2017 Vision Sunday: The Invitational Life"

Philippians 1:19-26

PRAYER...

God, help us understand, *the sidelines are safe but lifeless.*

God, make my life an invitation. Help me receive this invitation to the invitational life.

Lead us to pray bold prayers. Use us to see people connect their stories to your stories.

Help us believe that if you are powerful enough to speak stars into existence, he can help you extend his love to a friend.

Guided Prayer Time...

- Think of **family members**: spouse, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, inlaws, nephews, and nieces.
- Think of **neighbors**: next-door neighbors, elderly persons in the neighborhood, and new families on your block.
- Think of **people at work**: supervisors, employees you supervise, secretaries, clerical staff, students you teach, clients, new staff members, and colleagues you see occasionally.
- Think of **friends with whom you dine out**: single friends, parents of your child's friends, old friends from school, and friends of your spouse.
- Think of **casual associates**: your dentist, doctor, real estate or life insurance agent, your child's teacher, merchants, service or luncheon club members, people who belong to clubs or associations or professional groups that you attend, babysitters, sales representatives who call on you, people who graduated from the same university.
- Think especially of **people undergoing personal life stresses of some kind**. These individuals are often ready to hear answers to their problems from within the Christian faith: People who recently divorced, couples with new babies, families that have experienced a recent death, households where someone has lost their job or suffered business reverses.

Next Step... Sermon: invite... your friend - send a text right now... (Kevin... background music)