

Brentview Baptist Church



'Don't Take The Journey Alone'

Stories of Impact

Pastor Dave Spate

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This afternoon something quite unique will be happening, one of the ladies from our church will become the second women to be ordained in the NAB conference of Churches. Presently, there is one other lady who holds these credentials but her ordination happened over 10 years ago, and she has just retired. Now, you need to know that this has been a hard journey for her husband; I have had to get my head around having both of us preaching on the weekends, waiting on supper until she gets back from doing a funeral or making a hospital visit and having to call Kathy Reverend Spate or she won't answer me. It has also been hard to be her Senior Pastor, for because she is my wife, I have felt it was necessary to sit back during this process and not take a more active part. For if she had been another staff/church member going through this very same journey I would have been more involved in the process. Instead to this point I have had to step back and let her and you steer this journey.

Today, after all the study, papers, church votes and Ordination counsels behind us, can I say that as the Senior Pastor of Brentview Baptist church I am so pleased that Kathy has heard and answered God's personal call on her life, and that I think this is a good day for the Kingdom of God for we as a church are saying out loud that when we see God's gifts and calls an individual, be they men or women, that we will support what God is doing in that person's life, and that together we want to affirm what we have observed, God's direction and call on her life and pray that this affirmation will enlarge her scope and effectiveness of her ministry. Let me also add that this day did not happen in a vacuum. Who Kathy is today is the result of her desire to continue to grow in Jesus, continue to be obedient to his call on her life and hard work which she has done to develop those passions and gifts within her.

It is happening not only because she has sat under some good preaching but because friends and different small groups have cared for her and spoken into her life, and because on her journey she has been involved in a variety of ministries that God has used in her life to shape her into who He needs her to be today. I want to say this because it is true, and because we need to all remember that this journey of faith is never meant to be taken alone. C.S. Lewis said "Christ works in all kinds of ways but above all, he works on us through community". What happens today and what will happen in the future has and will be possible because she didn't take the journey alone.

This last couple of weeks I have been calling you (in this Year of Impact) to step out and attempt things which are Bigger than you. Like Gideon, who, as an individual was able to make an impact on his entire nation. As we said last week, don't miss the impact you can make on those around you, as you live a life worth imitating. I need to throw in one word of caution 'Don't take the Journey alone'.

I was trying to figure out how best to describe why this is so important and I came across an idea from Andy Stanley that may help. His comment was that all of us want to be known and all of us want to be known for something. If you want an example of that just go to anyone's Face book page and you will see that they place pictures and comments about themselves which will help you know them better. Let me give you an example, I just quickly Googled Craig Vanderhide's face book and the leading picture show's Craig and his Fiancée Lorellie. If you keep going through his pictures, you will find that Craig is an awesome skier. He plays guitar, has done some recording and he is quite the golfer. Now what is interesting about Face book is that if you look through someone's pictures you will see that all of us want to be known and we want to manage how people see us.

Some of us spend a lot of time and money to make sure we look good or are seen as people who work really hard and have the house and toys that make us look successful. Some of us want to be seen as very professional, the best nurse or the best dad or mom and so on. Most of that is important because it pushes us to be better in different areas of our lives. The problem is that often there can be a gap between who we want to be and who we really are in some areas of our lives. Some of you have experienced this gap on the way to church, maybe you fought with your spouse on the way to church and then as you walked into the door you put on the happy couple look. It is like when you are walking up to your parents place with the kids and you whisper under your breath 'you better be good or so help me when we leave...'. And if we are honest, all of us have areas in our lives where there are gaps between who we appear to be and who we really are. That is why we work so hard to maintain the image.

All of us have those areas in our lives where we feel if someone really knew this about me they wouldn't think so well of me. So we only show the created image of us to others. But here is the problem: Because we are afraid others may not like us if they knew certain things about us, we never really let anyone 'really' know us (and that leaves us lonely). In those areas where we would love to have someone come along side and help us win over an addiction, an insecurity or loneliness, we are so conscience of maintaining our image we never let anyone, who could help get close enough to actually help. So we stay lonely and we fail to win in those 'Gap' areas where who we want to be and who we are, are totally different. Here is the reality, while we all want to be known for something we do and how we appear, there is a deeper craving within all of us to be known by a community of friends who really know us, really care for us and who love us too much to leave us the way we are. To have people who love us and want to help us become all God wants us to become. This may be a shock to you but that is exactly what the local church is supposed to do. The church is supposed to be the place where people who find that there is gaps in their lives between where they want to be and where they know they are feel comfortable in finding friends who are ok when a person says 'here is where I am, this is the real me and there are gaps between where I am and where I want to be.'

As Christians we should be incredible at this because we have experienced forgiveness in our lives. We have been accepted by God, despite what we have done. We are in the process as the bible explains of becoming 'new people' as Jesus touches our lives. And because we have been given 2nd chances in our lives by God, we should be excited about helping others find new starts and win in areas where they have quietly been loosing on the inside.

We need to be at the place where baggage is ok, because Jesus on the cross took care of the baggage we have been carrying. We know that He has enough power to help others lay their baggage aside and get free of that guilt and pain that every so often rises up and makes people so disappointed in what they have done. It helps them win over some of those things they may be doing to take care of the pain that sits deep within them. All of us need a place where we can say 'in my marriage this is where I need help, as a single adult this is what I am struggling with' and having said it out loud to be able to look across the room and instead of seeing condemnation or shock in someone's face. Instead, see them nodding their head because they have been there and they know from experience that all of us have 'gap areas' in our lives that need the care of Jesus.

I know that is true because a year ago I remember a Sunday when I invited you to write a one line testimony on a card, of what God had done in your life and then place it on the front steps of the stage. When the morning was over we had the stage completely covered with cards that said things like 'my marriage was a mess and now we have found love again' or 'struggled with an addiction, have found freedom' or 'living in fear of failing and found a peace that I can't explain' or 'was content with loneliness, now in Love in and in Community again'. This room is full of people who know from personal experience that once we had a real encounter with Jesus that we felt forgiven, free and over time transformation has happened in our lives. People here have not only accepted where we were at but have been willing to walk with us to help us become more of what God created us to be. That is the core of what the local church is supposed to be. This place is not supposed to be a place where you need to do Image management but a place where you can do life with friends.

Grab your bibles and flip over to (*Acts 2*) as the early church began to figure out how to do faith and life, we read that they connected in three ways (*Acts 2:42, 46-47*) they meet each other at the temple (church), they meet in their homes, they met each other around tables. Why? Because there is a need to gather as a larger group so you can look around the room and see that God is powerful enough to be at work in the lives of many people at the same time (Similar to what we saw when we did the cardboard testimonies) and that gives us hope. Then together, we turn our faces heavenward and say 'You have proved you are loving, now we have the confidence to bring our 'gap areas' to you and ask that you, with the help of our friends will find new freedoms and a fuller life and we desperately ask that you do the same for those we love'. Then they met in homes together because as Matt Chandler says 'Sanctification always takes place within the confines of deep relationships. For it is so easy to believe that our ideas our way of doing things are always right and at times a friend needs to says 'I heard you speaking to your wife, heard you putting your son down again and as friend or brother I need to point this out to you'.

Because as your friend, stop you and cause you to rethink your actions. A home gets happier because you did life with a friend who had faith. Then they met around tables together for relationships can go to a whole new level over a meal. We all need times to laugh together around a good meal. For often in the process we grow what some call our 2:00 AM friends. Who are the kind of person, when the problems hit at 2:00 am in the morning will be the kind of friend that will be there no matter what the time or situation.

We will all need one of those at some time in our lives. There is the New Testament pattern, meeting in Church as a larger group to worship and be inspired, meeting in homes as a smaller group to wrestle through life together and around meals because true friendship needs food, fun, laughter and time in which to grow. What is amazing is that this was the pattern for all the people we find who were Christ followers. For we read in (*Acts 9*) that even in the life of the Apostle Paul, God brings Ananias, then Barnabas and then others to come along side of him and help him in those areas where despite his brilliance he needed the care of others to help him along the journey. When you read (*Romans 16*) you find 35 friends listed who were key players in helping Paul not only do ministry but care for him as a person. Why? Because life can get lonely and we need friends when the 'stuff happens' in life.

Let me give you 3 verses that are important in this area:

(*Hebrews 10:24-25*) We are called to 'spur one another on to good deeds'. Our call is to encourage each other to get involved in things that will make a difference in our kids, grandkids and neighbors lives. So that by our lives we help them become connected with the God who they will need so they don't develop 'gap areas' which could cause hurt in their lives. Then it adds 'let us encourage one another' that means that our call is not to judge them, not to leave them in their struggle but to encourage them. Remember, you can only encourage another person if you know them well enough to know where they need that word of encouragement that puts air back in them when they feel deflated.

(*James 5:16*) 'Confess your sins one to another' why does it say this? It is because we all know of things which if we could have figured out how to do ourselves; we would have been able to fix it a long time ago. So here, it is talking about finding that friend with whom you can say 'this issue has got to me, I can't seem to beat it on my own, and will you walk with me and help me win in this area?' And so you give that person you trust, permission to come along side, pray for you, give you a call when your traveling and be that friend who tells you truth when you want it or not.

(*Galatians 6:1-3*) 'If they are caught in a sin, restore them gently'. For far too long the church has felt like the last place you want to be if you have 'stepped in it'. The fact is that our goal here is to be the first place someone who wants to come because we can help them find forgiveness (just like we did) and a friend who can pray with them, call them and help them get up and do better in the future. Notice that it says, do it gently. The path of influence runs right down the path of acceptance.

The idea that because we all have areas in our lives where there is a gap between who we are and who we want to be, we all need a friend (group of friends) to pray with us, walk with us and who also need us to walk with them. This is not an add-on to what the church does; it is the CORE of who we are supposed to be. Let me add that while we have learned that we cannot create or force that kind of intimacy to happen in a group. We have found that God honors people's attempt to build community as they are part of a Small group.

I can give you lot's of stories of how as people stepped out in courage and shared their area where gaps were happening in their marriages, work, family or personal life that great changes and victories have happened. I believe that when it comes to not taking the journey alone we need to all choose to connect in 3 specific ways:

1. Choose to Connect for Celebration

We have 3 services on Sundays 9:00 am, 11:00 am & 6:30 pm. I want to encourage you to make one of those services yours and be as regular as you can. Why? Because I believe that in the services you have a chance to have an encounter with God and the last thing I want for you is to miss that moment in time when God has something that could change the course of your life. That may sound over the top, but it was fun as I stepped down last Sunday to hear again from someone 'how did you know? You were speaking directly to me today'. I don't know how that happens, but I know if you and I come ready to hear, God can have a word for you that may encourage you and challenge you or be that key that you have been waiting a long time for.

2. Choose to Connect for Community

Get connected to a Small group or set aside time to meet with 2 to 3 friends to do faith together. (*Matthew 18:19, 20*) The promise given there is that as 2 or 3 Christian gather together, God will be there and because of that there is power there as well. I am not sure how you felt hearing about the addiction of the young boy in Sparwood? But when I heard the News Reporter Make a point to say 'And the father believes that God will bring his son home'. My first response was that if the boy doesn't come home, what will the news report say then? But I can tell you that I have heard of numerous people who because of that comment prayed that this exactly was what would happen. The wonder of getting connected in a Small Group or a group of a few Christian friends is that when you gather together, God promises to be there to walk with you in power.

3. Choose to Connect for Service

In Tony Campolo's book 'Red Letter Christians' he tells of sitting down in a restaurant in Port at Prince Haiti. He had been seated at a table next to the front window of the restaurant. He was had just received his meal when he realized he was being watched. There inches from him with their noses pressed against the window were 3 raggedy dirty Haitian boys staring at the food on his plate. Their hair was rust colored, that indicated a lack of protein and they had distended stomachs which were evidence of extreme malnutrition and their eyes were riveted on his food. Just then the waiter saw the problem, grabbed the blind and pulled it down and said 'don't let it bother you, Enjoy your meal'. Tony wrote 'as if I could not let it bother me'.

Isn't that what we do, sort of 'pull down the shades' and hide ourselves as millions of desperate people press their noise against the glass barriers we created'? That is why this year we are feeling that call to step it up and make an impact. My prayer is that all of our Small groups, actually each one of us will find a way to make an Impact in our homes, our neighborhoods and this world.

(Interview with Michelle Rievaj) Let me help tie together how becoming connected for Celebration, Community and Service has affected her life.

If you want to get connected with a Small Group: I know that some of you have had wonderful experiences in a Small Group, and some of you have had a bad experience's, but you have had bad hair cuts and have not stopped getting your hair cut so can I encourage you to take a risk?

1. Check our Website, there is a place you can sign up (talk to one of our pastors)
2. Consider starting a group yourself, if we can help we would love to
3. If you are wondering what to study there are questions that come out of the morning sermon on the church website or for a book study we recommend 'Right Here, Right Now' by Alan Hirsch or Lance Ford or Tony Campolo's DVD's 'The Red Letter Addition'.

For most of us there are gaps between who we want to be and the person we want to be. I believe that God desires is to place us in community in which we can Connect, Celebrate and Serve. As you leave today can I ask you a simple question?

The Question is: Who are you doing life with?

1. If there is a Gap between who you are and who you want to be, do you need to consider letting God into your life so he can help?
2. If you find yourself taking the journey of life alone, let me encourage you to join a Small Group or to look for people and places of service to get connected to. For God never wanted you to take the journey alone.

