

## John on Jesus - The Power of My Network

Sign Title: The Power of a Network

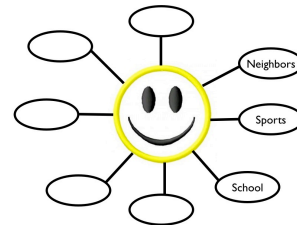
April 22, 2012

Good morning Faith family. I also want to welcome those of you connecting through the Internet. I am thankful you can join us. This morning, we are back in the Gospel of John where we are learning the story of God in the flesh.

### My relational network

Before we get to our text, I want you to turn to the back of your outline and draw a circle. Turn it into a smiley face by giving it eyes, a nose and a mouth. Don't make it too weird, because it is intended to be a self-portrait.

Now write the names of groups you are involved with in bubbles around you. When you are done, draw a line connecting yourself to those groups.



Examples of groups are:

- The neighborhood you live in.
- The people you see at the gym.
- The ladies you meet for coffee.
- Coworkers.
- The people you sit next to in the stands when your child plays sports.
- Friends on Facebook.
- The Chamber of Commerce or Kiwanis.
- Parents you know through the local P.I.E. group.

Take 30 seconds to write the names of the groups you are involved with. If you are done already, you either need to think harder or we need to pray you get more friends. (*Wait 30 seconds*)

Flip to the front of your outline. We will return to the picture of your relational network later in the message.

### **The Hush Puppies resurgence**

Let's begin by talking about Hush Puppies. I am not talking about the fried cornmeal Hush Puppy. I am talking about the classic brushed-suede shoe. How many of you remember wearing them? In preparation for this weekend's message, I reread the book Tipping Point by Malcolm Gladwell. He tells the Hush Puppies story<sup>1</sup>.



Prior to 1994, the Hush Puppies brand was dead. Wolverine, the company that makes Hush Puppies, was considering eliminating the brand from its lineup because sales were less than 30,000 pairs a year. Then, something strange happened. Hush Puppies became trendy in the clubs and bars of downtown Manhattan. The shoes were a sellout in the resale shops of New York. Since major department stores no longer carried them, people were traveling to the only place you could still buy Hush Puppies, small Mom and Pop stores.

Wolverine had no idea why this was happening. Later that year, a fashion designer used Hush Puppies as the feature shoe for his spring collection. It

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

wasn't long before Hush Puppies were trendy. From 1994-95, Wolverine went from selling 30,000 pairs a year to 430,000. A year later they sold 1.6 million pairs. By 1996, Hush Puppies became standard footwear for young American men. The company was congratulated with marketing awards. Thankfully, it told the truth. It admitted it had no idea what caused the roaring comeback.

After some research, the company found the answer. It had nothing to do with its marketing campaign. It was because a handful of kids in downtown Manhattan began wearing Hush Puppies because nobody else was wearing them. They discovered they liked them. They told their friends about Hush Puppies. Their friends told their friends about Hush Puppies. Like a virus, Hush Puppy enthusiasm began to spread. One of the teenager's parents worked in the fashion industry. That is where enthusiasm for Hush Puppies jumped from the teenage to the adult world. After that, it was only months for Hush Puppies enthusiasm to go nationwide.

Why do I tell you this? I want to illustrate the power of the relational network you drew on the back of your bulletin. If you influence your friends, who in turn influence their friends, you can change the country. One person talking to their friends can literally change a nation.

**My network of friends has the power of geometric progression.**

Let me give you another way to look at the power of your relational network. Let's illustrate it through the power of mathematics by looking at something called geometric progression. One way to illustrate geometric progression is to take a simple sheet of paper and fold it. As we know, it gets a

little thicker each time we fold it. The question is, 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. 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 the Empire State building? A piece of paper folded more than 50 times would approximate the distance of the earth to the sun.<sup>2</sup> That is the power of geometric progression. It illustrates the power of what happens when everyone in your relational network passes something on to everyone in their relational network. That is what turned Hush Puppies from a fashion trend for a group of teenagers into the standard shoe for American men in two years by only word-of-mouth advertising.

How does this relate to the Gospel of John? Let's turn there to find out. We are in John 1:35. Two weeks ago, we finished studying John the Baptist. He paved the way for Jesus. The hermit who lived in the wood became a hip, cultural sensation. The man who by nature avoided everybody so he could eat bugs became Mr. Popularity. When people asked him about himself, he considered himself a nobody when compared to Jesus, who is the real somebody. This morning, we are moving from John the Baptist to learn how Jesus' ministry got off the ground and how it moved from John the Baptist to a third of the world following Jesus Christ. It all happened through relational networks and the power of geometric progression.

**Andrew and John meet Jesus through John the Baptist.**

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<sup>2</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, page. 11

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)

At this point in the game, who recognized the identity of Jesus? Only John the Baptist. Even Mary, Jesus’ mother, doesn’t get it. Why did John the Baptist understand Jesus’ true identity? It wasn’t because he had a perfect score on his ACTs. It was because of a special revelation from God. After John the Baptist baptized Jesus, he saw the Holy Spirit descend like a dove on Jesus and heard the voice of God the Father saying, “This is my Son, in whom I am well pleased.” I am sure John the Baptist freaked out. Baptisms where the God the Father and the Holy Spirit show up to personally celebrate don’t happen every day.

John saw Jesus walking by and told friends in his relational network that Jesus was the “Lamb of God.” Three weeks ago, we learned that phrase is packed with meaning. John said Jesus is the one who will die for sin. At that time, they slaughtered lambs when people sinned because God told them the only way to handle sin was by death. The lamb figuratively died in their places. Jesus is not the lamb we provide for our sin, he is the lamb God provided. He is the lamb who died once and for all for all of our sin. Jesus is the lamb of infinite value so he died for all sins of the past, present and future. He died not just for our sins but for even for the sins of the Old Testament saints. The title, “Lamb of God” is a serious business. John the Baptist told his friends that the Lamb of God is Jesus.

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

There are couple questions here. First, who were these two disciples? The text later tells us one of them is Andrew. The other guy doesn't name himself. Scholars think it is probably John the Apostle, who wrote this book. I think they are right. When John wrote about something that included himself, in humility, he typically left his name off the roster. Let's just assume it is Andrew and John.

We should also notice that John the Baptist did something weird. Andrew and John were probably some of John the Baptist's best men. They were probably on staff at the John the Baptist ministry club. John the Baptist gave away some of his staff! He pointed them to Jesus. I love that about John the Baptist. He understood his job was to point people to Jesus, not build a crowd for himself.

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 these guys was, "Why are you following me? I already have a shadow, I don't need another one. You guys are acting like stalkers following me around town. What are you doing?"

Then they tipped their hats. They called him Rabbi, which means teacher. It wasn't until later in history when the term 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 you told them you looked up to them and wanted to learn from them.

The problem is, how much did Andrew and John know about Jesus? Almost nothing! If they knew nothing about Jesus, why were they calling him Rabbi? They called Jesus Rabbi because they trusted their friend John the Baptist. If John the Baptist said Jesus was the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world, they would trust his word.

The average person is submitted to 3,000 advertisements a day. They are at the gas pumps, in the movie theatre, in public restrooms and in the outfield of our kids' Little League fields. 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 it.<sup>3</sup>

How do we handle advertising? We filter it. One of the ways we filter advertising is through friends and acquaintances. If someone we trust says something positive about a product, then we consider buying it. The rest of the advertising we blow off. We use our relational network to help us know what people and information are important.

This is what happened with Andrew and John the Apostle. They trusted what John the Baptist had to say about Jesus. That is why they called him Rabbi even though they didn't know him.

Next, they asked Jesus where he was staying. This sounds a little weird. "Jesus, we want you to be our teacher. We are inviting ourselves over your house for dinner." I tell my kids not to do that. It is a rude to invite yourself over

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/marketing/advertising\\_everywhere.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/parents/marketing/advertising_everywhere.cfm)

to someone's house. Here, it is biblical. What is happening? The disciples invited themselves to Jesus' house.

Why did they invite themselves to dinner? They wanted to know Jesus. They wanted to explore what John the Baptist meant when he said Jesus is the Lamb of God. I love the way Jesus handled himself when John and Andrew came over for dinner. He could have dumped the whole program on them over the dinner hour. He could have told them how he made creation. He could have told them about his impending death and resurrection. He could have blown their minds away with details. He didn't do that. He knew the first conversation is not the time for those kind of details. He simply let them come over for some burgers on the grill, potato chips and a root beer float.

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 understanding the identity of Jesus, he doesn't pull out spread sheets. He doesn't pull out facts and statistics. There is a place for logical arguments for faith in Christ and heavy-duty Bible studies but the moment you meet somebody *is not the place*. All Jesus says is, "Come, and you will see." In other words, "Spend time with me and you will see if I am all John says I am."

Many times we try to prove Jesus is real, the church is real, God is alive and Jesus changes lives. I think that is the wrong approach. We shouldn't focus on proving things about Jesus, we should focus on inviting people to meet him. Invite them to "Come and see" for themselves. Come and see the church as God's people. See if they are different. See if their lives are changed. Spend



time under the teaching of God's Word and reading the Bible. See if the Holy Spirit begins working in your heart. Come and see. That is all Jesus is asking us to do. It is that simple.

### **Peter meets Jesus through Andrew, his brother, and John, his fishing buddy.**

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 dragged him to Jesus. Incidentally, Simon worked with John the Apostle. They worked in a fishing business so there was an additional friendship connection. Peter said, "If Andrew and John, the guys I am related to and the guys I fish with think they found the Christ, I better take this seriously. Jesus is worth meeting because my friends wouldn't steer me wrong."

Can you see how it is through friendships and relational networks that people are introduced to Jesus? It isn't a slick marketing campaign with billboards and door hangers. It is people talking to their friends about Jesus. They don't try to prove Jesus; they simply invite their friends to meet Jesus. The burden of proof falls on Jesus, not us.

There are three kinds of people in our lives. Family, friends and acquaintances. While the most influential group of people in our lives is our family, in practice, we are more influenced by our acquaintances. Our family has a similar relational universe to our own. Our family doesn't introduce us to new

ideas. It is with acquaintances where we connect with different ideas.

Acquaintances introduce us to new ideas and, because we have a measure of trust with them, we are willing to try them. This has profound ramifications for sharing Christ. We will be most effective sharing Jesus with the acquaintances in our lives. This is where we can introduce new ideas and they will be trusted.

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)

This was unusual. In this culture, students usually chose their teachers. Here, Jesus chose Philip. Most of us were introduced to Jesus through someone in our relational network. There are some of us that Jesus simply calls to himself. My wife is one of those people. She was given a Gospel tract in high school. She ran across it in her dresser years later. God called her when she read it. She got down on her knees, repented of her sin and trusted in Jesus. Most of the time, God uses the people in our relational networks to introduce us to Jesus but he is capable of just calling us.

Philip was from Bethsaida. When translated that means "fish town." Andrew and Peter were both from Bethsaida. So Jesus calls Philip and Philip wonders who he will know in this new group of Jesus' followers. It turns out Andrew and Peter came from his neighborhood.

Two weeks ago, I was on a study week in Wisconsin with other pastors from different parts of the country. One guy was from New Jersey. He was pastoring near where I grew up. Can you imagine the instant connection? I

didn't know him but because we connected through a town, we could relate.

That is the feeling Philip has when he meets John, Andrew and Peter.

### **Nathanael meet Jesus through Philip, his friend.**

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 did a double-take. Nazareth? Nazareth? Nazareth was a dinky town where everyone was related. Nobody knew why the town exists. It wasn't on the way to anywhere. The Nazareth school system fit in one room. The post office, police station and fire department all worked out of the same building. The residents of Nazareth married their relatives. In Nazareth everyone acted like Gomer Pyle.



Nathanael was stunned. 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! We are not arguing about this. I am not going to try and prove Jesus." Philip simply said, "You have to meet him; you have to spend time with this guy named Jesus. When you do, you will believe." Since Nathanael trusted Philip, he agreed to spend time with Jesus. All this happened because of the power of relational networks.

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 is freaked out. “How do you know me? I never met you. We should at least shake hands before you pass judgment on my character.”

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 for quiet time, Bible reading and prayer during the day, they would sit under the shade of a tree. One of the best trees to sit under was a fig tree. At that time, the ancient rabbis coined the phrase “Sitting under the fig tree.” It meant somebody was out reading their Bible. Apparently Nathanael was busy reading his Bible and praying under a fig tree that morning. Obviously, he was having an intense time with God.



Jesus said, “I saw you having your quiet time this morning.” We don’t know what Nathanael was studying or what he was praying. I suspect he was prayerfully asking to know God better. His prayer was answered because that afternoon he met God in the flesh. How is that for an answer to your morning prayers?

That is enough for a complete turnaround. Nathanael said, “Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel.” He went from a complete disbeliever to convinced Jesus was God simply because Nathanael took the time

to meet him. He took the time to come and see. Philip didn't have to prove anything. Jesus can prove himself.

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 1:50–51 (ESV)

Jesus said, "You believe because I said I saw you under the fig tree. You haven't seen anything yet. That wasn't even the warm up. That wasn't even stretching before the game."

He said, "Truly, truly I say to you." That is his way of telling Nathanael he is telling the honest truth. "You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Who is the Son of Man? This is one of Jesus' favorite ways to identify himself. It is imagery from the book of Daniel, chapters 7 and 8. It talks about God becoming a man. Jesus identified himself as the one from the book of Daniel who is the Son of Man.

Jesus said, "You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on me." Jesus quoted from the Genesis passage that talks about Jacob's ladder. This is when Jacob saw a gateway between heaven and the earth. Jesus told Nathanael that he is that gateway. He is the gateway that connects heaven and earth. He is the one who stands between us and God.

### **How does the story of Jesus move forward?**

Our mission statement is reaching our region, and beyond, with the life changing message of Jesus. Do you ever look at the Lakes area of Iowa and wonder how we will reach all the people in our region for Jesus? Even if we did

reach them, do you ever wonder what we could say that would convince them that Jesus really is the Son of God? The task seems overwhelming. This passage helps us with both of those questions.

### **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 our relational networks, people introducing people to Jesus because they trust one another. I think that is a strategy I can work with.

This is the way we can reach our region. If we talk to the people in our relational networks about Jesus and they talk to the people in their relational network, it won't take long for the good news of the gospel to spread.

Remember the Hush Puppies story? Remember the power of geometric progression? If everybody focused on telling their friends and acquaintances in the network they wrote down on the back of the bulletin it wouldn't take long for us to reach our region for Jesus.

Media and mass advertising has a place but it isn't usually the way Christ grows his church. Christ usually grows his church through people inviting their friends to meet Jesus.

### **2. I don't need to convince people about Jesus, I only need to invite them to meet him.**

Second, we don't tell people in our relational network about Jesus by brow beating them. We don't ring doorbells with a pamphlet in our hand, forcing them to make a decision for Christ the moment we meet them. What did Jesus do? He built relationships. He invited them to come and see. He had dinner with

people. He had BBQ and potato salad. He invited people over to watch the football game.

This morning, the application is simple. Those people connected to me are my mission field. My job is simply to build relationships with them and invite them to come and see Jesus. That simple strategy will reach the world for Jesus.

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 letter 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 finally arrived at the stock broker's home, he could see how many hands it passed through before arriving. 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 get the concept there only exists six degrees of separation between us.<sup>4</sup> That was before the Internet. That was before 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

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<sup>4</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, pages 34-35.

to reach, it wouldn't take long to reach our region and maybe even the world, for Jesus.

In a moment, we are going to respond to God's Word by taking communion together. We will respond to Jesus being alive, active and real among us. As you take the bread and the cup, I don't want you to just think of it as Christ's body and blood shed for our sins. I want you to think of the bread and the cup shared between Jesus, Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael. It was over a meal they began a friendship with Jesus that proved to them he was the Christ, the son of God.

As you hold the bread and the cup, I am praying God will bring to mind the people he wants us to connect with this summer.

## 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 EFCA. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics of study are ancient rhetoric and preaching. Feel free to contact him at [ktruck@gmail.com](mailto:ktruck@gmail.com) or visit his web at [www.christ2Rculture.com](http://www.christ2Rculture.com)

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