

## Making a Commitment to Experience God

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Risky Commitments

Genesis 32:6-8, 22-32

How many of you have ever read the Greek myth called *The Odyssey* by Homer. When I was in high school that was one of the books we had to read.

There's a fascinating story in *The Odyssey* where Odysseus is sailing by an island where creatures called "The Sirens" lived. In Greek mythology, the sirens were beautiful women who by their enchanted singing and music lured sailors to their island where they would be shipwrecked on the rocky coast. Their island was covered with the dried out bones of sailors who were shipwrecked. The sirens' song was said to be irresistible, but yielding to the song resulted in death.

So, how did Odysseus sail safely past the island of the sirens? First, he melted wax to fill the ears of his men so they would not be able to hear the sirens' song. And then he told the men to tie him, hand and foot, to the ship's mast. And he gave his men instructions to use even more rope if he begged to be set free.

Picture of the sirens and Odysseus

When the ship approached the island, the sirens began to sing, "Odysseus, Odysseus. Come here. Leave your ship and come to us. No one has ever heard our voices and not come to us. Come here. Come here."

Odysseus began to beg to be set free. But because of his prior instructions, the men who could not hear the song tied him even tighter and the ship sailed safely by the island where the siren song could no longer be heard.

One of the frequently occurring words in Bible is the word covenant. The Bible talks a lot about covenants. God makes a covenant with Noah and with Abraham and with the people of Israel and with King David. In the New Testament, Jesus makes a covenant with us to forgive our sins, a covenant we celebrate every week when we take communion together. And in the Bible, people make covenants with other people – a covenant of marriage or a covenant of friendship.

What is a covenant? The original Hebrew word for covenant was berit.

Berit=Covenant

One Old Testament scholar, a man by the name of Gleason Archer, said

“The original meaning of this word *berit* was probably “fetter” or “to bind”.

In other words, parties to a covenant bind themselves, they fetter themselves to act in a certain way in the future. So, why do human beings enter covenants? Why do we make commitments?

We make commitments when we are strong that force us to take certain actions even when we're weak.

Like Odysseus, a covenant or commitment ties us to the mast. The covenant fetters us, binds us to the mast. So, when we meet resistance, when we're weak, when we're being drawn by the sirens' song, when we're tempted, when we want to throw in the towel, when we want to quit, we still move on in our chosen direction. Throughout history, people have found that living successfully demands that we make certain covenants, certain commitments. That we deliberately limit our freedom, that we tie ourselves to the mast.

So, for example, we make a covenant in marriage in which we swear that we will keep our promises for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish until death us do part. Why do we do that? Because we know that when the worse comes, when we're profoundly unhappy, when we're not getting anything out of the relationship, we listen to the siren song and throw in the towel. So, we tie ourselves to the mast.

People do that in trying to maintain sexual purity. Folks install computer programs on their computers which alert someone else, a trusted friend, a spouse, concerning what websites they're visiting in order to stay away from pornography.

We make commitments in things like diet or exercise when we're strong, so that when we're weak we still continue on in our appointed journey.

A few weeks ago, I began a series for the New Year titled “Risky Commitments”. And I said that these days almost no one wants to make a commitment.

We want to hedge our bets, we want to sit on the fence. We want to keep our options open. Few people are willing to make an ironclad, no turning back choice. We want to respond to dinner invitations, not with a yes or no, but a maybe. Or maybe we choose not to respond at all because we don't want to get cornered so we never respond to people's invitations. We don't even want to make a commitment to be mentally present wherever we are physically present. So, we keep our phones switched on even in meetings so we can look at them in case the meeting is dull or we're not interested in what's being talked about. We can look at something more interesting whenever we feel like it. We won't even make a commitment to be mentally present when we're physically present.

Vineyard Columbus has a mission statement that reads,

“Our mission is to develop a community of disciples who experience God, love one another, and partner with Christ to heal the world.”

Today as I continue this series, I’ve called my message “Making a Commitment to Experience God”. Let’s pray.

Genesis 32:22-30

22 That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. 24 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.

25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26 Then the man said, “Let me go, for it is daybreak.”

But Jacob replied, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.”

27 The man asked him, “What is your name?”

“Jacob,” he answered.

28 Then the man said, “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,[a] because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”

29 Jacob said, “Please tell me your name.”

But he replied, “Why do you ask my name?” Then he blessed him there.

30 So Jacob called the place Peniel,[b] saying, “It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”

#### I. The importance of experiencing God

We have deliberately used the term “experiencing” in our mission statement. That our mission is develop a community of disciples who experience God.

“Our mission is to develop a community of disciples who experience God, love one another, and partner with Christ to heal the world.”

The reason why Vineyard Columbus has deliberately used the phrase “experience God” is because so many Christians have a relationship with God from the neck up. For them, Christianity is all about correct ideas and accurate thoughts. Now, I am absolutely committed to truthful doctrine, that we know who it is that we’re worshipping. We Christians, when we gather in worship, we are worshipping the triune God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Christians need to know that each day we are right with God, not because of anything we’ve done or are not doing, but simply through our faith in the obedient life, the sacrificial death and the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. We Christians need to know that the source

of power for daily living and for change in our lives is not will power, but the power of the Holy Spirit who enters our lives when we first trust in Christ. I'm absolutely committed to clear and accurate Christian doctrine, but for too many people Christian faith is reduced to dead orthodoxy, a head knowledge of certain Christian truths, an ability to parrot some doctrinal formulations that we read in a book or heard in a sermon, but we don't personally experience.

The Christian life becomes exciting, it moves from black and white to living color, when we experience what's been called "the 12-inch drop" from something in our heads to something in our hearts. Being a Christian is experiencing God's love for us. It's more than Yes, of course, God loves me. He has to, after all, He loves everyone. We move to, "I know in my heart that God, my Father, loves me." God, my Father, enjoys my company. God, my Father, loves spending time with me and communicating with me.

I deliberately chose the title, "Making a Commitment to Experience God". We use that word experience in our Vineyard Columbus mission statement because being a Christian is more than being orthodox in our doctrine. It's not less than that, but it's more than that. Being a Christian is experiencing God's forgiveness so that you know that God is not holding your sins against you.

Being a Christian is experiencing God's power. There are times in your life when you see God doing something that can't simply be humanly explained. Being a Christian is experiencing God's answer to your prayers. There are times where we say "no one but God could have accomplished that".

So experience is so important in the Christian life.

## II. What keeps us from experiencing God?

In other words, why don't we have a deeper, fuller, more compelling experience of God on a regular basis? I think there's lots of things that one could say here. From this text in Genesis 32, let me mention just three things that may keep us from experiencing God. The first is,

### A. God comes in unexpected ways

Look with me at Genesis 32:1-2, 24

Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. <sup>2</sup> When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" So he named that place Mahanaim. <sup>24</sup> So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.

Jacob is first fleeing from his father-in-law, Laban, and he has an unexpected encounter with a bunch of angels. And then Jacob is fleeing from Esau and, suddenly, a man who turns out to be

the angel of the Lord jumps on him and wrestles with him. Two totally unexpected experiences.

Why don't we experience God more often? Because throughout Christian history, the church has developed institutional controls over the way that people were allowed to experience God. For centuries the church taught that you could only meet God through the mass, through a certain church liturgy. The Reformation was all about meeting God through the preached word, not just through the liturgy, but through the Bible. Then people said, "OK, you can meet God through the Bible, but you can only meet God in a church building." And John Wesley and the Great Awakening was all about introducing people to God outside of a church building. Wesley began preaching in the fields, in the morning and the evening, before and after miners went down into the mines. People were meeting God outside.

Then it was you can only meet God through an ordained clergyman. The great Pentecostal revival that took place in southern California on Azusa Street. It was all about everyone gets to play! You can meet God through somebody that has no credentials.

What keeps us from experiencing God? God comes in unexpected way – we can't control him, we can't put him in a box. Here's the second thing, because God often comes in weird ways.

#### B. God comes in weird ways

There's so much mystery in this story. Who is the angel who suddenly jumps on Jacob and began wrestling with him? Why did he start to wrestle with him? What's this business about knowing or not knowing the angel's name? Why did it matter that daybreak was coming? Jacob had to let him go before the sun rose. I say this with all proper reverence, but this is a weird story. And there are so many stories in the Bible of people meeting God through other people or through experiences that we would consider down right weird.

John the Baptist, he's a weird guy. He goes out in the desert and all he eats is honey and locusts, but his preaching was so powerful that thousands of people followed him into the desert, weeping and repenting of their sins. People turned their lives around as they listened to John preach.

Spiritual gifts, they can seem weird, especially gifts like tongues. Maybe you've been raised in a church where the gift of speaking in tongues is maybe half a step above snake handling. Or you flipped through stations at night and you saw some odd-looking person babbling onto screen. Now, I know that there are those rare people who put a premium on being weird. There are some folks who because of their own emotional imbalance or psychological imbalance are drawn to weirdness. They like relating in weird ways. Most emotionally healthy people are not like that at all.

But my point here is a simple one, just because something makes us feel uncomfortable doesn't mean that God's not in it. Let me share something with you with all affection – God's highest priority is not to make you or me to feel comfortable. His highest priority is to make you and me more Christ-like. And much of the way that He makes us more Christ-like is by making us uncomfortable. So much of Christian growth occurs as God pushes us out of our comfort zones. He nudges us and He says, "I want you to experience me in a different way than you've experienced me before. I want to push you out of your comfort zone. I know that you've never traveled outside of North America, but I want you to go on a short term mission trip to Brazil or to a Muslim country."

Or He nudges you and says, "I want you to begin to serve in children's ministry even though you are a single adult. And not only have you not had children of your own, but the only child you've ever been around is your little brother and you didn't like him very much. Or I want you to give the teaching in your small group or to share your faith with your boss or to give financially well beyond what you're currently giving."

All those things, you say, make me feel uncomfortable. And, yet, they very well may be God at work in your life because, friend, God's highest priority is to not make you and me feel comfortable, it's to make us Christ-like. Never allow your comfort level to be the determinate of what you're willing to accept from God because if you allow your comfort level to be the determinate then you will be severely limiting your experience of the Holy Spirit in your life.

What keeps us from experiencing God? God comes in unexpected ways, God comes in weird ways, and God comes in sovereign ways.

### C. God comes in sovereign ways

I think that a good deal of our difficulty with experiencing more of God. You know, experiencing that 12-inch drop from our head to our heart, when we talk about experiencing God we're not entirely in control.

In John 3, Jesus says to Rabbi Nicodemus,

John 3:8

The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

In this modern world, we love things that we can control. We like techniques and methods. Teach me how to pray for the sick that guarantees that every time I pray, a sick person will get well. So I'm not embarrassed. So I don't feel like a failure. And Jesus says that the Spirit is sovereign and free. The wind blows where it wills.

I pray for lots of people who don't get well and then the wind blows. Just last week, a woman who is a nurse came up to me at Guest Central in the lobby. She said, "Rich, you shared a prophetic word a few months ago. You said that you believed that there was someone there that was deaf in one ear and you invited us to come forward. You came down from the stage and you prayed for me. I was 95% deaf in this one ear and when you prayed it felt like my ear was on fire, it was burning hot. When you got done, I couldn't hear any better, but over the next two months, I have been completely healed. It was nerve damage. The doctors say that there is no explanation for me being able to hear except a miracle."

The wind blows where it wills. I didn't do anything different than I've done 50 times before. As John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement, taught us over and over again, the key to getting a hit is swinging a bat. The reason that some of us get to see healings is we swing at almost everything that comes our way and occasionally we hit the ball. Mostly, I strike out. But I swing at every pitch.

God wants us to experience him. Now here's the question.

### III. When do we experience God?

The first thing that I would say is that we experience God when we experience change.

#### A. When we experience change

Jacob regularly met God during times of change in his life. We see this in Genesis 28, when Jacob for the first time was fleeing from his brother Esau and he was moving away from the Promised Land to go to Paddan Aram to the relatives of his mother Rebekah. While he was moving from one place to another, he had an experience of God at a place called Beth-El. Then here in Genesis 32, again, while he's moving back from Paddan Aram, back to the Promised Land, he has an experience with God. Then in Genesis 46, Jacob is heading down from the Promised Land to Egypt during a famine, and again, he has an experience of God.

I think what this says to me is that we tend to have major experiences with God in what I'd call the seams of life. Where we're transitioning from one status to another, one place to another, one job to another, one stage of life to another, it's in the seams of life, in the cracks of life, during times of change, when we're more open to experiencing God.

You know, our surveys tell us that people at Vineyard Columbus are inviting others to church much less often than they did 10 years ago. I don't know why that is. Certainly, as our society becomes more secular folks may feel that an invitation to church may be less welcome. We're more fearful about inviting or we don't want to offend or maybe we as church leaders haven't done a good job in encouraging invitations. If you regularly attend here at Vineyard Columbus, you look at your own life and you say, "I haven't invited someone to the Vineyard in months or

in years.” Or you look at yourself and you say, “For me, I virtually never invite.” May I encourage you to start inviting?

I’m persuaded by the Bible that people need God and I’m persuaded that people do meet God here at Vineyard Columbus. When should you invite someone who you meet to come to church with you? Anytime is the right time. But pay particular attention to times of change in people’s life. When someone is going through change, that’s when an antenna ought to go up and you say, “Gosh, this is a time for me to invite them to church!”

- When they are getting married
- When they are pregnant and they are going to be new parents
- When they just moved to Columbus from out of town
- When they just began working in your company
- When they’ve just gone through a divorce
- When they experience the death of a family member
- When they just started college or grad school
- When they just joined the military

Pay particular attention to times of change in people’s lives and jump in. That’s particularly the time to invite someone to church. You know, whenever we go through change, it’s during these transition times, at the seams of life. When our past is joined together with an unknown future that we become open to God.

Why is that? During times of transition, we all wonder to ourselves “am I sufficient for this”? I’ve never been a mom or dad before. Will I be able to handle it? I’ve never been a widow or widower before, will I survive? I’ve never tried to run my own business, will I make it? I’ve never worked in this place, will I succeed? I’ve never been in this school, will I be accepted? In times of transition, we ask ourselves a very basic question, am I enough? It’s during those times that we’re open to the possibility that we need something more than ourselves.

Friends, are any of you experiencing major transition in your life. I would encourage you during this time of transition, be open to God. Ask for God to intervene in your life. Which leads to my second point. When do we experience God?

#### B. When we experience problems that are too big for us

Genesis 32:6-12

6 When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, “We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”

7 In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups,[a] and the flocks and herds and camels as well. 8 He thought, “If Esau comes and attacks one group,[b] the group[c] that is left may escape.”

9 Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ 10 I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff



when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. 11 Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. 12 But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"

Jacob had his back against the wall. He had a few relatives and a few people working for him, but they were absolutely no match for 400 armed men. But God in his sovereignty did Jacob a favor by allowing Esau to come into his life. God doesn't make someone hate you. God doesn't make someone abuse you. God doesn't create cancer. But God does allow Esaus to come into our lives so that we, like Jacob, would draw near to God. Esau is coming with 400 men.

See, Jacob had been running from God his whole life and he didn't realize it. Jacob's whole life was all about grabbing – grabbing whatever he could, manipulating his father, deceiving Esau, fighting with his father-in-law, trying to placate his two wives. Everything and everyone in life was taking a piece out of Jacob and all that he knew to do was still not enough to deal with this threat. Esau was coming with 400 men.

All the self-help and self-reliance works pretty well for the normal level problems of life – fixing a meal, balancing our checkbooks, doing our jobs, working on basic relational issues. Self-help, self-reliance, living by your wits, working your way out of stuff, figuring out solutions – that works pretty well with the normal stuff of life. Most things we don't need a lot of help with.

But every once in a while we are faced with an Esau, a problem bigger than we can manage. We always think, "Well, I can fix this; I can manage that. I can always rally myself. I can always figure something out." And then we encounter something bigger than we are – an Esau of depression, an Esau of cancer, an Esau of divorce – and we discover that all of our self-help and our will is not sufficient to deal with the overwhelming power of depression. We can't will ourselves to be happy again. We feel like we're always walking in a drizzle. It's hard to get out of bed; hard to be enthusiastic about life.

Friend, when you are facing an Esau, something too big for you, you need to do what Jacob did. Jacob prayed. And regarding depression, rather than self-help – get God's help by setting an appointment with a competent Christian counselor.

Let me ask you a question: When was the last time you prayed about something with your whole heart like this prayer of Jacob's? When was the last time you cried out to God with your entire being and said I can't get through this without your presence?

Jacob had everything going for him. He had two wives, 12 sons, a daughter, wealth; but, he didn't have God. At least he didn't believe that he had God. He didn't believe God's promises. The Esaus in our lives are God's invitations to us to experience more of God and to pray.

When do we experience God?

C. When we experience times of wrestling with God

There is a play on words going on here in the Hebrew. In v. 22 it talks about Jacob and he is at the ford of the Jabbok.

Genesis 32:22

22 That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.

And in v. 24, it says:

Genesis 32:24

24 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.

All of these words have the same Hebrew root. It is something like

Yaqqob was yaqqobed at the Yabbok

Have you ever wrestled with God? When we are wrestling with God, it may seem to us that God is our opponent, that God is our enemy. We say, "God, why won't you answer my prayers for my daughter or my son? Why won't you, God, answer my prayer to get pregnant? God, why won't you answer my prayer for my marriage or my friend or my finances or this ministry that I want to start for you?"

During times of wrestling, we can become bitter toward God. You think, "God if you keep opposing me, if that's the way you're going to treat me – forget it! I'm letting go of you, I'm turning my back on you, I'm walking away from you."

Notice what we read in Genesis 32:24-26

Genesis 32:24-26

24 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

And, I just hope that God gives you the ability to see what Jacob saw when you're wrestling with God. Because Jacob saw what most of us do not see, he saw that he had right at his fingertips an opportunity to be blessed. He said, "I'm not going to let go because you have the power to bless me."

The angel said, “Let me go”, but Jacob replied, “You’re not leaving, you’re not going to go until you bless me.” Jacob saw that God was at work in this situation. I tell you, whatever you are going through right now, whatever the difficulty, whatever the trial, whatever the nature of the hurt or despair that you’re going through, don’t give up until you experience God in the midst of it.

So many of us have gone through hard things and we let go, and we never experience God in that thing. And who knows what God might have done if we hadn’t let go of him and turned our backs on him and pushed away from him. Of course, the angel of the Lord could have killed Jacob, but he didn’t. It just shows the kindness and the condescension of the Lord who wants to bless our lives when he could kill us.

Let me apply this, friend, this wrestling with the Lord through times of failure. We suddenly find ourselves having failed spectacularly and publicly. You may be privately failing all along, but suddenly you are failing publicly. Others know about your failure. We absolutely have to learn to see the events of our lives, even failures, as potentially the best thing that ever could have happened to us.

Years ago I was counseling a man whose Christian life had crashed and burned in a very public scandal. He was discovered to have been in a long-term affair and he was dismissed from his position working for a Christian organization. So he came into my office completely distressed about his marriage, his job, people were talking about him. After we prayed and he poured out his heart to me, I said to him: “This failure could turn out to be the very best thing that ever happened to you, if you allow it to be. You’ve been living a lie for years. Finally, you are freed from the fear of discovery. You have nothing else to lose. You’ve lost your family. You’ve lost your reputation. You’ve lost your job. You are in, right now, the most secure place you will ever find yourself – a place that most people are trying to keep themselves from. You have lost everything and so now, for the first time in your life, you can become radically honest with yourself and radically honest with God. And I believe that if you throw yourself on God with all of your heart, God will restore you and bless you beyond your imagining.”

This man couldn’t do it. He couldn’t bring himself to complete and total honesty. He couldn’t face himself or face God. And so he kept running.

There’s another man who’s been a part of this church for over a decade. He was a pastor here in Columbus who was also discovered to be involved in an affair. He lost his church, but he decided not to run away from God. This pastor and his wife came here to Vineyard Columbus and he humbled himself, even though he’d been a senior pastor and a preacher. He began to attend a sexual addiction recovery group here at the church. He went through a long, slow process of being healed of lifelong sexual addiction. Then after being sober, being freed from all of his addictions, the pornography and other women, after a number of years he started a ministry here called 180. God began using him in other men’s lives to help set them free. None of this would have been possible, if when he had failed he let go of God.

I don't know where you're at today. If you are on top of the mountain or down in the valley. Wherever you are and particularly if you're down in the valley, don't let go of God until you break through to blessing.

When do we experience God?

D. When we experience ruthless self-honesty

Genesis 32:27

27 The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

Think about this with me. God is wrestling with Jacob, and he asks him, "What is your name?" This is a strange question for somebody who is omniscient, who knows everything, to ask. Imagine somebody who knows everything asking, "What's your name?" But in that moment of being confronted by God his Father, and being asked his name, Jacob, I believe, flashed back to the one other time in his life when he was asked by his earthly father that same question back in Genesis 27.

Decades before God asked Jacob what's his name, Jacob's earthly father, Isaac, who at the time was blind asked Jacob "What's your name? Who are you?" And when Jacob was asked what his name was years before, he lied. He told his father, Isaac, "I am Esau. I'm your first born son." And, in so doing, he stole the blessing that God wanted to give him anyway. God wanted to give him a blessing, but he would not trust God to work it out in God's time and in God's way. Jacob opted for self-help instead of God help. That led to years of unhappiness for Jacob.

Now, Jacob is confronted with the same question again, "What's your name?" Only this time the question is posed by God his Father. And this time he answers the question honestly. He says, "My name is Jacob." The name Jacob, by the way, means *grabber or supplanter*. What Jacob is saying is "God, I've come to see who I am and I'm going to be honest about it. I'm a deceiver and a grabber, my whole life has been lived by twisting the truth and turning it to my own advantage. I'm been all about trying to grab for me and not trusting you with my future. Now, I am going to be honest and tell you who I am, I am Jacob."

And God says to him, "Now that you've been willing to be ruthlessly honest, Jacob, now that you've come to a clear self-understanding, I'm going to call you Israel. I'm going to give you a new name. You're going to be a person that overcomes sin in your life. You're going to be an overcomer who's victorious."

And, friend, I believe that God is always looking for that kind of ruthless self-honesty. Because it is through ruthless self-honesty that we experience God. It's when we come before God and

we say, “God, my name is Jacob. I’m an addict. I have been incredibly selfish. God, here’s how I have messed up my marriage. Here’s my part in this divorce. This is how I have tried to grab for myself instead of waiting for your blessing.”

When we finally are radically honest with God, God will say to us what He said to Jacob, “I’m going to rename you. I’m going to call you Israel, an overcomer.”

When do we experience God?

- When we experience change
- When we experience problems that are too big for us
- When we experience times of wrestling with God
- When we experience ruthless self-honesty

And, finally

E. When we commit to pursue God

Jeremiah 29:13

<sup>13</sup> You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Matthew 7:7-8

7 “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

I began today’s message with the story of Odysseus who lashed himself to the mast so that he wouldn’t listen to the sirens’ song. We make commitments when we are strong so that when we are weak, we still pursue a certain direction in life. Let me mention two commitments. Two ways for you to lash yourself to the mast.

This Sunday at our Cooper Road campus, we’re running our five Vineyard Growth Classes. If you’ve never become a member of Vineyard Columbus, why not tie yourself to the mast as it were. Stop keeping all your options open. Come to the membership class at 2:30 and join the church. If you are already a member of the church, take one of the other classes this Sunday. Take the Maturity 201 class which will help you grow in your Christian life.

Particularly this week, I want call your attention to Meeting God 301. It’s all about what I’ve been talking about today. How can we personally experience God? How can you make that 12-inch drop from your head to your heart in terms of experiencing the Holy Spirit? Go to Meeting God 301.

You say, “You know what, I want to get tied in to the church, but I don’t know where to serve.” Go to Ministry 401, it’s a great class.

If you say, “I really want to have an impact out in the world. I want to share my faith better, I want to make a difference in the world, in my workplace, through activities of justice.” Then attend Mission 501.

Your first commitment in terms of pursuing God, make a commitment to attend one of the Vineyard Growth classes on Sunday.

Here’s the second commitment. I’ve mentioned to you over the last few weeks that beginning on Ash Wednesday, mid-February, we’re going to start a campaign here called the “Good Life” campaign. The commitment to experience God is at the center of it.

Here at Vineyard we really have a high priority on this; we want you to experience God in a small group during the six weeks of the Good Life. Our expectation is that in all of our small groups here at Vineyard Columbus, that we will meet God – not just study the Bible, discuss our thoughts and opinions, and leave. We believe that God wants to meet with us, and he does it through community. Along with the video teachings and small group discussions in the workbooks, we have included suggestions for how your group can pray together each week for the six weeks of the campaign. We believe that God meets us when we pray – and prayer isn’t just us talking but also us stopping to listen to hear what God might want to say – about our lives and the person that we are praying for in our group.

We have heard so many stories of God physically healing people in small groups, prophetic words given that were really transformational in someone’s life, as well as God’s presence being very real during meetings.

During the campaign, all our small groups will be talking about the Good Life. If you are not leading a small group would you consider hosting a group during this 6-week period? We already have 100 hosts signed up! Our goal is to start 350 groups. Out in the lobby at each of your campuses there are representatives of the Good Life campaign. You can sign up. All you need to do is have a few people that would join you, maybe from your work or family members or friends, a few others to join you. As long as you have a

H.O.S.T.

- H – Have a **heart** for people!
- O – **Open** your home, your space
- S – **Serve** a snack
- T – **Turn** on a video

Then you can HOST. Or you can sign up online. God wants us to experience Him. Make a commitment in the New Year to pursue a deeper experience with God. Let’s pray.

## Making a Commitment to Experience God

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Rich Nathan  
January 23 & 24, 2016  
Risky Commitments  
Genesis 32:6-8, 22-32

- I. The Importance of experiencing God
- II. What keeps us from experiencing God?
  - A. God comes in unexpected ways
  - B. God comes in weird ways
  - C. God comes in sovereign ways
- III. When do we experience God?
  - A. When we experience change
  - B. When we experience problems that are too big for us
  - C. When we experience times of wrestling with God
  - D. When we experience ruthless self-honesty
  - E. When we commit to pursue God