

## Making a Commitment to Share our Faith

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Rich Nathan

February 6-7, 2016

Risky Commitments

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

A few years ago I was invited to speak to a Mainline Protestant church group. I asked them why they wanted me to speak since our respective churches were part of very different streams of the larger Christian world. They said, “Well, your church is growing. Our churches are mostly shrinking. We thought you could talk to us about how to grow a church.”

I said, “Well, I don’t actually know a huge amount about growing a church, but if I came I would talk with your group about evangelism. Are your churches involved in evangelism?”

And one of the leaders said, “It’s funny you should mention the E-word. We were just talking in my leadership team about how uncomfortable we are with the E-word.”

Evangelism is the E-word for many in the church. It’s an unmentionable word. Almost a curse word. Something that makes us really uncomfortable. It wasn’t like that when the Christian church started way back in the first century. Everywhere we look in New Testament, we find people, not only the apostles, but ordinary men and women sharing their faith.

Vineyard Columbus has a mission statement which reads,

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

Over the last month or so, I’ve been talking about Risky Commitments. As we have gone through this mission statement, making a commitment as a church to actually fulfill our mission. And, brothers and sisters, I have to say thank you because you’ve been listening and making commitments. We had our largest Membership Class in our history 2 weeks ago. Over 280 of you participated in our Membership Class. We’ve never had more than 200. And we do this class every 2 months.

This weekend we’re having our largest baptism in our history. For a church that’s been around for 4 decades, that’s a big deal. And as you heard more than 275 of you have signed up to host groups as part of our Good Life Campaign. Yay God! You’re listening

and you're making commitments. I can't tell you how grateful I am to you and to the Lord for a church that is making commitments.

Today as I complete this series in which we've been going through our mission statement, I want to focus on this last part of our mission statement. We make a commitment as a church to **partner with Christ to heal the world**. I've called today's message, "Making a Commitment to Share our Faith". Let's pray.

So as I said in my introduction, many people in the church are uncomfortable these days with what that one church leader called the "E-word", Evangelism. I want to begin today by clearing the ground and talking about why it is that we're so uncomfortable with the E-word, Evangelism. Let's start by considering

I. What evangelism is not

A. Evangelism is not reserved for professionals

Most Christians treat evangelism the way we treat the Super Bowl this weekend. We're spectators watching the professionals play. We may cheer when the professional makes a great play or boo when the professional screws up. So if the pastor or evangelist makes a call and there's a big response, we cheer and if there's no response, we boo. But for most folks in the church today, we believe that evangelism is reserved for the professionals. It's not our responsibility.

One survey said that 95% of Christians have never led even one other person to Christ. The vast majority of us as Christians do not share our faith with others **ever**!

The true picture of the church is not we are all spectators with the professionals playing down on the field. Rather you ordinary men and women, you are down on the field playing the game. The pastors' job is to run along the sideline cheering you on, coaching you, encouraging you, and preparing you to play. Christianity is a game that everyone gets to play.

Christianity is a game that everyone gets to play!

As I clear the ground, here is the second reason why we are so uncomfortable with the E-word evangelism. It's because

B. Evangelism is not a purely human effort

Our mission statement captures Biblical theology when we say at the end of it

Our mission is to... partner with Christ to heal the world

Evangelism is something that we human beings do in partnership with God. Part of the overwhelming reluctance that Christians have regarding sharing our faith is that we wrongly think that we are responsible to bring God to a place where God is not and to a person in whose life God is inactive. That's a pretty daunting task. To try to carry God into a situation where He is not or to bring God into a person's life where God is totally inactive.

What if we changed the paradigm all together? What if our job was not to bring God to people and places where God was not? What if our job was simply to partner with God, to follow God's lead, to join together with God concerning what God is already doing in a person and place? What if we assumed that God was already working in a person's life before you and I ever showed up?

The great founder of the Methodist church, John Wesley, used the term

Prevenient Grace

In asserting the wonderfully liberating doctrine that the Holy Spirit goes before the sharing of the gospel. The Spirit is already working, readying people to hear and respond. We don't bring God to anyone. God is already there. The Spirit is at work everywhere in the world and in every heart preparing people, moving people so that they can decide for Christ.

The weight of responsibility in evangelism is on God, not on you and me. We're just going where God already is. It's His job to soften people's hearts, our job to simply share what we have. Let me share one other thing that evangelism is not

C. Evangelism is not an optional extra

An optional extra for those extroverted types, who like that sort of thing. You know, some people like ramming their faith down other people's throats. Me? Not so much. Sharing our faith is something our Lord Jesus Christ commanded us to do. He commanded us to go into the world and make disciples of all nations. It's hard to see how we can realistically acknowledge Jesus to be our Lord and so radically disobey what He told us to do by refusing to ever share our faith.

I talked about what evangelism is not. Let's consider what evangelism is.

II. What evangelism is

The first thing that comes to mind from a New Testament perspective is that:

A. Evangelism is overflow

You know, we can't help talking about what we're excited about. Whatever you're into, you talk about. If you're into sports, you talk about sports. If you're into politics, you talk about politics. If you're into a certain TV show on Netflix, you talk about that. If you're into your kids or your grandkids, you talk about them while showing everyone pictures of them on your phone. Whatever you're thinking about, whatever you're excited about, whatever you're worried about, whatever is filling your heart and mind – your boyfriend, girlfriend, hunting, fishing, shoes, cat videos on YouTube – we talk about what we're into.

Evangelism is overflow. The picture in the New Testament is that we've got a bathtub and it's filled with water and you just keep the tap on and the water just runs over the top. In the New Testament, people are so full of joy about their relationship with Christ that it just spills over the sides. Sharing our faith is the most natural thing in the world.

The Apostle Paul says this in

1 Thessalonians 1:5

Because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.

One Anglican pastor, Michael Green, points out that in the original language in the Greek, this idea of deep conviction is a translation of the word

Plerophoria = Confident Overflow

So, let me ask you a question. What are you overflowing with? Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." What do you talk about? What are you excited about? A really good mirror of our spiritual state is what's overflowing out of our mouths.

What is evangelism?

B. Evangelism is sharing what we've experienced

19<sup>th</sup> Century English pastor Charles Spurgeon put it so well when he said, "Evangelism is one beggar telling another beggar where to get bread." I like that. There's no moral superiority in this. A former member of our church, Dr. Tim Kubacki along with his wife Betsy, have been serving the Lord as missionaries for many years. First in Brazil, now in

Angola in Africa. They had a really interesting statement on their mission website, they showed this picture

Picture of 3 boys

And under the picture they wrote:

The picture above nicely illustrates our vision/calling/perspective: “I am not here to fix you, save you or improve you... I’m not capable... I am screwed up, you are screwed up, and we each face various challenges, hardships, joys, strengths, weaknesses... If we walk together with Jesus, we will together experience His light, His love, and His purpose for our lives (to live in relationship with Him, now and eternally).

No moral superiority.

There’s an image problem that Christians in America have right now. When we’re talking to others about Christianity it sounds like we’re standing way above people, talking down to them. “I’m totally fixed, but you’re screwed up! Let me come and fix your life!” That’s not it at all. It’s more like, “I’m messed up and I want to talk to you about a person named Jesus who I met who is changing my life for the better. I’d like you to meet him, too. I think you’ll really enjoy him.”

What is evangelism? Evangelism is overflow. Evangelism is sharing what we’ve experienced.

### C. Evangelism is words and deeds

The church in America is so divided about what evangelism is. For some on the conservative side of things, evangelism is just words, just preaching. For those on the more liberal side, evangelism is just deeds, helping people.

Here at Vineyard Columbus, we say both the conservative and the liberal side of the church have part of the truth. Evangelism is both-and, words and deeds, proclamation and demonstration. Jesus regularly preached, but he didn’t only preach. When his dear friend and follower Peter summed up the life Jesus, here’s part of what Peter said,

Acts 10:37-38

<sup>37</sup> You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— <sup>38</sup> how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

One of the things that I'm really excited about concerning this Good Life campaign that's kicking off next weekend here at Vineyard Columbus is the invitation to all who are part of the church, from kids to adults, to imitate Jesus in doing good towards the central Ohio community. Towards that end, we're going to be engaged in a church wide service project for those who are transitioning into more permanent housing. We're talking about homeless veterans who have served our country and now are homeless but are transitioning into more permanent housing. We're talking about women and children who are being rescued from human trafficking. We're talking about women and children who had to flee their home because of domestic violence and are now transitioning to new housing. Refugees who are being resettled into our community. Prisoners who are coming out, they've paid their debt to society, they've done their time and now they're finding permanent housing.

During the Good Life campaign, we're going to be collecting baskets filled with kitchen, bathroom and bedroom items so we can help homeless vets, victims of human trafficking, victims of domestic violence, and so on to get a start in setting up new houses in the community.

We want to collect a thousand baskets of household items for these vulnerable groups. Would you consider today immediately after the service going out to the lobby at your campus and volunteering to help put those baskets together. I'm not asking you to actually buy the stuff today, we'll be talking about that in future weeks. But we need lots of assistance if we're going to put a thousand baskets together. We need a lot of assistance in setting the whole thing up. So, go out to the lobby at your campus today and sign up to help out.

In light of what we've been talking about

### III. Why don't we evangelize?

Well, if evangelism is overflow then one main reason we don't share our faith is because

#### A. We are too empty

I think it would be really good for many of us to simply go before God and in private, kneel down, maybe in your bedroom, your study, your dorm room or apartment, wherever you have some private space. Simply kneel down before God and say, "Lord, my heart is so full of other priorities and other interests Lord, the reason that I never share my faith is because I'm too empty."

We're like tourists going through customs. When we get to the agent, we say we have nothing to declare. "Lord, I'm too empty. Would you please fill me up? Get me excited

about you again.” Or maybe for the first time. “Lord, will you infect my life with Jesus so much that I become contagious?” We need to be filled.

Why don’t we evangelize? We are too empty.

B. We are too scared

This series is all about risky commitments. A few weeks ago, I said “do not allow your feelings of discomfort to determine what you allow God to do in your life.” We grow whenever we allow God to nudge us beyond our comfort zones. Will I take the risk? Somebody says, “I’m not feeling well.” And you take the risk of saying, “May I pray for you right now that God will heal you?” Or you take a risk today by signing up in the lobby after the service to HOST a group in your home for 6 weeks.

Or we take the risk sharing our faith with a family member that we’ve never talked to before or a friend at work, a neighbor, somebody you regularly talk with at your gym. Let me share with you a low risk commitment that I’m really excited about that I’m asking every single person that considers themselves part of Vineyard Columbus to engage in over the next six weeks. Really low risk, but for some of us, it will push us to the edge of our comfort zone.

On your way out of the service today, someone is going to hand you a 6-pack of invitations. No, it’s not a 6-pack of beer, so don’t be disappointed when you don’t get a 6-pack of beer. It’s a 6-pack of invitations for you to invite 6 people to join us for the Good Life series here at Vineyard Columbus. Everything we’re going to be engaged in this Good Life campaign is not designed just for Christians, for those used to going to church. We want to throw the doors of the Vineyard wide open and make everything accessible and relatable to those who are not yet Christians and those who are not church people.

So, take these invites, there are just 6 of them, and make this risky commitment during the Good Life campaign. Hand out 6 invitations here in the community. Six people. Think about this, if we all did that that’s 50,000 personal invitations to people in Central Ohio to hear a message about how they can live a good life. Invite someone to a weekend service or your small group where the Good Life small group videos will be shown.

Why don’t we evangelize? We are too empty. We are too scared.

IV. Why should we evangelize?

The Apostle Paul gives us one reason in 2 Corinthians 5

## A. The fear of God

### 2 Corinthians 5:9-11

9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience.

The motive that Paul has for us persuading people to be reconciled to God, to be at peace with God is the fear of the Lord.

### 2 Corinthians 5:11

11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others.

This fear is related to the reality that we must all appear before judgment seat of Christ. You know, to stand before the Lord Jesus Christ in judgment is a fearful thing. Who is it fearful for? Is it fearful for the Christian who is considering whether or not to share their faith? Is it fearful for the person who has not yet embraced the Christian faith? I think Paul was thinking of both. The Bible is really clear that those who have embraced Christ and those who have not embraced Christ, that we all will appear before Christ in judgment.

This is a scary thing because the key to understanding what judgment is all about in the Bible is that, according to the Bible, judgment is exposure. Judgment is being naked. What happens in judgment is that the deepest reality of who we are, what we're really about, what's really going on inside, what our true motives and intentions are, what we do when no one is looking, the deepest reality about us will be exposed. It will all be revealed. The cover will be pulled away.

Excuses and rationalizations and lies will all melt away as we will stand naked in the full light of Christ's judgment. If that doesn't cause you to fear then something inside of you is broken and needs to be fixed. Here's the message of grace, friend. We don't have to



wait for the Day of Judgment to have everything exposed before God. We can voluntarily reveal ourselves and our stuff to Christ right now. Our voluntary revealing of our deepest, darkest secrets is called confession. Before you, Lord, I'm going to acknowledge my lies, my excuses, my rationalizations. The big things that are broken. The little things – the petty jealousies, the judgments, the envy, the harsh words, the lovelessness, so that when I stand before you in judgment all of those sins are stamped "Forgiven".

What is the motive of evangelizing?

The love of God.

Here's what we read in 2 Corinthians 5:14:

2 Corinthians 5:14

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

Now there's a debate about the meaning of this phrase. Literally, it reads:

For the love of Christ compels us

Is Paul speaking about Christ's love for us, our love for Christ? Likely it's Christ's love for us – because Paul goes on to say, "We are convinced that one died for all." Can we show any more love for somebody than to give up our lives for them?

But like most things, I think, "Why not both-and?" Not only is the love of Christ, Christ's love for us, but the love of Christ is also our love for Christ. Our love for Christ is a main motive for sharing our faith.

You know the old song, "When a Man Loves a Woman"

When a man loves a woman  
Spend his very last dime  
Trying to hold on to what he needs  
He'd give up all his comfort  
Sleep out in the rain  
If she said that's the way it ought to be

When you love someone, you'll endure anything. You have a sick child, you sit up all night with them, you sleep in a chair in the hospital. You are dating someone you love, "Sure, I'll drive 700 miles to spend a day in Minneapolis as you make your way from

Europe to Asia. Sure, a day in Minneapolis is no problem. It's 20 below zero there? Sure, I'll drive there and see you tonight!"

We love Jesus. Absolutely, Jesus, I'll talk about you. I'll hand out 6 little invites, whatever.

Why do we share our faith? The fear of God. The love of God. Here is the third reason from this text:

The need of people

The Apostle Paul wrote:

2 Corinthians 5: 18-20

<sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Paul is not shy about regularly communicating to us the situation of people who are without Christ. For example in Ephesians 2:12 we read:

Ephesians 2:12

Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

In 2 Corinthians 5, the Apostle Paul tells us that the great need of human beings is to be reconciled to God. Paul says that God has reconciled us to himself. He has given us the ministry of reconciliation. God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ. He's committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are Christ's ambassadors. God is making His appeal through us. He's partnering together with us. We go out and tell others, "Be reconciled to God".

Now the whole issue of reconciliation implies that there is some sort of conflict that needs to be healed. If you ever have been in a family you understand something about conflicts. Particularly, if you are in a family that owns a pet. I just read an article that said that a dog will cause almost 2,000 arguments over the course of their lifetime or over 150 arguments a year. That's three arguments a week over a dog! Who should walk the dog? Whether the dog should be allowed on the bed. Whether the dog should

be allowed on the sofa. Whether the dog should be fed from the table. How much money we're spending on the stupid dog. Who should clean up the mess in the backyard from the dog? The dog chewed up my shoes. The dog chewed up my pen. The dog chewed up my glasses. Not that any of these examples are personal to me or I'm working out my own issues in public through my preaching.

You understand conflict, don't you? There's a company that's coming to central Ohio that's the cause of enormous conflicts. It's called Ikea. The comedian Amy Poehler once said, "Ikea is Swedish for argument." Especially if you try to assemble a piece of Ikea furniture with your partner. Ikea is Swedish for argument, I like that.

According to the Bible we not only have conflicts with one another, but our fundamental problem is that we have a massive spiritual conflict with God. The reason why people need to be reconciled to God and God is given to us this ministry of reconciliation is because there's a war going on between us and God. Most people don't realize their need for reconciliation. Most folks don't feel like anything's really wrong between them and God. "If there is some God up there, I'm sure whoever they are thinks I'm really great. I'm not terribly concerned about what I do wrong, so why should God be concerned?"

Here's the deal. The Bible describes God as being passionately upset with our sin. God hates your sin and he hates my sin the way an oncologist hates cancer. Oncologists hate what cancer does to someone. They hate watching the spread of cancer. They hate the destruction that cancer causes.

God hates our sin the way a mom or dad hates the drug addiction that is literally killing their child. Ruining everything that is good. Sin causes a conflict between us and God. It puts us at opposite ends of a tug of war. We want to hold onto our sin. God wants to remove it from us. That's why Christ came, to remove sin from us, to perform the cancer operation. To free us from the addiction. To take our sin and place it upon himself. That's why Christ died to remove the sin that caused the conflict between us and God and to reconcile us to God. To bring peace in our relationship with God.

Let me ask you today, is there peace between you and God? Paul says here in verse 21:

2 Corinthians 5:21

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Have you ever gone through that exchange where you gave Christ your sin? Really gave it to him and had Christ give you his right and peaceful standing before God?

Why do we share our faith? The fear of God. The love of God. The need of people.  
And, finally,

The return of Christ.

We look out at this world and things are so messed up. There's so much suffering. There are so many tears. There's so much injustice. Who's going to be able to straighten things out? This is an election year. Politicians are running around saying, "Elect me! I'll straighten the world out. I'll fix everything." You know that's impossible. No politician has the power to straighten the world out. But there's one person who can fix everything. His name is Jesus Christ. This world needs Christ.

We need Christ to return and set up His kingdom in this world. To end all the wars. To dry all the tears. To heal all the sicknesses. To repair all the relationships. To right all the wrongs. This world needs the return of Christ. But when will Christ return? When will Christ come back and set up his kingdom? If you need a reason to share your faith, the Bible teaches that the sharing of our faith is connected to the timing of the return of Christ.

Jesus said as much in Matthew 24:14

Matthew 24:14

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Peter talks about us hastening the coming of the Lord. I don't pretend to understand it, but I know that somehow in the plan and providence of God we really do partner together with Him in healing the world.

Will you make just 2 commitments today, friends? Just two. Would you make a commitment to not only take that 6-pack of invitation cards and put it in your purse or wallet, but to actually hand out six of those cards in the next few weeks and invite someone to a Vineyard worship service or to your small group? Will you also make a commitment to not only share the gospel in word, but also in deed by helping us set up those baskets for men, women and children who are in transition to more permanent housing? Would you make those two commitments? Let's pray.

## Making a Commitment to Share our Faith

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February 6-7, 2016  
Risky Commitments  
2 Corinthians 5:11-21

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  - B. Evangelism is not a purely human effort
  - C. Evangelism is not an optional extra
  
- II. What evangelism is
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  - B. Evangelism is sharing what we've experienced
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