

Sharing Your Faith According To Your S.H.A.P.E.

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February 16-17, 2008

How a Christian G.R.O.W.S. (Spiritual Growth Series)

Romans 12:6

What comes to your mind when you hear the word “evangelist”? For some of you, the word evangelist might be a positive word. You might think of someone like Billy Graham, a man who is full of integrity; a wonderful, sincere preacher, who speaks to a stadium full of people with a slight Southern accent, saying, “It may take you a minute to come down from the top of the stadium. Don’t worry, the buses will wait.” And as people stream down from all parts of a huge stadium, the choir begins to sing, “Just As I Am.”

For some of you, the word evangelist might be a very positive word. But for most Americans, the word “evangelist” has an extremely negative connotation.

The Problem: Our Aversion to Evangelism

Most Americans immediately think of some totally over the top TV evangelist, who spends most of his time selling a new product such as a new set of 9-CDs from their most recent series, *The Secret to Prosperity*, for only \$139.00. But if you dial the number of the screen right now, you can also purchase the evangelist’s new book, “*How to Prosper in the End Times*,” for the low, low price of \$29.99.

In the book titled “*The Day America Told the Truth*,” James Patterson reports that when a national survey asked respondents to rank various professions for their honesty and integrity, TV evangelists came out almost at the bottom beneath lawyers, politicians, and used car salesmen. Out of 73 occupations in this integrity rating, only two ended up lower in public perception than TV evangelists: organized crime bosses and drug dealers. Prostitutes were considered to have more integrity and honesty than TV evangelists. And as a former lawyer and business law professor, I can tell you that when lawyers show up much higher than your profession on an integrity scale, you’ve got real problems.

Evangelist, for most Americans, is simply not something you would aspire to.

And for many church people, the word evangelism conjures up memories of some bait-and-switch church program in which you were required to stand on a street corner and hand out gospel pamphlets to people who are totally uninterested, or a church evangelism program in which you were trained to present a canned, memorized presentation of a message to someone you were friends with, to approach them like some Amway salesman, and then you were chagrined to discover that your friendship quickly cooled after your little canned presentation.

I talk with so many followers of Jesus, who in their more honest moments, would say, “I tried evangelism and I failed miserably. I felt totally fake; totally inauthentic. I felt like I was selling something.”

I remember one of my early Christian teachers telling a room full of us teenagers that you could segway any conversation into a discussion about Jesus. Someone yelled out, “Really? How about baseball?” The teacher said, “Oh, that’s easy. If you are talking about baseball with someone, simply drop into the conversation the statement, ‘You know, Jesus would have been the best baseball player who ever lived. He could have hit a baseball into outer space.’”

Well, how about sauerkraut? Oh, that’s real easy. You know, our sins smell stinkier than sauerkraut.

Don’t get me wrong. This teacher was very sincere and he understood that God cares about people, not just church people, but people in general; and not just people in general, but every single person on earth. This teacher at least understood that God wants every individual on the planet – your mother, your father, your sister, your brother, your spouse, your kids, your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your roommates, your co-workers, single moms living in Columbus, men and women living in Sub-Saharan Africa in some rural village who are suffering with the AIDS virus, your Jewish neighbor in Bexley, your Japanese neighbor in Dublin – this teacher at least understood that God loves every person on earth. He made us all. He wants every person on earth to come into a personal relationship with him through his Son, Jesus Christ.

The problem, however, with so many approaches to evangelism and outreach, is that they neglect one of the most important ingredients for the whole evangelistic transaction namely, you and me. See, people who are followers of Jesus are sharing our faith are often greeted as if we don’t matter. We are treated as if sharing one of the most personal and important parts of our being, namely our faith, we are treated as if sharing this deep part of our being is the same as selling a 20 pound box of soap, or tightening some bolts on an assembly line. Here is a canned formula. Here is how you start the conversation. Here is how you close the deal. Just pour yourself into this mold and you will succeed.

The problem with so many church approaches to evangelism and outreaches is that, yes, God wants us to share our faith because he loves people enough to know him. But God is a God of individuality and integrity and he is not interested in being presented in a way that forces you or me to lose our individuality, or our integrity. If an approach to outreach forces you to lose your integrity, or lose your individuality, it does not represent the God that you are claiming to represent.

I’ve been doing a series on spiritual growth that I’ve called “How a Christian G.R.O.W.S.” I’ve used the acronym, G.R.O.W.S.

G.R.O.W.S.**G**=Giving**R**=Relationships**O**=Outreach**W**=Worship**S**=Spiritual Disciplines

Today we are going to talk about outreach. I am becoming Mr. Acronym. I tried to stop, but I'll tell you once I got started down this road of acronyms, it became addictive. I can't help myself. So, here's another acronym. God wants you to find an approach to sharing your faith that fits you; that corresponds with who God made you to be; your personality, your gifts, the way you're wired, your sensitivity, your opportunities. God does not want you to be me; God does not want you to be Billy Graham; God does not want you to be some fake, slick sales person, or angry defender of Christianity. He wants you to help others come to know him in the way that corresponds to your S.H.A.P.E.

S.H.A.P.E.**S**=Service**H**=Hospitality**A**=Announcement**P**=Power Evangelism**E**=Entrepreneurship

One of the most stunning things that you could ever discover about God is that you do not have to become something else, or someone else, for God to use you. Most of us don't believe that. You don't have to become someone else or something else in order for God to use you to help someone else come to know him. I've called today's talk, "Sharing Your Faith According to Your S.H.A.P.E." Let's pray.

Romans 12:6-8

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; 7 if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; 8 if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

God has given each of us different passions, different interests. You know, most of us, as followers of Christ, would make a major advance in our Christian growth simply by discovering that God didn't make a mistake when he made us the way he made us, with our temperaments, with our interests, with our gifts. We are often so ineffective in representing Christ to this world because we are certain that we've got to become something else, or someone else, in order to be used by God. And it is this artificiality, this fakeness, that bleeds through so many presentations of the gospel. It is such a turn off for those who are our targets as well as for those of us who are trying to sell Jesus like so many cans of soup.

God cares about us as individuals. Why do you think, by the way, that there are so many names in the Bible. You know, those long lists of genealogies that you read in Old Testament books like Numbers, or Chronicles. Here are the descendents of Judah: Perez, Hezron, Carmi, Hur and Shobal. Shobal was the father of Reaiah.

1 Chronicles 4:1-2

The descendants of Judah: Perez, Hezron, Karmi, Hur and Shobal. 2 Reaiah son of Shobal was the father of Jahath, and Jahath the father of Ahumai and Lahad. These were the clans of the Zorathites.

Why do you think that so many names that are so hard for us to pronounce are listed in the Bible – all of these genealogies? Because God, as a good father, cares about every one of his children. He knows us by name. We are not just one undifferentiated mass of people, some gigantic blob, some crowd. God doesn't look at us simply as Americans, English, or Ganeans. You are Daryl, you are Melissa, you are DaJuan, or Rosa – or whatever your name is. And if you are a follower of Christ, God wants you to use your particular gift in an outward-focused way to assist another human being to come into relationship with Christ. God wants to use you according to your S.H.A.P.E.

S.H.A.P.E.

S=Service

H=Hospitality

A=Announcement

P=Power Evangelism

E=Entrepreneurship

Now, to some degree, all of us are called to every aspect of this acronym. Some of us can say, "Well, thank God, I don't need to serve. I'm just called to announce, or speak the gospel." Or "Thank God that I never have to open my home in hospitality, or ever attempt to pray for a sick person." If we are followers of Christ to some degree, we have to employ each of these methods in reaching out to other people and to let other folks know that God loves them and wants them to come into a personal relationship with him through faith in Jesus.

There is a commonness in our approach to sharing our faith; but, there is also a difference in our emphases based on our own individuality. Maybe a simple illustration would work here. It is like going to college. There is a common Core curriculum that every one of us has to take. But because we are different, and we have different shapes, we are going to have different majors according to our interests, our gifts, and our preferences. What are our different majors?

Majoring in service

Jesus said in Matthew 20:26-28:

Matthew 20:26-28

26...whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

The apostle Paul calls his approach to sharing his faith, service in 1 Corinthians 3:5,

1 Corinthians 3:5

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task.

You know, as pastor of this church, I am always concerned about how our church is perceived in the larger community. When people hear about Vineyard, how do they think about our church in the larger community? Last week I read you an email from another pastor, who pastors a Church of Christ, north of town. And for those of you who weren't here, or who don't remember, this Church of Christ pastor got involved in a conversation with an older man at a local restaurant. He began to show that older man real interest and concern. This pastor encouraged this older man in nightly prayers to just tell Jesus that he was seeking the truth and that if he was real to reveal himself to him. The email went on to say,

“I asked this older gentleman his first name, and he told me it was Ron. I told him I wanted to be able to pray for him by name. All of this leads up to the punch line I thought you would appreciate. As I was walking away, he said to me, ‘What are you? A member of the Vineyard?’ It says a lot about your ministry that when an agnostic perceives that when a believer generally cares about him, who comes to mind, the Vineyard. I'm glad for the positive face you're putting on Christianity in Central Ohio.”

After I shared that story, several individuals from the church immediately came up to me following the service and said, “Rich, I have another story for you regarding how Vineyard is perceived in the community.” One woman said that she was driving along some road and she saw an older couple walking in the cold. They were obviously struggling against the wind. So she turned her car around, pulled up next to them, rolled down her window and asked, “Would you like a ride? Where are you going?” They said they were going to a Kroger's store several blocks away. She said, “Is your car there?” They said, “No, we don't have a car.” So she said, “Why don't you get in and I will drive you to the Kroger's and then I will go home and when you are done shopping, I will come and get you and pick you up and drive you home.”

So she dropped this couple off, went home, did some chores, went back and picked them up. She began driving them home when the man turned to her and said, “Are you a member of the Vineyard?” She said, “Why?” This older couple said, “Because my granddaughter goes to the Vineyard and what you are doing seems like something Vineyard people would do.”

Another woman said, "I've got another story for you, Rich." She said that she was in her home and there was a knock on the door. Two Mormons were standing by the door with their white shirts and little ties. She was busy, but she decided to invite them in. She asked if they wanted something to drink. They sat around the kitchen table; she made them something to drink and chatted with them for a little while. They looked at her and said, "Can we ask you a question? Are you a member of the Vineyard?" She said, "Well, as a matter of fact, I am." These Mormons said, "We thought so because only members of the Vineyard are this nice to us."

Another young woman in our church came up and said, "I have another story for you, Rich." She said, "I work at a library on the north side of town. There are lots and lots of immigrants who come into the library trying to find different kinds of services in our community." She said she was standing there next to the librarian and the librarian printed off a sheet of social service agencies that could help the immigrants. She said this librarian said to at least ten different people, "There is really only one place you need to go..." And she pointed to the Vineyard. She said, "Just go to the Vineyard, they will help you out."

Serving is a gift according to the Bible. Here is what we read in Romans 12:6-7:

Romans 12:6-7

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us... 7 if it is serving, then serve;

We see this service approach to outreach in Acts 9:36-39:

Acts 9:36-39

In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. 37 About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 38 Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" 39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. 37 About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. 38 Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" 39 Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

Tabitha was known for her loving acts of service, which she performed in the name of Christ. God sent Peter to raise her from the dead and to put her back in service. I know there are people who have a gift of service; they find it natural and easy to serve others. That's the way God made them. The service approach doesn't get the credit that it

deserves because it is generally not in the limelight. And yet, serving others, just being kind and helping someone out can often open a person up in ways that no other approach to sharing ever could.

A couple of years ago we were, as a church, ministering to some men and women in our community, who have the AIDS virus. There was a man, who was loosely connected to this ministry, who was HIV-positive and who was being evicted from his apartment. So the head of this ministry said, "I can get some guys to move you from your apartment." This man said, "Oh, don't worry; I will just get some of my girlfriends (he was talking about some of his transvestite friends) to help me move." So she said, "Well, I will just send some guys anyway." And she talked with some young guys from Joshua House, our young adult ministry, and she said, "This guy needs help and he has some strange things in his apartment that you are going to have to move; and I don't want any of you to smile; I don't want any of you to laugh or snicker because he has evening gowns and wigs. I just want you to go in there and serve him."

And so they showed up at his apartment at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday morning. None of his girlfriends showed up. And they boxed everything up and they were kind to him. They moved his stuff. And at one point, this young man with AIDS turned towards the wall, put his head down and began weeping. He said, "I can't believe that you guys are doing this for me. No one has ever been this kind to me."

You help someone in a cold parking lot to jump their car; you shovel your neighbor's walk; you baby-sit your neighbor's kids, or help with their plumbing – acts of service can be bridges for people to discover a personal relationship with God.

And then some of you major in hospitality.

Majoring in hospitality

Hospitality became a leadership requirement in the early church. In 1 Timothy 3:2, we read this:

1 Timothy 3:2

Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...

Likewise in Titus 1:8 regarding an elder, we read:

Titus 1:8

Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright and disciplined.

Hospitality is not just a requirement of eldership, but the practice of hospitality became a New Testament obligation of every Christian. In Romans 12:13, the apostle Paul is

going through a list of injunctions concerning the way we ought to do Christian community with each other. He says this:

Romans 12:13

Share with God's people who are in need, practice hospitality.

Likewise we read in 1 Peter 4:9:

1 Peter 4:9

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.

And in Hebrews 13, the verse we looked at just a little while ago, we read:

Hebrews 13:1-2

Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.

The Greek word for hospitality, “philoxenia” is a Greek compound word. Philo means love, like Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love.” Philoxenia means the love of xenos – stranger; the love of a stranger. Hospitality literally is the love of a stranger.

Jesus talks about the practice of radical hospitality in Luke 14:12-14:

Luke 14:12-14

Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

What Jesus is saying is, “I don’t want my followers sitting around debating the causes of poverty, blaming the poor for their condition, or simply running around trying to do nice things for the poor.” God wants followers of Christ to bring the poor in; bring people to the table, Jesus said. Invite people into relationship; get to know someone who is different than you, someone who is in need. Find out what’s going on in their life. Practice hospitality with the poor, with the disabled, the same way you do with any dinner guests.

One of the most famous African American spirituals is called “The Welcome Table.” It is based on this gospel story of Jesus. The words go like this:

The Welcome Table

We’re gonna sit at the welcome table,

We’re gonna sit at the welcome table on of these days,

Hallelujah!...All God’s children around that table...

*No more fightin' or grabbin' at that table...
I'm gonna walk the streets of glory...I'm gonna get my civil rights...
We're gonna sit at the welcome table one of these days.*

Sitting at the welcome table is a great way to understand the practice of hospitality. Jesus is saying in a world full of hostility and fear where people are estranged from each other, estranged from their families, estranged from their neighbors and friends, culture and country, in a world in which people are separated and estranged from God and, indeed, from their own selves, hospitality is the way a stranger can enter our lives and become a friend instead of an enemy.

Karen Mains, in a book written nearly 30 years ago titled *Open Heart, Open Home*, makes some excellent points about the difference between entertaining and hospitality. She says entertaining is terrible bondage. Its source is human pride that demands perfection and fosters the urge to impress. It is a rigorous taskmaster, which enslaves. In contrast, biblical hospitality is a freedom, which liberates.

Entertaining says, "I want to impress you with my beautiful home, my clever decorating, my gourmet cooking." Hospitality says, "This home is not mine. It is a gift from my Master. I am his servant and I want to use it as he desires." Hospitality does not try to impress, but to serve. Entertaining always puts things before people.

"So and so is coming; I've got to get this new thing before they come. My house has to be absolutely perfect." Hospitality puts people before things. Entertaining is rooted in our pride. Our homes and all that we do always have to be perfect. Hospitality is rooted in our humanity. Because we don't maintain false pretenses, people can relax in our homes.

Simply put, hospitality is key for us in building the kind of church that God wants to create here in Central Ohio.

Listen, we have so many kids and young adults, and even some older adults who were raised in broken families. Many of us come into the church as the walking wounded. We are relationally estranged and mistrustful, defensive, hurt, alienated, and angry. How does a person truly get healed when their foundation in their own family of origin is broken? How does a person learn to resolve their father issues and mother issues, or sibling issues? Often, it is by God using the experience of hospitality to bring healing and wholeness. By simply welcoming people into our homes, we have an opportunity to model healthy relationships; if you are married and have kids, you can model healthy family life – warts and all.

Edith Schaeffer, who co-founded the Swiss community called L'Abri with her famous husband, Francis, said in one of her books, "For some young people, our L'Abri homes were the first really happy homes they had ever experienced. You can't imagine what the opportunity of eating, doing dishes, helping peel potatoes, being part of a

conversation, and family prayer in the variety of homes that any amount of lecturing or talking about home life, or counseling could never do.”

You want to see young people and older people made whole and well? Let’s practice hospitality with them.

How can we have a racially diverse church? How can we? Overcome all of the suspicions, resentments, prejudices, and years of miscommunication and misunderstanding that exists between the races in America? Corporations have hired diversity consultants, a good thing. They have training programs. But I tell you, simply practicing hospitality to someone of a different race, simply inviting into your home and sharing a meal and conversation with someone who looks different than you is way better than any diversity program or political solutions.

And I believe the gift of hospitality is a key way that many of us can practically assist others to come into a personal relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. You know, hospitality, creating a free and friendly space where we can reach out to strangers and invite them to become friends isn’t something that we just do in our homes. I believe the practice of hospitality we can do here in church especially with children.

Henri Nouwen in a wonderful book called *“Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life”* talks about being down in Mexico and sitting on a bench in a large village plaza. He said this,

I saw how much larger the family of the children was. They were hugged, kissed, and carried around by aunts, uncles, friends and neighbors, and it seemed that the whole community spending its evening playfully in the plaza became father and mother for the little ones. Their affection, and their fearless movements made me aware that for them everyone was family.

Nouwen goes on to make the comment that the church is, perhaps, one of the few places left where we can meet people who are different than we are, but with whom we can form a larger family.

I believe that we, as the Vineyard church, can practice hospitality to form a free and friendly space to welcome in especially children and teenagers. Teachers, you can practice hospitality in the classroom by creating free and friendly space for children to ask questions, to discuss, to debate, to inspire curiosity. We parents can practice hospitality with our own kids by turning off the television, by putting down the newspaper, by being available to talk and to listen; to not dominate our children with our opinions and our preferences.

Hospitality is a gift that is practiced by counselors creating in a small office environment free and friendly space for people to unburden themselves. There is room for someone

to talk, to tell us their story without being interrupted, or simply encountering someone who is preoccupied with their own agendas and thoughts.

And then some of us are called to major in announcement.

Majoring in announcement

Evangelizing literally means to speak or to announce a message of gladness, to proclaim good news. The word was used in Roman times to announce the birth of a new emperor, who was considered to be a divine ruler. When the emperor became of age and made certain decrees, or passed certain laws, his heralds would evangelize, literally announce the good news of the emperor's work, or the good news of his birthday, or his deeds, or speeches. The New Testament writers picked up this use of evangelize in talking about Jesus. It was good news, glad tidings, a divine Ruler has been born into this world. Good news – he heals the sick; feeds the hungry; comforts those who mourn. Good news – he teaches us the way to live fully human lives; to be freed from our addictions and the things that cripple us. Good news, the divine Ruler has shown us the way for us to have a personal relationship with god.

Announcement evangelism. Every follower of Christ is called to this to some degree. We read this in Mark 16:15,

Mark 16:15

He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

People often quote St. Francis' motto about using words only if you have to and it becomes a great way to excuse them from opening their mouths in evangelism. Well, as the evangelist, J. John, once put it,

Most Christians are like arctic rivers, they are frozen at the mouth.

St. Francis never meant his proverb, which said,

Go throughout the world preaching the gospel, and use words if you have to.

...To be used as a reason for not speaking to people about Jesus. Francis said it only to underline that a person whose lifestyle is bad news has no right to verbalize good news. We have to be good news and we have to preach good news.

But the fact is, friends, none of us is simply by our actions or deeds such good news that we have no obligation to speak. No one is going to be such an amazing servant that people will simply say, "Well, watching you serve me, I know now that there is a God and I need to put my trust in his Son, Jesus, for eternal life." No one is going to be so hospitable simply by their actions of hospitality that people will automatically come into a personal relationship with God through his Son, Jesus. At some point we have to speak. At some point, we need to explain our faith.

But some of us major in announcement. That is certainly my major. Last year I was flying to England. I began chatting with the man sitting next to me and in five minutes I knew that this was a divine appointment. God had set this up. And I frequently ask God to allow me to get into conversations with people that he is preparing for salvation. You ought to pray for divine appointments.

This man and I talked and he began to open up his life a little bit. He had certain needs in his life, certain areas in which it was apparent that a relationship with God could make a difference. At a certain point in the conversation, I said, "Can I show you something?" So I took one of the airline barf bags and I drew a bridge diagram. I have used this bridge diagram from Navigators literally hundreds of times in sharing the gospel. People love watching you draw something even if you are a terrible drawer.

In the first drawing, I say something like: do you believe in God? And very often, at least here in America, people say, "Well, yes." And then I say: Well you probably don't feel very connected to God. Do you ever feel like your prayers just bounce off the ceiling or that God is somewhere, but you just can't quite reach him? The person will say: Yes. I say: Do you know why that is? And I draw a picture. I say: It is almost like you are on one side of the Grand Canyon and God is on the other side. Now, if you wanted to get in touch with God, how might you do that? People will often say: Well, maybe I would go to church, or try to be good, or read the Bible, or give up my bad habits. I say: Do you know why it is that you feel separated from God?

And down the middle of the diagram I write the word "sin." I say: The Bible teaches that you are a sinner and God is holy and our sins separate us from him. And then I draw a cross and I write the word "Jesus." I say: Nothing that we do can ever bridge the gap between us and God. God reached across the divide by sending us Jesus. Jesus died to take care of your sin problem and my sin problem. He is the sacrifice that God sent to pay for your sins.

And then I talk about the fact that Jesus wants to come into your life to become the Ruler of your life. And I draw the two little Campus Crusade hearts with a little seat in the heart. I ask people the same question all the time: Who do you think has been calling the shots in your life your whole life? It is amazing how often people say the same thing with the same tone: Me? And I will say: That's right. Folks always smile thinking: I've got one! And then I'll draw another heart with another seat.

I say: If you were to become a Christian, who do you think would be calling the shots in your life and exercising control in your life. They answer always using the same tone: Jesus?

So this man and I talked a while and he said: This is so exciting. I want to take this home and share it with my wife. The two of us are going to become Christians. I want to tell my wife what you told me. Then he said: Oh, I'm sorry...is it OK if I keep this?

Now, I've done this literally hundreds of times and I've had the same question asked: Is it OK if I keep this? I've written the bridge diagram on napkins, on lunch bags, on barf bags dozens of times on planes. I'm always tempted to be a wise guy and say: No, that is original artwork. You can't keep it; it's mine.

Sometimes our announcement is simply telling our personal story of how we came to faith in Christ. I told the story of growing up in a Jewish family, going to Hebrew School, and being bar mitzvah, never being to church, as a teenager I became an atheist and then going off to university at Case and meeting a young woman, Marlene, who was a Christian; how she explained to me how I could come into a relationship with God through Jesus. I told the story hundreds and hundreds of times. And those of you who are followers of Christ, you have a story. It doesn't have to be dramatic. It doesn't have to be stupendous. It is just a simple story of how you came to place your faith in Christ and the difference that Christ makes for you.

The next major is,

Majoring in power evangelism

Matthew 10:7-8

As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,² drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.

Craig Heselton, who is on our staff and who has been a leader in our church for many years, used to be the plant manager of a chemical company. And while he was serving in that capacity, he had the following experience.

His director of research's wife was diagnosed with cervical cancer. Craig went over and offered to pray for her. He was not a believer; nor was she. They initially declined the offer. She ended up having surgery and they put her on taxal. They went and prayed for her just to bless her after her surgery.

They put her on chemotherapy, which was not working. She was given about a 14% chance of surviving. Things were getting more and more desperate. Craig offered again to pray for her. This time, they accepted the offer. Craig prayed for her at her mother-in-law's house. Prior to praying for her, they explained why they believed in healing and something about the kingdom of God. She accepted Christ before they prayed for her.

Craig prayed for her from that point on. Her tumor began to reduce until she was cancer free about several months later.

Her husband, who Craig worked with, a PhD chemist, actually did not become a Christian right away, but he and his wife began to come to church every week. He

would sit in church and basically weep during the entire service and in the ministry time. Then about 6-8 months later after his wife was completely free of cancer, he gave his life to the Lord as well.

Again, in speaking of power evangelism, two summers ago we had a Joshua House conference, our young adult conference that we call "Breathe." A young female attorney went to the conference. She had been abusing alcohol for years. She used to walk around with a huge cup of coke sipping away, but mixed in was a tumbler full of vodka. She would just sip vodka all day long.

She went to Breathe and at that conference went through a major deliverance which then opened up her life to receive the gospel. Jesus said to her at the Breathe Conference, "You are now included in the family of God. You are now a part of the community. You are welcome." Power Evangelism. Signs and Wonders being used in the promotion of the gospel.

You know, it is unfortunate, even in Vineyard churches, how often prophecy is divorced from evangelism. And so we talk a lot about the prophetic in some circles, but it is very introspective and it really only involves the church, getting words in our small group settings, getting words in women's groups, getting words in church on Sunday morning. And then there are those who are outward focused and evangelistic.

But throughout the New Testament, we see people breaking down walls of resistance through prophetic words that pierce the hearts of non-believers. Let me tell you story.

Occasionally, if you ask, God may give you prophetic insight that can significantly advance the preaching of the gospel in someone's life. I remember a number of years ago having coffee with a gay man, who was totally hostile. I tried to talk with him and engage him and be kind, but he was absolutely walled off. He was really well-defended against God and he was really well-defended against pastors. So all of my attempts to engage him were met with utter defensiveness.

At a certain point in the conversation, he began talking with someone else. And so I remember actually just putting my head down at the table praying, "Lord, show me something that will reach under his defenses." And I immediately got a picture of this man holding a burning coal in his hand. He was squeezing this burning coal so tight that it was burning through his hand. And the Lord said, "The coal is unforgiveness towards his mother."

We talked for a while after I received this impression and I asked him, "May I share with you a picture that I felt the Lord gave me about you?"

He said, "Go ahead."

As I described this burning coal and the impression that I had regarding unforgiveness, he put his head down and began to cry. Apparently, he had received a very similar picture of his life not too long before.

Do you ask God for prophetic insight? Have you ever said to God, “I want to get through to this person and have them know your reality, Lord. Will you give me a word or a picture, something, some revelation that I might gently and warmly share with them so that they might know that you are real? That there is a God in heaven who cares about them?” Have you ever taken the risk in your office, or in your school, or in your family, or with someone who doesn’t yet know Jesus and says, “I’m not feeling well,” and say, “Would it be OK if I prayed for you?”

When I’ve taken that risk, it really is amazing how often God touches someone. He loves people. He cares about folks coming into relationship with him.

And finally, we major in entrepreneurship.

Majoring in entrepreneurship

Colossians 3:17 says this:

Colossians 3:17

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

There are people who will never be reached by a pastor, or a religious service, and will only be reached by business people, who do their work in the name of Christ. That’s why we need followers of Jesus permeating every discipline. We need our best and brightest kids getting doctorates in biology and women’s studies and philosophies and English – getting law degrees and engineering degrees; journalism degrees; and going into fields where followers of Christ are few and far between.

I want to recommend to you, if you are in business, two book titles that I think are real encouragements. One is called “*Faith in the Halls of Power*” by Michael Lindsay. Michael Lindsay conducted 360 in-depth interviews with Christians, who are leaders in every walk of life – in politics, corporations, sports. They just talk about how they go about exercising their Christian faith in key places in American industry and American life. I would very much encourage any of you, who are in management positions, or places of significant influence to pick up Michael Lindsay’s book.

And then one of our church members, who helps to organize businessmen and women in terms of market place evangelism, is Harvey Hook. Harvey wrote a great book that we have available in our bookstore titled “*The Power of an Ordinary Life*.” He tells stories of people who have made a significant difference in this world. Some of the people you’ve heard of; some of them you haven’t. But they are folks who have fissions of influence to assist people into coming into relationship with Christ. I want to close by

talking about our own OSU Football Coach Jim Tressel. This is taken from Harvey Hook's book, *"The Power of an Ordinary Life."*

Coach Tressel addressed a breakfast audience of about 4000 at the fellowship called The Gathering led by Harvey Hook here in town. He talked about how he went to a sports camp as a teenager and the speaker was Bobby Richardson, who played second base for the New York Yankees for a decade. During Bobby Richardson's talk, he asked the kids if the game of life were to end tonight, would you be a winner.

Jim Tressel, teenager, thought long and hard and discovered that he didn't have an answer. Bobby said that the answer to being a winner in life was found in a relationship with God through faith in his Son Jesus Christ. And so Jim Tressel that night chose winning at life over winning at football. He's chosen to allow Christ to direct his life ever since. He said, "You know, since that time, its not been easy." He said that he's not been perfect. He's got lots of "fan mail" to prove that he has a lot of areas to improve upon.

But Coach recited a poem to underscore the value of his relationship with God. He said:

*The Hall of Fame is only good
As long as time shall be,
But keep in mind God's Hall of Fame
Is for eternity.
To have your name inscribed up there
Is greater more by far
Than all the praise and all the fame
Of any manmade star*

Jim Tressel finished his story this way. He said,

You know, the beauty of God's Hall of Fame is that we can all make it. It isn't reserved only for the exceptional athlete or the extremely gifted. Life is a mixture of good and bad, but no matter what happens, God never leaves us. All of life that holds meaning and purpose is centered in knowing God, loving God, and serving God upon whatever platform he places you. The real bottom line is not winning the National Championship and it is not in defeating Michigan. It is found in a relationship with God.

Here is a man who is using the platform that God has given him in a really honorable way. He is speaking to people who nobody else would be able to connect with – student athletes, fans, business people. And there are people in your life who no one else will be able to connect with, but God will allow you to connect with, if you will let him use you according to your gifts, according to your interests, according to your talents, according to your S.H.A.P.E. Let's pray.

Sharing Your Faith According To Your S.H.A.P.E.

Rich Nathan

February 16-17, 2008

How a Christian G.R.O.W.S. (Spiritual Growth Series)

Romans 12:6

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- C. Majoring in Announcement (Mk. 16.15)
- D. Majoring in Power Evangelism (Mt. 10.7, 8; 1 Cor. 14.24, 25)
- E. Majoring in Entrepreneurship (Col. 3.17)