

Partnering With Jesus To Change Our World

Rich Nathan

March 12-13, 2005

Blessed to be a Blessing Series

2 Chronicles 28-31

Thursday night was an historic night in the life of Vineyard Columbus and I pray in the future that it will be an historic night in the life of our city, and perhaps, even in the life of our world. To see thousands and thousands of folks stream into the Columbus Convention Center on a snowy, rather miserable Thursday night in March was just thrilling. I knew the atmosphere would be absolutely electric, and it was. The worship could not have been better.

I loved listening to the testimonies on the video of people's changed lives. And I was so encouraged looking out from the stage and seeing 40-50% of you stand when we asked how many of you committed or recommitted your lives to Christ here at the Vineyard, and then to watch from the stage as thousands and thousands of you came forward and made your pledge to the campaign. I just thought where else on a Thursday night in March are thousands of people getting together and committing themselves to give their money away to the poor in the community and to world missions. This campaign was so different than most capital campaigns. We were giving away ourselves. Where else is this happening in the world right now?

Our accountant, who went through the collected cards, told me the following stories:

STORIES

- A couple pledged 10% of their wedding budget
- Someone pledged the next three year's vacations.
- Some people pledged their bonuses.
- People pledged their next 3 years tax refunds
- There was a 5 1/2 year old, 8 year old, and an 11 year old who pledged.
- There were several pledge cards from teenagers.
- Someone made a pledge and wrote. "Will be more when I find employment"
- People are planning to sell coin collections, vintage records, artwork, jewelry.
- Someone wrote "Praise the Lord. He has given me more than I can ever thank Him for."
- Someone turned in a new member application last night along with their pledge and their first year's payment.
- Along with one person's cash pledge, they also pledged "my life" in the non-cash section of the card.
- People out of work and asking for prayer that they would be able to give.

We will continue to receive pledges from those of you who did not pledge and from newcomers to furnish the community center and perhaps to help pay for operating costs. So, if you didn't pledge, but want to, please do so.

Donna Gibbs Letter

I wanted to take a moment to share the ongoing miracles of God! While attending the February 26th service, I was focusing on what dollar amount to commit for the Giving Campaign. Like you and your wife, a dollar amount popped into my head...\$3000. I then drifted away thinking how I will make that a reality. Guess what? I can lose that smoking habit of \$4 per day (math breakdown \$1460 per year = \$4380 over 3 years). This not only improves my health, it meets and ultimately exceeds what I am committed to! Praise God!

On Monday, I returned to work and was still focused on the weekend message. I remembered my employer has a matching gift foundation. At first, I didn't find Vineyard on the approved list. Never discouraged, I was determined to submit Vineyard to be reviewed to qualify. I called for the Tax ID# for the church and left

a message in the accounting department. I looked again on the website of the list of approved churches and voila! There it was – Vineyard Church of Columbus! How elated I am now. My employer will match my contribution! Do the math – if they match my \$4380 that now multiplies to \$8760 combined over 3 years! Wooooo Hoooo!

I am a mother of 3, with an annual income of mid-\$30,000. While we struggle, God always provides a way for us! Thank you, Jesus! Let and let God! I am blessed and want to be a blessing!

Back in 1968, Crosby, Stills and Nash sang what became an anthem for a generation. It is better known by its chorus, “We Can Change the World.” The song was written in reference to the Democratic National Convention that was held in Chicago that year. The war in Viet Nam and Civil Rights were white-hot issues. Riots threatened the convention. Mayor Richard Daley told the police that they could use all necessary force in subduing the rioters. So the police essentially beat thousands of young people into submission.

SLIDES

*Somehow people must be free
I hope the day comes soon
Won't you please come to Chicago
Show your face
From the bottom to the ocean
To the mountains of the moon
Won't you please come to Chicago
No one else can take your place
We can change the world
Re-arrange the world
It's dying – if you believe in justice
It's dying – and if you believe in freedom
It's dying – and a man live its own life
It's dying – rules and regulations, who needs them
Open up the door
We can change the world*

Well my generation of Baby Boomers mostly heard the last few words of the song:

SLIDE

Let a man live its own life

Rules and regulations, who needs them.

The generation who sought to change the world in the 60's became the "me generation" of the 70's, searching for self-fulfillment rather than societal change. And then we became the "yuppies" of the 1980's with our yellow ties and BMW's, and then we became the "soccer moms" of the 1990's.

My generation discovered two painful lessons about trying to change the world. The first painful lesson is: You can't change the world when you yourself are an addict. My generation was a thoroughly addicted generation. The second lesson is: You can't change the world unless you are connected to a world changing power. And most of my generation was not connected to a world changing power.

When we talk about world change, it is easy to become cynical. It is easy to see things that are wrong, things that are unjust, things that are unfair, and maybe for a time, try to change things. But if your changes don't work, as they didn't for my generation, it is easy to get angry and cynical.

Jim Wallis, in his new book, *God's Politics*, writes: *"Cynicism does protect you in many ways. It protects you from seeming foolish enough to believe that things could and will change. It protects you from disappointments. Ultimately, cynicism protects you from commitment. If things are not really going to change, why try so hard to make a difference? Why become and stay involved? Why take the risks, make the sacrifices, or open yourself up to the vulnerabilities? Cynics are finally free to just look after themselves."*

We just got done with a capital campaign – a campaign that was built on the very opposite of cynicism. Our capital campaign was built on our church's choice to hope. Vineyard has made a choice to hope that with God's help this world can change. And our hope is not just some optimistic leap of faith. It is a conviction born out of the witness of the scriptures and the witness of history that the world really can be changed.

Nobel Prize winner, South African Bishop Tutu had a church service interrupted by the South African Security Police. They burst into his service while he was preaching, wielding clubs and tape recorders, trying to intimidate his congregation and intimidate him from making any statements against the South African government. Bishop Tutu stared the security police down and said: "You are powerful. I acknowledge that. You are very powerful. But I serve a God more powerful than you. I serve a God who cannot be mocked." And then

smiling at the police, Bishop Tutu said, “Listen. You’ve already lost. I invite you today to come and join the winning side.”

The congregation heard their pastor speak words of hope and faith and they were instantly transformed. In an instant they changed from cowering at the heavily armed police to leaping to their feet cheering and shouting and praising God, worshipping God in dance.

See, hope for world change is a choice to believe that Jesus told the truth when he said:

SLIDE – John 16:33

Jn 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Today, I want to remind you why we as a church just pledged \$7,650,000.00 to build a community center and expand our involvement in world missions. In this last talk in our Blessed to be a Blessing Campaign, I’m going to talk about partnering with Jesus in changing our world. Let’s pray.

The Bible is a record of people who changed their world. Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Gideon, David, Jonah, Elijah, Elisha – all of them were world changers. I love the King James Version of Acts 17:6 when talking about the apostles in the city of Thessalonica.

The crowd drags some Christians before the rulers in the city of Thessalonica and they say: “These are the men who have turned the world upside down.”

How many Christians could have that said about them in America today? These are the men and women who turned the world upside down.

Why this capital campaign, brothers and sisters? Why should we, as a church, hope for world change?

I want you to consider the Old Testament story of King Hezekiah. Hezekiah came to the throne in one of the darkest moments in Israelite history. His father Ahaz was so wicked and such a failure as a king that when he died he wasn’t even buried in the royal tombs. 2 Chronicles 28:27,

SLIDE

2Ch 28:27 Ahaz rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of Jerusalem, but he was not placed in the tombs of the kings of Israel. And Hezekiah his son succeeded him as king.

What was King Ahaz’s reign like? We read in 2 Chronicles 28:1-4,

SLIDE

2Ch 28:1 Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD.

2Ch 28:2 He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and also made cast idols for worshiping the Baals.

^{2Ch 28:3} He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his sons in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites.

^{2Ch 28:4} He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree.

Ahaz reigned at a time when the Jewish nation was divided between Israel in the North with its capital in Samaria, and Judah in the south with its capital in Jerusalem. Eventually, the kings of Aram and Israel defeated King Ahaz of Judah and the King of Israel killed 120,000 of Ahaz's soldiers. He also killed one of Ahaz's sons, his palace manager, and his second in command. Israel also took 200,000 wives and children into captivity.

A prophet named Oded finally convinced them to release the prisoners back to Jerusalem. But Ahaz did not change, even after his terrible military defeat. Instead, we read in 2 Chronicles 28:24-25,

SLIDE

^{2Ch 28:24} Ahaz gathered together the furnishings from the temple of God and took them away. He shut the doors of the LORD'S temple and set up altars at every street corner in Jerusalem.

^{2Ch 28:25} In every town in Judah he built high places to burn sacrifices to other gods and provoked the LORD, the God of his fathers, to anger.

If anyone could have ever become cynical, it was Ahaz's son, Hezekiah. Why even try to change this world, he might have asked. Things are too dark. Everything is against us. We have all of these military powers arrayed against us. What can our little nation ever hope to accomplish? Why take risks? Why

put myself on the line? Why not just go along and get along? Why try to make a difference?

But Hezekiah was a committed follower of the Lord. He really believed that in partnership with God the world could change. And he could hardly wait to bring change to his world. We read in 2 Chronicles 29:3,

SLIDE

2Ch 29:3 In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of the LORD and repaired them.

Later Hezekiah spoke to the priests and Levites saying, 2 Chronicles 29:6, 8 and 10,

SLIDES

2Ch 29:6 Our fathers were unfaithful; they did evil in the eyes of the LORD our God and forsook him. They turned their faces away from the LORD'S dwelling place and turned their backs on him.

2Ch 29:8 Therefore, the anger of the LORD has fallen on Judah and Jerusalem; he has made them an object of dread and horror and scorn, as you can see with your own eyes.

2Ch 29:10 Now I intend to make a covenant with the LORD, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger will turn away from us.

For eight days the priests and Levites did nothing but clean out the temple, not only of the dirt and rubbish that had accumulated over the years, but also of the idols that Hezekiah's father had brought into God's holy temple. Then Hezekiah

offered dozens of animals as a sacrifice for the nation. He ordered temple worship to begin.

Personal worship and personal repentance is often the first step in world change.

It is interesting how many world changers are extravagant worshippers.

Cynicism occurs when we get so wrapped up in trying to fix our world that we forget that the only one who can actually save and change our world is our Lord Jesus Christ. Only a commitment to worship him can keep the fire of hope burning alive inside of us.

Well, the people of Judah joined in the example that Hezekiah set. They were so fired up that they wanted to clean up the entire nation of idols that King Ahaz had set up. Following an incredible celebration of the Jewish Passover, we read in 2 Chronicles 31:1,

SLIDE

^{2Ch 31:1} When all this had ended, the Israelites who were there went out to the towns of Judah, smashed the sacred stones and cut down the Asherah poles. They destroyed the high places and the altars throughout Judah and Benjamin and in Ephraim and Manasseh. After they had destroyed all of them, the Israelites returned to their own towns and to their own property.

Was Hezekiah successful in changing his world? Here is what the writer of Chronicles says about Hezekiah's reign in 2 Chronicles 31:20-21,

SLIDE

2Ch 31:20 This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God.

2Ch 31:21 In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered.

History is full of examples of world change by people working in partnership with Christ. Think about what has happened in the US over the last 40 years as a result of the Civil Rights Movement. Many of you know some American history. You know that following the Civil War Southern whites reestablished white supremacy by a variety of means including state-sponsored terrorism. What we are fighting today, tens of thousands of Americans participated in for a century. The police, the courts, and the government together with the KKK conspired to terrorize Southern blacks through lynchings, bombings, and cross burnings.

The Southern state legislatures enacted codes that became known as Jim Crow Legislation and a racial caste system was created in the South that lasted for 100 years. Every single realm of Southern life was segregated including public transportation, restaurants, schools, hospitals, and cemeteries. Though blacks had just recently received their right to vote, they were disenfranchised through literacy tests and poll taxes.

Even the Federal Government participated in this Jim Crow backlash. The US Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Acts of 1875 unconstitutional. And in 1896 the Court in Plessy vs. Ferguson affirmed the principle of "separate but

equal.” As a nation, we just celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Selma March that pressured Linden Johnson and the United States Congress to finally pass a Voter Rights Act.

But think about the extraordinary change in the US over the last 40 years. There are over 500 African American Mayors now in the US including the mayors of some of our largest cities, including the city of Columbus. There are 38 African American Congressmen, and 15 from the former Confederacy, where for 100 years there wasn't one. The last two Secretaries of State have been African American.

But this world change was produced in large part by the church working in partnership with Jesus Christ. If you are interested in reading about the church's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, pickup a copy of Charles Marsh's book, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from the Civil Rights Movement to Today*.

In Eastern Europe during the 1980's, it was the church represented powerfully by the current Pope that resisted the communists and helped bring the Berlin Wall down. I could point to South Africa and the church's role in ending apartheid. I could talk about the church's role in toppling the Marcos's dictatorship in the Philippines, or the church's role even now in pressuring the international community to intervene in the Congo and the Darfur region of the Sudan.

Changing the world in partnership with Jesus Christ is absolutely possible.

Brothers and sisters, if we want to change the world, we have to understand the world we are living in. It says in 1 Chronicles 12:32a,

SLIDE

1Ch 12:32 men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do...

This is a group of people who distinguished themselves from those around them by understanding the times in which they lived. Jesus rebuked the people in his day telling them they knew how to predict the weather, but they didn't know how to interpret their own times:

SLIDE – Matthew 16:3b

Mt 16:3 You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

“You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.” Again, if want to change our world in partnership with Jesus, we have to understand the world we are living in.

I love what the founder of modern management, Peter Drucker, said. He said, “We do not have to predict the future. What we have to do is deal with the future that is already here.”

That is what we are trying to do with this capital campaign – deal with the future that is already here. We need to be in touch with the big trends in our world. What are the big global changes that are occurring so that as we keep in step with Christ we can address these big global changes occurring in our world.

I am not talking about fads. Again, Peter Drucker points out that a fad is something people talk about. When there is tons of talk, that is a fad.

A change, a global trend, is what people actually do. When tons of people are actually doing something, that is an opportunity for Christ. So, I want to talk about a few major global trends and how our giving campaign ties in with these global trends. I could have addressed some other trends. I certainly could have addressed the global church's move from being centered in Europe and North America to now being centered in Africa, South America, and Asia. I certainly could have talked about the global spread of AIDS and what our church needs to do to respond to that great plague, but in this last message I just want to focus on five global trends that are divine opportunities given to the church.

The first one is this: If we are going to partner with Jesus, we need to focus our attention on cities. Almost all of the global population growth will be urban.

Today about 45% of the world's population lives in urban areas. In 20 years that is going to grow to 60%. The result is going to be huge population centers that will count their populations in the tens of millions. In 1900 all of the world's

largest cities were located in Europe or North America. Today, only 3 of the world's largest 10 urban areas can be found in traditionally advanced countries – Tokyo, New York, and Los Angeles. By 2015 the only city that will be left on the list will be Tokyo. 80% of the world's largest cities are now in Asia or Latin America. Africa is gaining in cities like Cairo and Lagos, who are predicted to have between 30-40 million people in the next several decades.

If we are going to partner with Jesus in changing the world, we must focus on the cities. The ministry of the early Christians was entirely city-centric. Paul's missionary journeys essentially ignored the countryside. When he entered a new region he planted churches in the cities and then left. Why? Because cities are the main place where culture develops. As the city goes, so goes the arts, scholarship, communication, philosophy, and commerce. As Pastor Tim Keller from Redeemer's Church in New York puts it, "Cities are the culture-forming wombs of the society. Whatever captures the city, captures society." The values of the city are always being transmitted to the surrounding suburbs and countryside.

Did Paul's city-centric strategy work? By AD 300 50% of the urban population of the Roman Empire was Christian. 90% of the countryside was still pagan. In fact, the word pagan comes from the word "paganos" which means "country yokel." The way the Roman Empire was captured was the cultural centers were captured and then it spread to the rural areas. It never works in the other

direction. The cultural trends that began in New York and Los Angeles and San Francisco will be caught in a few years in rural Iowa.

And do you know Christians in America have it exactly backwards? Many Christians are proud that the majority of us live in the so-called red states, the rural states. But that is not where the culture is going. The shaping influences of media and education and business and politics are all happening in the blue states. If we partner with Jesus, the very worst thing a Christian can do is move out of the city. And the very worst thing the church can do is move away from the city.

“Well, I just want to move way out to the country. Get me 5-10 acres of land and be left alone.”

When a Christian or church does that, they become marginal to the culture-forming womb of the power center in the city. If we want to partner with Jesus, we have to develop a positive view of the city.

As I’ve said through this campaign, we’ve got to link the prosperity of our church to the prosperity of our city. As I said the other night at the Convention Center, wouldn’t it be wonderful if the mayor of Columbus, the school board, the city council, the police commissioner, and fire chief, and the school superintendents, and anyone else who is in a position of significant influence and power in this

city, when they wanted to find a real friend in the city and they needed prayer and spiritual counsel, when they needed to hear the mind of God, they turned to the Vineyard? If we want to partner with Jesus, we have to pray for and fall in love with our city.

And if we want to partner with Jesus, we need to embrace racial diversity. That is the second huge global trend. Brothers and sisters, embracing racial diversity is not just a matter of political correctness, as some conservatives would suggest. Or to put it differently, diversity is not just a fad. Diversity is a fact. Diversity is a global trend. Churches will either partner with Jesus in embracing racial diversity, or we will be reduced to almost complete irrelevance in the next few decades. A number of large American states are already majority minority, including California, Texas, Arizona, New Mexico. And by majority minority I mean non-Hispanic, Caucasians make up less than 50% of the population. That is going to be true in the entire US in the next 40 years. Non-Hispanic Caucasians will no longer be the majority in 40 years in America.

Many, many American cities are already majority minority. New York, Chicago, LA, Philadelphia, Washington. Do you know that in Miami right now, only 15% of the population is non-Hispanic Caucasian. Racial diversity is a world-wide phenomenon. Travel to Europe and issues of diversity are heating up in most European countries – certainly in France and Germany, Denmark, as more and more immigrants from Africa, Turkey, and South Asia and the Caribbean move

in. One of the amazing trends currently in the US is the rapid rise of immigration, particularly from Latin America, Africa and Asia.

Here is a little fact for you. Do you know that more immigrants have come into the US in the last 25 years than in any other 25 year period in American history? Think about that. We think about the age of immigration being between 1890-1915 with the millions of folks streaming through Ellis Island in New York looking for work and a better life, but more immigration has taken place since 1980 than when America threw its arms open to the world and said, according to the words that are imprinted on the base of the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

Here is a statistic for you. Do you know that New York City right now has a higher number of foreign born residents than at any other time in its history. 40% of New Yorkers right now were born outside of the US.

Let me share with you another incredible statistic. According to a front page article in the New York Times just a few weeks ago, more Africans have voluntarily come to the US in the last 25 years than came through the 2 centuries of America's notorious slave trading era.

Racial and ethnic diversity is a fact globally. It is a fact nationally. And it is a fact locally. More than 2/3's of our own city's foreign born residents have come here

in the last 15 years. Think about that. Of all the people in our city that are foreign born, 2/3's of them came in the last 15 years. The Columbus Public Schools are 70% minority. Franklin County's population grew by only 6% in the last decade. But the African American population grew by 18%. Other minorities grew by over 40%.

Did you know that racial and ethnic diversity is not only a fact, but it is a fact that God loves. God wants people from every people group worshipping him together. There is nothing that honors God more than representatives from every ethnicity coming together to worship him.

John Piper in his fantastic book on world missions called *Let the Nations Be Glad* points out that the greatness of a person's gift of leadership is directly related to the range of people influenced by that person. Let me paraphrase what he is saying. If the only person you can get to follow you is your five-year old, and even she doesn't obey you very much, you don't have a particularly strong gift of leadership. If you are only able to lead people who are exactly like you, who have your level of education, your economics, then you probably still don't have a great gift of leadership. But if your leadership could be recognized by people of every ethnicity, language, occupation, and education we would say: Here is a person whose leadership is very great. God's glory, God's leadership, God's lordship is magnified the broader the group that comes together to worship him and call him Lord.

This is particularly magnified when we are together because people look in and say: Only God can create a multicultural church. Only God could bridge the gap between suburban and urbanites, black and white, Hispanic and Asian. Only God can bring together rich and poor, people living in mansions and people who are homeless.

Our giving campaign, in building this community center, and our expanded involvement in world missions is all about our church making a conscious choice to reject the cynicism about race that you hear on talk radio and to embrace the hope of racial reconciliation.

I want to apply this for a moment personally to each one of us. It is not enough for our church to embrace racial diversity. If you consider yourself a follower of Jesus you must embrace diversity. What does that mean? I'm not just talking about some internal state of mind, some subjective thing. I'm talking about actual behaviors. For example, when is the last time you had dinner in your own home with someone who had a racial background different than yours. If it is more than six months, it is too long. If the answer is almost never, then the Holy Spirit would want to bring correction to your life, as he has to Marlene and my life over the last decade.

It is important that each of us learn to listen to the life experiences of people who

grew up differently than we did. It is important that you and I allow the Holy Spirit to change us. Embracing diversity means that you expand your knowledge of America's racial history. Why not visit Cincinnati's National Underground Railroad Freedom Museum? If you have children, bring them there and talk with them after about American History. Visit the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC. Read, if you are a reader, there is a good brief starter book from a Christian perspective regarding America's treatment of African Americans. It is titled *Free At Last* by Carl Ellis. One of my favorite books, again, from a Christian perspective, is *Divided By Faith* by Michael Emmerson.

Educate yourself. If you are white, visit one of the many great black churches in our city. We are dear friends with Bishop Timothy Clarke of First Church of God on Refugee Road. I also have a warm and dear friendship with Pastor La Fayette Scales of Rhema Christian Center, and Pastor Keith Troy of New Salem Baptist. Both of those churches are here on the Northeast side of town. But some Sunday in the next six months, go and visit First Church, Rhema, or New Salem Baptist Church. If we are going to partner with Jesus, we need to embrace racial diversity.

If we are going to partner with Jesus, we need to address the issue of fatherlessness. A chaplain in the federal prison decided to improve morale. Mother's Day was approaching and he made a deal with one of the major greeting card companies to supply the 500 men in the prison with free Mother's

Day cards. It was great PR and so the company gave the free cards to the prisoners. The inmates were so excited. Each man sent their mom a card. Morale went up so high that the chaplain decided to repeat the event on Father's Day. Again, the greeting card company agreed to supply 500 Father's Day cards. The chaplain offered the cards to the inmates. Do you know what he found? Not one inmate sent a card to his father – not one.

James Robison in his book *My Father's Face* wrote about the chaplain's experience. He said: *"The majority of men in prison come from a home with an absentee father, or one in which the man doesn't even know his father. Or one in which the father was present, but abusive."*

Wade Horn, in the national fathering initiative said the greatest social tragedy in America in the last three decades has been the collapse of fatherhood. One-third of all children in America are now born out of wedlock. That is nearly 15 times higher than in 1960. Among children of divorced, 40% do not see their fathers in a typical year. And I need to immediately say that I do not blame all men or all fathers for marital breakdown or for not seeing their kids. Some of you dads have fought valiantly to preserve your marriage or your relationship with your kids, but it was your wife who walked out on you and has been fighting you in court.

But nothing – not race, not income, not economics, nothing is a better predictor of social and personal problems in America than the absence of fathers from children's lives. Fatherless children are five times more likely to live in poverty than children living with both parents. Fatherless children are more likely to experience mood disorders, experiment with drugs, drop out of school, become sexually active, and have behavioral problems than children of two-parent families. This is true for both children born to unmarried women and to children of divorce.

Now, single moms, before you utterly despair regarding your child's future, let me share one incredibly hopeful fact with you. Harvard Economist Richard Freeman found that *“church attendance is a better predictor of who escapes poverty, drug addiction, and crime than family income, family structure, and other variables.”*

And Morgan Reynolds, the Director of the Criminal Justice Center at the National Center for Policy Analysis reports:

SLIDE

Other criminologists find that even under poor social economic conditions, church going serves as an insulator against crime and delinquency. These and other findings give evidence to the importance of character formation – teaching the difference between right and wrong and the value of morality.

Single moms, don't despair. Immersing your child in church in a deep and meaningful way and regularly stressing with your son or daughter the difference between right or wrong in a loving and hopeful home is hugely important in raising a responsible, productive and healthy child.

But as a church, we must partner with Jesus in combating the societal spirit of fatherlessness. And I believe that there is a great deal we can do as a large church. I believe we need to work together with other churches to get the laws changed in Ohio so that divorce is discouraged and not encouraged. I love what they just did in Arkansas in passing a Covenant Marriage Bill. Couples can elect to participate in Arkansas and before they can get divorced, they have to go to marital counseling. They have to live apart for two years, with the only exceptions being physical abuse, infidelity, and criminal behavior.

Right now, I know the frustration of talking to couples, holding God's Word before them, and reminding them of the vows they took before the Lord. Couples say: Well, thank you for your time, but I just want out. And the laws of the State of Ohio say go ahead.

I believe if we are serious about dealing with the issue of fatherlessness, we will as a church, work to change the law in the state of Ohio to more closely reflect God's view of marriage. And as a church, we can work to reinvigorate marriages. I'm so grateful for our Begin Again program that assists couples who are struggling to renew their marriages. That needs to be greatly expanded. And through the community center that can be offered to our city.

And we also, as a church, can greatly strengthen our men's ministry. We know men need to be trained to be good fathers, and to greatly value fathers. And for those who have had children out of wedlock, men need to be challenged to legitimate their children, to support their children economically, and to visit and love their children.

If we are going to partner with Jesus, our church has to fill the gap left by Government cutbacks. You know, the fact is, friends, that Government at all levels has simply run out of money for social programs. Government deficits are a trend that will only increase over the next several decades. The national debt is growing by hundreds of billions of dollars every year. And in President Bush's most recent budget, the Pentagon is about the only winner. There is growth in military spending and domestic anti-terrorism spending, but most domestic programs are cutback or held flat. Food stamps are cut.

At the state level, Gov. Taft's recent budget hit huge tax cuts to try to stimulate the economy, but in order to balance the budget, Gov. Taft is proposing enormous cuts in Medicaid systems, and systems for the disabled.

What this means, brothers and sisters, is that churches like ours need to step up to the plate and fill the gap that the Government used to fill. Society's ship is sinking and it is all-hands on deck including the church. This is not a time to escape to the country. This is a time to get our buckets and start bailing. What

an opportunity we have to have a community center to plug a hole that is just absolutely enormous, to plug a hole in our medical care system, or in job training.

Public schools a decade ago used to be indifferent at best, and absolutely hostile at worse, towards the church, but now they are throwing their doors open to our church. They are saying: Come help us anyway you want to help us. You want to tutor our kids, come on. You want to help provide athletic programs, come on. Help up with the arts. Help us with music.

The city just now only avoided closing its very few health clinics. But with the government cutbacks there is an enormous hole in publicly provided medical services. Did you know that when our community center opens up in the Fall of 2006 we are going to have the only community center on the entire Northeast side of Columbus?

Last thought – if we are going to partner with Jesus, we must stand against the moral pollution of our culture. Whether we are talking about Janet Jackson's wardrobe malfunction, or the simulation of sex with Justin Timberlake that ends with the very romantic song line: "I've got to have you naked by the end of this song." Or Ashlee Simpson's sleazy song at the Orange Bowl, or hardcore pornography, which is being tapped into by children and teenagers, and millions of men and women who are now addicted. We can't have social morality, without personal morality.

I deeply believe that this community center is going to be an utter experiment in futility unless Christ is at the very center of it and people are called to personal moral responsibility. Discipleship is not discipleship if it excludes our sexual behavior. One of the things I am most hopeful about is the extension of ministries like Integrity.Men, which provides a path of healing and recovery for men from pornography addiction and sexual addictions whether they are heterosexual or homosexual, some of women's ministries like Integrity.Women and Beauty For Ashes.

Brothers and sisters, the nearly \$8 million dollars that this church just pledged from thousands and thousands of you is a clear statement that our church is choosing to hope. You are saying you believe that by partnering with Jesus Christ, we can change the world. Let's pray.

Conclusion: Call for folks to come forward, if they would like to make a pledge to the campaign.

Partnering With Jesus To Change Our World

Rich Nathan

March 12-13, 2005

Blessed to be a Blessing Series

2 Chronicles 28-31

- I. A Choice Of Hope Over Cynicism
 - A. The Example Of Hezekiah
 - B. The Example of South Africa
 - C. The Example of American Civil Rights
- II. A Choice Of Partnership With Jesus
 - A. If We Are Going To Partner With Jesus We Must Focus On Cities.
 - B. If We Are Going To Partner With Jesus We Must Embrace Racial Diversity.
 - C. If We Are Going To Partner With Jesus We Must Address The Issue Of Fatherlessness.
 - D. If We Are Going To Partner With Jesus We Must Fill The Gap Left By Government Cut-Backs.
 - E. If We Are Going To Partner With Jesus We Must Stand Against The Moral Pollution Of Our Culture.