

How God's Kingdom is Extended

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The Kingdom of God Series

Luke 5:1-11

A few months ago I was at a local restaurant when I noticed that one of the servers was wearing a large pentagram around her neck. I don't know if you know what a pentagram is – it is like a five-pointed star. People who are into witchcraft and paganism wear them around their necks. This was quite a big one.

So I just wanted to engage her in conversation. I said, "Hey, what's that around your neck?"

She said, "Oh, this? This is part of my religion."

I said, "Really? Tell me about it."

But before she had a chance to, another woman stepped forward and said, "Hey, check this out."

I said, "What's that?"

She said, "This is a ring from my girlfriend." (She was a practicing lesbian.)

I said, "Really? That's your girlfriend's ring."

Another woman turned around and said, "Oh, look what I am wearing around my neck."

I said, "What do you have?"

She said, "I am wearing (and it was some name of an Egyptian goddess)..."

I said, "What's that all about?"

She said, "Well that's the goddess of fertility. It will make me fertile."

Now, this is really an honest-to-God conversation that happened over the course of just a few minutes. I didn't get a chance to really follow up. They were busy. But as I walked away something occurred to me. That is, how generally uptight Christians are when they talk to people who are into something totally other, radically different, than Christianity. These ladies were into something really radically different.

As I walked away, I just laughed about the conversation and thought, "Lord Jesus, how the world is changing." It occurred to me that if I had had that conversation a decade ago or 15 years ago, I would have had a whole different set of emotions. I would have been pulled tighter than a drum. See, the Christian environment that we live in in the U.S., at least in the evangelical portion of the church, the conservative portion of the church, produces an extraordinary uptightness in Christians. So much so that we have virtually lost our ability to extend God's kingdom to those who are very different than us.

I recently signed a book contract, I may have mentioned it perhaps or not, I can't recall. But I signed a book contract with Zondervan Publishing to write two books for them over the next couple of years. The first book I am writing is called, "Who is My Enemy?" Basically, what I am talking about in the book is that we Christians have gotten thoroughly confused regarding who God's enemies are and how we are to respond to the world.

The Pharisees in Jesus' day were certain they knew who God's enemies were and what they should pray for. God's enemies were clearly the Romans who were oppressing the 1st century Jews. They were the pagans, people who didn't worship God correctly. And what they were praying for and working toward was the destruction of the pagans.

Jesus came along with a whole different spin on life – a spin that ultimately caused him to be crucified. Jesus said that God does have enemies, but the enemies could turn out to be not the Romans as the Pharisees supposed, but God's very own people. The chief concern of God was not the statues that the Romans were bowing down toward. But rather the fact that God's people wanted these idolaters destroyed rather than saved.

Jesus spun the story. He continually reminded the people of God that our chief responsibility is not to destroy the world or condemn the world, but to save it by becoming the light of the world.

The other great alternative to condemning the world is avoiding it. I think about this publication called the Christian Yellow Pages. I certainly don't think that there is anything wrong with wanting to have an ethical Christian attorney or an ethical Christian car mechanic. There is nothing wrong with discovering that someone you are working with is a fellow Christian. I am certainly not opposed to any of you who would advertise in such a thing. But I do wonder about the ghetto mentality that, at least in part, could produce such things as Christian Yellow Pages. We just want to deal with our own kind and avoid contact with the rest of the world. So that when a plumber who comes to your house hits his thumb with his hammer, he just yells, "Praise the Lord" instead of some blaspheme or curse. And these are the two poles that Christians in America generally alternate between. We move from condemnation to avoidance back to condemnation back to avoidance. And all the while, the Lord has a plan that through us the kingdom of God will be extended.

Over the course of the summer I have been doing a series on the kingdom. I have mentioned to you over and over again that the central message of Jesus was the message of the kingdom of God. It was also the message that the apostle Paul preached. We don't find the phrase as often in Paul's preaching, although we find it in Acts and a few other places. We don't find the phrase as

often because that phrase was not meaningful to the Gentile audience that Paul was preaching to.

But the basic concept, the basic framework, was absolutely present in Paul's preaching as it was in Jesus' – namely, that in Jesus Christ, God was bringing into the world a fresh reign of blessing and healing and prosperity. That the future that the Jews were waiting for had drawn near in Christ. That God was coming to defeat the enemies of God's people. That God was coming into the world to bring blessing and prosperity and to create for himself a people who were in love with him and who lived for him.

So over against either two major options that we find most Christians choosing, in terms of their relationship with the world – condemnation and avoidance – the Lord calls us to a third option, which is to extend the kingdom of God. That is to extend God's reign over those parts of the world that have not yet bowed before the Lord Jesus.

Today, I want to consider with you the simple question: how is God's kingdom extended through the world?

Luke 5:1-11

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man." For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

We read in verse 1 that Jesus was standing the lake of Gennesaret, that is the Sea of Galilee, and people were crowding around him listening to God's Word. In fact, they pressed so hard as they were listening, that he needed to create some distance between he and them, and so he got into a boat to speak.

Now, when we are talking about extending the kingdom, one of the things that we found in our study of the kingdom is that the kingdom is extended through the

way we listen to God's Word. The average pastor spends years of training in delivering a sermon. In seminary, men and women take classes in preaching. They get video taped. They have professors hammering them about the right way to stand and hand motions and the proper use of an illustration. Lots and lots of classes in how to properly interpret the scripture. The average pastor spends a great deal of time in being trained how to preach.

Since my background is in law, I didn't have the opportunity to take many of the classes – maybe they aren't that helpful, I don't know. But I had to be self-taught. So I have read dozens of books on preaching, and I have listened to many good preachers. So I developed an ear the way a musician would develop an ear for songs. I have developed an ear for preaching good and bad.

And so I, by God's grace, have been able to intuit a lot of the basic principles of teaching. In fact, for the last five years or so, on Friday afternoons I do a preaching mentoring group with young adults where I get a group together with me, and I work with them to improve their preaching skills. Many of the young adults who are preaching in Joshua House have been through my mentoring class.

I say all of that about the training in preaching to suggest to you that the church, by and large, has only done one-half of the equation of training in extending God's kingdom. Because the other half of the equation is training people how to listen to messages. See, we have one person highly trained to deliver the message and thousands of people who don't know how to listen. I think, my goodness, wouldn't it be helpful for people who sit in church week after week for 40 years to take a class in how to listen well to a message. How to get the maximum benefit. Think of the thousands of hours that you could spend in church.

Again, I recognize not every message is worth listening to. And not all the time that people spend in church is well-spent time. But let's assume for the purpose of argument that the time you spend here at Vineyard is mainly well spent and that is why you keep coming back. Are you a trained listener? Could you mentor other people? Those of you who have been in the Vineyard for years, could you sit down and do what I do in preaching, could you sit down with others and mentor them in listening well to messages?

Let me give you a few suggestions for listening well. Here is my first and most important suggestion: Have a devotional time before you come to church. I know that a lot of people use church as their devotional. Well, I am going to church today, therefore, today is a day where I can skip individually meeting with God and dipping into his Word alone and praying alone. After all, that is what church is all about. But I tell you, you cannot get anywhere near the benefit of worship and hearing God's Word if you come into a service ice-cold compared to having

your heart already warmed by being in touch with God alone in your own devotions.

One of the main things that keeps people from being able to listen well is a crowded heart. You come to church weighed down, preoccupied, anxious, guilty. There is all of this warfare going on inside your heart – the stresses of the week, the stresses of family, feelings of failure. What if you took a half an hour on Sunday morning and instead of getting up with just enough time to make the service, you got up a half-hour earlier just so you could be with the Lord for a little while. And with God you fed on his Word, the Bible, for 15 minutes, and you prayed confessing your sins, casting your cares upon him, uncrowding your preoccupied hearts.

Would you not come to church far better able to listen? What if, in addition, while you were listening, you took some notes? There is a reason we hand out outlines each week, and it is not just so that you could clock me to see how much longer this torture is going to go on. The best kind of learning is active learning where the learner and the listener are actively engaged.

We don't have the opportunity in a church this size to have several thousand people dialogue through the course of the sermon. It would be just total bedlam. But if you take notes, you can at least begin the process of active engagement. You could jot down questions. You could carry on a dialogue with me as you write down different points. Your notes could be a source of conversation. You could talk about this stuff in a small group setting or with your spouse or roommate. The whole point of the story we read a few weeks ago, the story of the sower and the seed, had to do with the kingdom of God extended through listening.

So let me ask you a couple of personal questions. Those of you who have been in church for some period of time, or you have been in Vineyard for some time, you aren't a newcomer – what's the general state of your heart when you come to worship? Do you prepare yourself by taking a little bit of time for a devotion before you come to public worship? Might that be something you would want to incorporate into your life? Do you take notes? Do you ever look at your notes?

The text goes on to read in verse 4, "When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked hard all night and haven't caught anything.'"

Let's stop there. I have noticed that sometimes Jesus' approach to people starts with something that on the surface is quite innocuous. That he doesn't approach us necessarily with thunder and lightening. Not everyone is a Moses who gets to have a burning bush experience. Not everyone meets God on top of a mountain that is quaking and shaking and is on fire. Not everyone in the world gets to be a Gideon who in the Old Testament had an angelic visitation. Not everyone gets to

be an apostle Paul, who was knocked down and blinded by a physical appearance of the resurrected Christ.

How is it that most people meet Christ? Let me tell you how the kingdom of God is extended in most people's lives. Mostly people meet Christ in times of failure and crisis. It is the most incredible thing because we human beings run from failure. We hate moments of frustration and embarrassment. Those times when we have blown up our lives and made an absolute ruin of everything – just a total mess. Or when our lives are blown up for us by someone else. We do everything in our power to preserve ourselves from facing failure, yet, friend, here is something you can take to the bank. Moments of frustration and failure are the main moments that Jesus uses to extend his kingdom into your life and into other people's lives. Crisis moments are the ripe moments, the "kairos" the ripe moment, for the extension of the kingdom of God.

I read a story some time ago from a pastor who pastored a blue-collar church in Western Pennsylvania. It was a coal-mining area during the Depression. His particular community was really hard hit by the Depression. He had lots of folks out of work, just scraping to get by. He said the highest level of giving that his church experienced was the ten years of the Depression. That the church members never gave as much before when everyone was employed or after the end of the Depression when everyone got jobs again.

There is something about crises, about failure, about frustration. Those are the moments when we are most responsive to the intervention of God. Those of you who are familiar with the story of the Jews in the Old Testament, you know that the moment of receptivity to God in the history of Israel was not when life was easy. It was when life was really difficult and painful.

The truth is lots of people can survive spiritually moments of difficulty and frustration. We think we can't, but then we do. There are comparatively fewer people that can survive times of great prosperity and comfort with a similar amount of devotion and faith. I find over and over again in people's lives that moments of receptiveness to God's call upon them, the moments of responsiveness to someone's witness, to the Gospel message is when we are in need – when life has overwhelmed our systems. There are life events that we go through that are life moments for responding to Christ.

I regularly see this in my own life and in the lives of those I talk to. Someone has experienced great failure. Like the disciples, "I have tried and tried. We have been out all night, Jesus, fishing. We are tired, sore and we just want to go to bed. We want to give up. Nothing's worked." I regularly see in someone's life that they have done something totally stupid. Maybe they had an affair or they totally messed up in school and they failed and they have to repeat another year. Or they get charged with drunk driving or they get pregnant before they are married. Or they cause a pregnancy. Or they have gone through something that

is totally beyond their control – a miscarriage, or the death of a spouse, or divorce, or the rebellion of a child – they go through some kind of serious pain or failure. Maybe it is a financial setback, a bankruptcy, a business they started collapses.

And I have said to people if I have said it once, I have said it a hundred times, “This particular problem that you are going through, this failure, this embarrassment, this thing in which you have blown up your life, or the rug has been pulled out from under you, this could be the best thing that ever happened to you. Believe it.” If you use this time right now, when your life is all blown apart, if you use this time to discover a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ, if you get to the root of your sin and you discover at this moment how real Jesus can be for you, this could be the best possible thing that has ever happened to you. Because now you are at a place where you have nothing else to lose. And you aren’t just going to be hearing about Jesus, but genuinely person-to-person without all the religious baloney, you will have a chance to meet him.

I was at a coffee shop just a few days ago, and I hope I am not embarrassing a young woman who came up to talk to me, but I was just preparing this point about failure being an open door to the extension of God’s kingdom. I was just writing those words down and writing down an illustration of folks where I have seen that work. A person who is separated in their marriage and then Jesus comes to them. A person who is going through a divorce or discovers their spouse is having an affair, and Jesus comes to them. A person who has been participating in an affair, blown themselves up, and then Jesus comes to them.

I was writing some of those thoughts. A young woman came up and said, “Rich, could I talk with you for a moment? I have been coming to your church for a little while. I am going through a divorce.”

I said, “Really?” I had just got done writing the word “divorce” on my sheet.

She said, “Yeah, it’s been real painful.” And she shared some personal things.

I said, “What’s happened in your relationship with Jesus during these last few months? Has anything happened for you?”

She said, “Well, as a matter of fact, I think I have met him.”

I said, “Really? Tell me about it.”

She said, “Well, I was having a particularly awful day. I had been out to your church a couple of times. I had a pounding headache. I was totally devastated emotionally. I was sitting in my car crying. And I just said to the Lord, “Jesus, help me. I need you.” The most amazing thing happened. I felt this incredible wave of peace come over me. My headache immediately left. It was like all of

the weight that was on my shoulders just lifted, and I just knew that Jesus had come into my life.”

Friends, whenever our heart is broken, it is through those broken places that Christ enters. He just doesn't enter our lives, but through us. Christ wants to extend his kingdom and bring others to a place where they kneel before him as Lord. So that when you encounter someone who is in crisis, who is experiencing frustration, who has blown up their lives through their own stupidity or just through no fault of their own have had life pulled out from under them, this is a ripe moment for Christ to enter. A moment of stress, the death of a parent, the frustration of a new job, getting fired from a job, moving into a new city and not knowing anyone – those are Jesus moments.

And don't just restrict those moments of failure and frustration to adults. The kingdom is extended to teenagers and children during moments of failure and frustration. It is the same principle. When a kid starts college and there is all of this stress of being in a totally new environment, finding your way to class, and all the pressure of starting college, when a teenager breaks up with her boyfriend or his girlfriend, when a child goes to a new school, when a kid's parents get divorced, when a teen's dad gets remarried or his mother gets remarried, when a kid doesn't make a sport or doesn't succeed in an extracurricular activity that they really want to succeed it, when a kid gets pregnant or is injured in an automobile accident – those are ripe moments for the extension of the Kingdom, if the teenager, the kid, the adult reaches out for Jesus at that time.

Because here is the principle. The issue in life is always what will move us away from self-confidence and self-reliance to a place of need and dependence. Faith is all about acknowledging your need and coming to a place of radical dependence upon the Lord. There is a reason why Jesus said in one of his teachings that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. He didn't say that because there is something wrong with money. Money can be good. We can use money to promote the kingdom. There is nothing wrong with money. And there is nothing wrong with lots of money. Money could be used to promote the kingdom. Money was used to build this new building. We use money here to send missionaries out around the world. We use money to plant new churches. The reason Jesus said it is hard for a rich man or woman to enter the kingdom is because when you have lots of money, it is very difficult to not be self-reliant and self-confident.

See, when you secretly know that if everything breaks down, you still have twelve back-up systems, then the door to real dependence upon God is shut. It is only when your systems fail, when you have been a success all the time, and you have been great in school – maybe you have had straight A's all the way through – you have done great in business and you have a pile of money, and you have a big house; and you have everything you are supposed to have – it is only when your systems fail, when your life or at least some aspect of your life overwhelms

you, when there is something that is out of your control – it is only in those places, those out of control places, those places of failure and frustration and trial that people reach out to Jesus Christ.

I have watched this in the life of the very wealthy over and over again. I have seen this in the lives of the very successful over and over again. It is when wife or husband threatens to leave, it is when I realize I have no capacity to parent my child, and it is when we come to an end of ourselves, “Lord, we have been fishing all night and we have come up empty.” I have tried all the things I know how to try. I have run my systems and done my schemes and it is still not working. That’s when the kingdom is extended.

But now look at how Peter responds to the frustration: Simon Peter answered, “Master, we have worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.” Because you say so, I will. This has for almost 20 years been one of my favorite phrases in the entire New Testament. Because you say so, I will. May I encourage you to underline this in your Bible? Verse 5, Because you say so, I will. This is the statement of a disciple who is in love with Jesus. Lord, I am tired. Lord, I am angry. Lord, my back hurts, my shoulders hurt. I am exhausted from fishing all night. Lord, I have tried to make this marriage work. I have gone to counseling. I have prayed. We have had dozens of talks, my husband [wife] and me. My net has come up empty a thousand times. I am completely exhausted. If it were up to me, I would row back to shore right now. I would take my boat and chop it up into firewood and set it on fire and throw my net and fishing gear into the fire with it. Lord, I wouldn’t try again for anyone else in this marriage, but because you say so, I will.

Here’s the question that tests the genuineness of your love of Jesus and your ability to extend the kingdom of God to others. What will you do for Jesus? What have you done for Jesus that you wouldn’t do for anyone else in the world? What would you do? What have you done just for Jesus? Just because you love him.

There is an old rock and roll song that I love. It goes:
When a man loves a woman,
He will sleep out in the rain.
Give up all of his comforts
If that’s the way she says
It ought to be.

Because you say so, Lord. Because I love you, I will sleep out in the rain. Give up all of my comforts, if you say that’s the way it ought to be.

The apostle Paul, in another one of my favorite verses in the New Testament, gives us the great motive for extending the kingdom of God. Why share your

faith? Why go out on a limb? Why get caught up in the mission of the kingdom? To bring other people under the Lordship of Christ by extending life and grace to them rather than condemnation or avoidance. Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:13-14, "If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised for them."

"If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us."

Today in English we use lots of different words to describe insanity and lunacy when we are talking about people in love. People in love are sometimes totally insane. They lose their balance. Their brains go on vacation. We talk about people being madly in love. We say people are crazy about each other. We talk about people being insanely jealous when someone is paying attention to their lover. People are lovesick. They are moonstruck.

The first time I held my wife, Marlene, I literally fell head over heels in love with her. I remember our first date when we first held one another. We were on the dance floor. As I held her, I literally began to hear bells go off. It was like I was under a big church bell and my head was going bong, bong, bong.

We talk about people being ga-ga in love. Swept off their feet. Bowled over.

If you want lunacy and insanity, listen to the cute names that people give to each other when they are in love: honey-bunch, snookie-ukems, little punkin – it is enough to make a grown man absolutely sick. You never hear people in love say, "I am rationally in love. I am coolly, dispassionately and logically in love. I feel nothing. I am absolutely frozen and cold inside as I hold you. You don't even register on my emotional scale. But as an abstract, philosophical proposition, as I work this out through symbolic logic, I have reasoned through our relationship, and I believe that I am coolly and indifferently in love with you."

Any woman worth her salt would be swept off her feet with that kind of declaration. Paul is saying the same thing that Peter said. Because I love Jesus, because the love of Jesus compels me, I will do anything for him. Because you say so, Lord, I will.

Lord, I would not refrain from having sex before marriage for anyone else, but you. But because you say so, I will.

I wouldn't reconcile with my mother or father for anyone else but you, Jesus. But because you say so, I will pick up a phone and call them.

I am naturally shy. I absolutely hate, it gives me the willies, it send shudders up my spine, to talk about really personal or private things publicly – to get up and teach or to share my faith. I wouldn't do it for anyone else. But because you say so, I will do it for you, Jesus.

For you I will join a small group, even though I am busy and small groups give me the willies.

For you I will break off an unhealthy relationship. For you, Jesus, I will not get an abortion even though it would be so much easier to end the life of this baby in my womb.

Do you understand that people do crazy, insane, absolutely irrational things when they are in love? Because you say so, I will. Lovers will travel 500 miles, a thousand miles, to be with their beloved for 12 hours. They will drive 12 hours there, spend a day together, and then drive through the night. Almost every guy in the world has a story like that. Just to be together for 12 hours. Sure...what's the big deal...1000 miles of driving. No problem. Just hop in the car and drive all night.

Marlene used to sit up and type my term papers until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning. I would hand her sheets and she would type away when I was in college and law school. I remember Marlene being sick a few years ago. She had a high fever. She was chilled and couldn't get warm. I saw this beautiful, sweet person lying in bed just shivering and shivering. I didn't care if I caught what she had, I just wanted her to feel better. I laid down next to her and wrapped my body around her to warm her up.

A person in love will risk their own health to comfort a sick child, to hold a sick spouse. Someone in love will give their kidney in a kidney transplant. They will go to the hospital 10 times, a hundred times to be with their child, with their mate, with their parent, with their sister or friend. They will allow their bones to be dug into for a bone marrow transplant.

I had a guy come up to me a couple of years ago here at church and tell me, "I just want to tell you that this is the first church I have come to four times in a row."

I said, "Really? That's great."

He said, "Let me tell you who I am. I have been inside of penitentiaries for the last 20 or so years." He went down a litany of crimes he had committed. He was a rough guy. Tattoos on his arms – rough guy. He said, "I drive 50 miles to come here to church. It is the first positive thing I've done in my life in several decades."

I said, "You drive 50 miles to come here to this church?"

He said, "Hey, I have driven a couple of hundred miles to chase some woman. I figure I can drive 50 miles for Jesus."

Why do you give a portion to your paycheck every week to church? Why when we take an offering for world missions do you reach into your pocket and take out your hard-earned money that you worked for. Why would anyone leave a comfortable job or risk social embarrassment by talking with a neighbor or parent or coworker about Jesus? Why do people move to places like Indonesia or Uzbekistan? Give up houses and all that stuff that we value – bank accounts, IRAs. Why do people do stuff like that? Because it is the shrewd thing to do? Because I have weighed it up, friend, and it makes totally great sense for me to give up my job, sell my house, and go to the middle of nowhere to preach the gospel. Why?

We don't extend the kingdom because it is the most conservative way we can live our lives. WE don't plant churches, as we are going to do in a couple of months – we hope to plant two new churches out of this church. We are giving away a couple of hundred people and several hundred thousand dollars. Why? Because that is the shrewd thing to do?

We do it because we are in love with the Lord. Because something has gripped up. Because in a real sense we are out of our minds for Christ. Because it is that kind of heart that Peter had when he said, "Not for anyone else, Lord, but because you say so, I will."

The kingdom is extended through love, and it is extended through the power of Christ. We read, "'But because you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink."

How was this miracle worked? Peter worked all night. He was a fisherman. He worked all night. The nets came up with seaweed and couple of spare tires (probably not a lot of spare tires in ancient Palestine), spare chariot wheels. This time when they throw the net in where Jesus tells them to, they get so many fish that their boat begins to sink.

How was this miracle worked? I believe we almost always shoulder more of the responsibility for extending the kingdom of God than we should. It is so difficult to get people to pray for someone in the marketplace or to get someone to share their faith because most Christians honestly believe that the success of every witnessing opportunity rests entirely upon them. Well, if I am going to say something about Jesus, I have to find the perfectly right moment to speak. And I have to word what I am saying perfectly. And it has to be clever and persuasive.

I don't want to sound like a total lunatic or turn a person off. And I don't want them to feel condemned. And I have to remember all the arguments and recall all the answers to the 20 most common objections raised against the Christian faith.

It is like every time we share we are taking a final exam in quantum mechanics. It's no wonder with the incredible burden we place on ourselves for the success of every conversation that we really hate the idea of bearing witness to Christ. I mean who wants to take a final exam every single day? There is so much pressure. Who wants to be tested all the time? To feel that horrible weight that it is all up to me?

What if sharing your faith was not a final exam? What if the issue wasn't that you have to find exactly the right moment and say precisely the right thing in the most persuasive way and never sound like a lunatic and always have all the answers ready and dialed up in your brain at just the right moment? What if extending the kingdom of God was simply a matter of you talking with someone else in the most natural way possible about your friendship with Jesus and what he has done for you in the same way you would talk with someone about your roommate or your girlfriend or your job. What if when a need arose, when someone was in crisis, when we are talking with a friend and we see that this is a ripe moment, what if we just simply said, "My only job, Lord, right now is to simply say what you've done in my life and to be a sensitive and loving witness for you. It is your job to save. You are the one who has to point the way to the miraculous catch of fish. My job, Lord, is only to use the opportunities you present me with."

I can pray for opportunities. I can pray for eyes to see people in need. Lord, give me eyes to see where people have been overwhelmed by life. But it is your job to save. It is up to you to find where the fish are. The punch line of this story is not that we all stand back in awe and say, "Whoa, what kind of bait was Peter using? Man, he ought to be on one of those fishing shows on TVerse Where does he buy his nets anyway?" That's not the punch line of the story.

The punch line of the story is, "whoa...what an incredible Lord." What an amazing Savior Jesus is. The kingdom of God is about Jesus. It is not about me. It is not about you. The same thing is true when you are praying for healing, friend. Why is it so hard for any of you who are followers of Christ to walk up to a sick person and say, "Look, I know you aren't feeling well. I am a Christian, may I pray for you?" Immediately we have all this anxiety. Oh, I didn't have a quiet time today. I am not spiritually with it. I just yelled at my dry cleaner and kicked my dog. Or I just kicked my dry cleaner and yelled at my dog. I have to spend weeks in spiritual preparation before I can pray for the sick.

Peter didn't have weeks of preparation before he cast his net and a miracle worked in his life. He just obeyed the Lord.

What is the worst thing that can happen to you? Friend, what is the worst thing that can happen? If someone says they aren't feeling well at work or at your school or at the gym and you say, "Hey, I am a Christian, can I pray for you?" What's the worst thing that could happen? They would look at you and think that you are totally weird? Trust me, they probably think that already.

But most probably they never think about you at all. My first pastor was a Pentecostal pastor. He was in his early 60s. I was 18. I still remember one night in his teaching, he said, 'You know most of us spend so much time worrying about what other people think of us.' Then he looked at us. We were all a bunch of teenagers. He said, "Trust me, nobody is thinking about you at all. They are thinking about what you think of them." It was a good lesson.

It is so good when you pray for healing to quiet your anxious mind and to say, "Lord, my job is to obey you and to pray. It is your job to heal. If this doesn't work out, you need to shoulder the blame for it, Jesus. I am not going to carry that around. But if it does work out, you need to get all the glory."

A major way that the kingdom of God is extended is through the miraculous. What the founder of Vineyard called "power evangelism." See, the church knows all about three of the four "p's" of evangelism. Christians in America know about presence evangelism - just being a loving ethical decent Christian, practicing hospitality, telling the truth, paying your bills on time, asking for forgiveness, going out of your way to help someone move, loaning someone your truck, being merciful. We know about presence evangelism. Just being salt and light.

We know about programmatic evangelism - inviting someone to a women's breakfast, inviting someone to church, inviting someone to Summer Harvest or to Easter services. We know about programmatic evangelism.

We know about personal evangelism - sharing our faith with someone, using the opportunities the Lord gives us to speak.

But there is a fourth "p" in the Bible – presence, programmatic, personal and power evangelism. It is so important that people experience the power of Jesus in answer to a prayer. A person who is struggling, who is really hurting – a Christian comes up and says, "May I pray for you?" and the Lord does something and answers that prayer. Friend, through power evangelism a person discovers that this Jesus is real. That he loves us. That he cares.

I have made a personal commitment. The Lord has spoken to me, and I have made a personal commitment that when I am outside of the church, in the marketplace, just doing life, if someone expresses a need or someone tells me that they are sick, I am going to tell them that I am a Christian and I am going to ask them if I can pray for them. I used to do that all the time. I have gotten away

from it for years. But recently the Lord has spoken to me and has given me opportunities to pray, and I have seen healing out in the marketplace.

Will you do that? Will you join me? Can we have a few thousand totally irrational people who wouldn't do it for anyone but Jesus say, "OK. If someone at work or in a restaurant or in a coffee shop says, 'My back is killing me,' say, 'Hey, this may sound a little bit weird, but I am a Christian, would it be OK if I just prayed for you real quickly that the Lord would heal you?'"

The burden is on the Lord. God knows who you are. God knows where you are. What he chooses to do with my obedience or yours in the moment is up to him. But I will pray, Lord, that you will extend the kingdom, fill the nets, through this little thing that I do. Through my speaking, through my prayer, through my risk taking. Fill the nets.

And the Lord's kingdom is extended through transformation. A transformed vision of life. "When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man.' For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners."

Lord, depart from me, I am a sinful man, because he saw the catch of fish. When we are in the presence of the Lord, the presence of God's power, the presence of the miraculous, one of the things that happens to us over and over again is that we experience great fear. You are suddenly in the presence of an overwhelming person. When people meet the real God in the Bible, they experience fear. Adam wanted to hide himself. The children of Israel in the Old Testament said to God, "Stop talking." Isaiah threw himself of the ground and said, "Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips. I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips."

If you have never felt afraid – if you have never said, "God, leave me alone. It is too much." I wonder if you have ever met the Lord, really. If it is always totally cool, I have this really cool relationship going with God, he is my buddy, he is the co-pilot of my car – if there haven't been any moments where you just wanted to run away from him and hide your face; if you have never said, "Lord, I can't handle your goodness any more, it's too much. I can't do this thing. I feel so much shame." If you have never before God said, "Please, Lord, leave me alone, I am totally unworthy of you," then I wonder if you have ever met him. Because shame is one of the first things we feel in the presence of a perfectly good person.

But the Lord doesn't allow our feelings of unworthiness to keep him at arm's length. He loves us so much that he comes to us and transforms us. He says to Peter, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him."

Peter, you have spent your whole life catching fish. From now on you are going to catch men and women. What if you heard Jesus say something like that to you? How can Jesus change the vision you have for your life? We have been talking about the Kingdom of God all summer. How can Jesus Christ change the vision you have? You have this little perspective of what your life is about. What could Jesus say to you that could extend your vision and say, "you have been doing this one thing, but now I am going to call you to something totally new and different." You have been spending your life raising kids. Now I want you to disciple kids – your kids, a bunch of other kids in the neighborhood, some of your kids' friends. You have been spending your life making money. You have been very successful at it. Now it is time for you to spend your money helping people to find life. You have been spending your life making money; now spend your money helping people to find life.

How about not just being a secretary any more? How about becoming a missionary to your whole office? How about not just being a student any more? How about being a missionary to the whole department? To your class?

What if you really started to believe that you were the light of the world? That because you know Jesus, you have answers. You have THE answer to what people are really seeking. What if instead of being uptight in your encounters, instead of condemning, instead of avoiding, you entered the world with a vision of extending God's kingdom? What if you woke up in the morning and you said to the Lord Jesus Christ, "I wouldn't give myself today to pray, to heal the sick, to share my faith for anyone else, but because you said so, Lord, I will."?

Let's pray.