

A Contagious Faith

This past week I saw the first sign of winter – flyers posted announcing that the annual flu vaccinations were coming. This is a bit of a military tradition which may have more emphasis placed on it than arming and equipping the force. I have literally seen commander's careers ruined over mismanagement of their unit's flu shot program. Sometimes our reaction to anything associated with the word "contagious", is a bit neurotic. When most of us hear the word "contagious", our first instinct is to don a surgical mask, reach for the antiseptic, flail ourselves for NOT getting that inoculation, and RUN in the opposite direction praying that we don't "catch" whatever nasty little germ or virus is being spread. This morning I want to introduce you to a "condition" which I wholly and wildly advocate you catch and proliferate everywhere you can. That "condition" is faith. Now, get ready, I'm about to use the "E Word." It's OK, take deep breaths; we'll get through it together...

Evangelism: (Websters)

1. the winning or revival of personal commitments to Christ
- 2: militant or crusading zeal

Anyone scared yet? No, OK, let's move on to the vocation...

Evangelist: (Websters) an enthusiastic advocate: There, that doesn't sound so bad, does it?

The Bible, in Ephesians 4:11, calls the Evangelist, a "publisher of glad tidings;" a missionary preacher of the gospel. This title is applied to Philip ([Acts 21:8](#)), who appears to have gone from city to city preaching the word. Judging from the case of Philip, evangelists had neither the authority of an apostle, nor the gift of prophecy, nor the responsibility of pastoral supervision over a portion of the flock. They were itinerant preachers, having it as their special function to carry the gospel to places where it was previously unknown.

While I don't believe I have the gift of prophecy, I can make an educated guess as to what many of you are thinking about as we embark on this series entitled "Developing a Contagious Faith."

Some of you are delighted; you've been waiting for a series like this. You are eager to improve your personal evangelism skills and to learn some new approaches. Others of you are rather neutral on this subject, because you really don't know what to expect. And still others of you are dreading this. Just hearing the "E word" strikes terror in your heart! You have feelings of fear and pressure and maybe some guilt in the mix too.

I want to assure you at the beginning—especially those of you who might feel a bit fearful—that I have no desire to increase the burden or to fuel any

pressure that you might already be feeling. But I am confident you can grow and learn how to become more effective in this area, despite what experiences you may have had. I have high hopes for what God might do in every one of our lives as a result of focusing today and during the next six weeks on this series.

That's especially true since our morning messages will sync up and synergize with the content of the *Becoming a Contagious Christian* training course that many of us will be going through in our Sunday evening discipleship classes during these same weeks.

But today I want to start by asking the *why* question. What motivation is there for putting energy into communicating our faith? I want to jump right in and offer you four reasons why every one of us should be motivated and stay motivated in his or her own mission of spreading the faith to the people around us.

The first motivation for developing a contagious faith is what I call the “Stockpile Factor.”

This comes from an Old Testament passage in the book of 2 Kings 6:24 (NASB), where it says: “Now it came about after this that [the King of Syria] gathered his army and went up and besieged Samaria. There was a great famine in Samaria; and ... they besieged it until a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver and a fourth of a [pint] of dove's dung for five shekels of silver.”

We're talking about a serious shortage of food in this city. Inflation is skyrocketing and there is very little food left because the enemy king has laid siege to the city. It's so bad that verse 28 indicates that some of the people were actually resorting to cannibalism. This was clearly a disastrous situation in Samaria.

Now, look down at 2 Kings 7:3–5: “There were four leprous men at the entrance of the gate; and they said to one another, ‘Why do we sit here until we die? If we say, “We will enter the city,” then the famine is in the city and we will die there; and if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us go over to the camp of the [Syrians]. If they spare us, we will live; and if they kill us, we will but die.’ They arose at twilight to go to the camp of the [Syrians]; when they came to the outskirts of the camp of the [Syrians], behold, there was no one there.”

Second Kings 7:6–8 says: “For the Lord had caused the army of the [Syrians] to hear a sound of chariots and a sound of horses, even the sound of a great army, so that they said to one another, ‘Behold, the king of Israel has hired against us the kings of the Hittites and the kings of the Egyptians to come upon us.’ Therefore, they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents and their horses and their donkeys, even the camp just as it was, and fled for their life. When these lepers came to the outskirts of the camp, they entered one tent and ate and drank, and carried from there silver and gold and clothes, and went and hid them; and

they returned and entered another tent and carried them from there also, and went and hid them.”

Do you see what’s going on here? These lepers had figured out that they were as good as dead. So they went out to the enemy camp, gambling everything in the hope of getting some food—but it was deserted because God had made noises in the night that confused the enemy into thinking they were being attacked! And so these lepers stumbled onto all of this provision in the middle of the enemy camp! They are half-starved to death and they go into the first tent and they find more food than they can put into their mouths! So they go into the next tent, and they find food and provisions there. And the next tent, food and provisions there! They are just stockpiling all of these provisions. They can’t believe it. It was like winning the lottery!

Then they said one to another in 2 Kings 7:9: “We are not doing right. This day is a day of good news, but here we are keeping silent; if we wait until morning light, punishment will overtake us. Now therefore come, let us go and tell the king’s household.” So, in verse 10 they went back to the gatekeepers of the city and announced that there was no one in the tents, that the Syrian army has deserted the camp, and all of the people came out and found food and provision—and the city was saved.

But what I want you to focus in on is that it was the *abundance* of the provision that led them to go back and make the announcement to the people back in the city. It was the fact that the provision was so large, the miracle so exciting, the news so wonderful, that they just said, “We’re not doing the right thing by keeping silent about this miracle: let’s go tell the others the good news.” Silence was an unthinkable crime at that point.

When mature believers have a proper understanding of their spiritual inheritance, they can’t stop themselves from spilling over into other people’s lives! One of the most effective ways to develop a contagious faith is to stay mindful of the extent of our inheritance in Christ, the wonder of the character of the God we worship, and the magnitude of the miracle of transformation that has taken strangers and converted them into sons and daughters of God.

When you are living with an awareness of the size of your spiritual stockpile, you will find yourself agreeing with Joshua and saying to people outside of God’s family: “I don’t know about you, but I know that as for me and my house, because of who God is, because of how wonderful he is and because of how benevolently he treats me, I’m going to serve the Lord!” That has a way of finding a responsive chord in the lives of unbelievers.

As I get older, I’m finding it more difficult to watch people go from, toy to toy, fun-fix to fun-fix, fad to fad, trying and crashing and then trying again and

crashing again! I feel like telling every “scavenger” I meet out there: “Stop picking at refuse piles! There’s a stockpile in the kingdom of God. There’s plenty of God’s grace, there’s plenty of His favor, there’s plenty of His love. It’s spilling over in my life and you could probably live happily on just the overflow, if you’d open up your life!”

Now, a word here: understand that Satan will do everything in his power to convince spiritual princes and princesses that they are, in fact, spiritual paupers. You see, if believers walk around unaware of the scope of their stockpile, unappreciative of the wonder and the glory of our God, and unaware of the extent to which they have been transformed and received a new identity in Christ as sons and daughters and saints and heirs and stewards—then they will walk around like fellow scavengers, instead of walking as spiritual princes and princesses should walk.

That’s why it’s so important to worship God regularly, worship him privately, worship him publicly. List his attributes and thank him each day. Say, “Again this morning, I am living in a miraculous relationship with the God of this universe! I’m a child! I’m a saint! I’m an heir! I’m blessed! I’m saved, I’m adopted, I’m being sanctified, I have a spiritual gift. I have a wonderful future, I have Heaven waiting for me.”

Every time I go over my stockpile I find myself living filled to the brim with this sense of spiritual wonder. And when we live this way, it makes for very easy evangelistic opportunities, because we just operate with the mindset that says, “How can you **not** want to be in a wonderful relationship with a God like the One we serve?”

So, please, remember one of the best forms of motivation is for you to have that sense of wonder and gratitude about your spiritual stockpile. Protect it, work on it, preserve it at all cost.

The second motivation for developing a contagious faith is “the honor of being an agent of God!”

I’ve had a number of important-sounding job titles in my life, but nothing comes close to this one...David T. Jones – AGENT of GOD! This comes out of the passage in Acts 1:8 where Jesus said, just before his ascension: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”

We, as God’s witnesses, as God’s ambassadors, or agents, are “PLAN A” in his strategy for reaching the world. He chooses to use individuals like us as spokespeople for Him. And God doesn’t even have a “PLAN B”! I’m “PLAN A” and you are “PLAN A.” In the middle of your uniqueness, your personality, your gifts, talents, abilities, and your particular arena of responsibility, you are called to

be God's spokesman, to speak on behalf of Him to lost people who matter to Him, but who need one of His agents out there in the marketplace.

I find that to be very motivating because someday I want to stand before the Lord and hear him say to me: "Well done, good and faithful agent of mine! You know, I carved out a group of people who desperately needed you. They needed your life, they needed your personality, they needed your witness, they needed your age factor, they needed your sense of humor, they needed you. I used you, I filled you with my Holy Spirit, I commissioned you to be My spokesperson and you were a faithful one. Well done, good and faithful agent."

I find it enormously motivating to go through my day, trying to figure out what serendipitous kind of occasion is going to surface in which I can be used by God to be a spokesperson for His kingdom. Here is a good prayer to start your day with, "Lord, I don't know where you are going to put me today, what opportunities you are going to orchestrate for me to tell somebody that they matter, but, God, I want to be a part of it. And, if you don't have any big plans to use—you know, Agent double-0-whatever my number is—today, that's okay. I'm not pressing you, but I'd sure love to be used." Pray that in faith and see what happens in your day.

And keep in mind, Jesus said that you are going to receive power. You're not on your own. The Holy Spirit is going to make you an effective witness. I have found in my own life that when I'm in tune with the Holy Spirit, and living with a

spirit of anticipation about being an effective agent, I have many opportunities to be used! But when I am a little off-base spiritually, not so tuned in to the Holy Spirit, when I am grinding out my own agenda and saying, “Lord, I’m sorry, I’m really not that concerned about what you have for me today, because I’m overwhelmed by what I have to get done,” then I find myself going for weeks at a time without having any opportunities to be a spokesperson.

So, my effectiveness as an agent is almost always tied to my being surrendered to the work of the Holy Spirit in my life—which I try to handle each day as I pray. I’m motivated to think that God would entrust his great message to somebody like me for the purpose of spreading it to others!

The third motivation for developing a contagious faith is “the reality of hell.”

My Grandma used to remind me that sometimes the plain truth hurts, but it’s got to be said. Believers are blessed with unlimited access to the absolute truth – the Word of God. It tells us the plain truth is that hell is real and real people go there for eternity!

The reality of hell was a major theme in the ministry of Jesus. We read time after time how Jesus was saddened over various evangelistic situations. Jesus grieved when the rich young ruler refused to receive spiritual wealth in exchange for temporal wealth, because Jesus knew he was walking down the road that led to

hell. Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem, because he said he could see them as sheep wandering around without a Shepherd, and that it was only a matter of time before they would go off the cliffs of eternity into the abyss forever.

Jesus confronted the Pharisees, the scribes, the tax collectors, and the politicians.

He confronted anybody and everybody with the basic message that unless you turn and put your faith in Him you would die in your sins and face condemnation in eternity.

Why did Jesus teach from early morning until late at night? Why did he keep the pace he did? Why did he endure the ridicule that he did? Because Jesus knew that people were on the road that was headed toward hell. It broke His heart and it motivated him to spread His gospel of grace.

Let's turn for a moment to Luke 16:19, which begins the well-known parable of the rich man, who lived in splendor, and a poor man named Lazarus, who was starving to death at his gate. They both died. The poor man Lazarus had received God's forgiveness and went to paradise. The rich man ended up in hades.

In verses 23–26 we read: “In hades, where he was in torment, [the rich man] looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his

finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in *agony* in this fire.’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’”

So then, forgetting about his own agony, the rich man went on to his second request—see verse 27—and said something very, very difficult to hear and to think about: “Then I beg you ... send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.”

Five minutes in hades turned an uncaring unbeliever like the rich man into a committed evangelist! He was motivated. He was saying, “Somebody has to warn my brothers that hell is real and real people go there!” And in a way, the rich man is crying out to us today: “People of Valley View: Pull out all of the stops! Do whatever has to be done to keep others from winding up here with me!”

I’ve studied this passage so many times, and every time it cuts me a little deeper. I get excited about evangelism because it’s an honor to be an agent entrusted with the gospel message.

But, frankly, part of the reason I'm as serious about serving God as I am, is because I believe in hell. I believe in it consciously and I believe in it emotionally. I'm not neurotic about it, but I'll tell you what: it impacts me every day!

The apostle Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthian church: "If there is no resurrection, if there is no heaven or hell, then let's eat, drink, and be merry. If there's no judgment, why do I risk my life? Why do I take beatings? Why do I suffer in prison? Why do I do all of this?"

You know, if there's no resurrection, no heaven and hell, let's all just party! If there's no hell, then why all the time-consuming service around this church? Why all the energy output? Why all the giving, the praying, the pleading with people? Why all the work? Why all the blood, sweat, and tears? WHY? I mean, if there's no hell, then let's just pack it up!

What we're doing in this church, all the time and especially now in this series, is serious business. We all need to develop attitudes that say, "Look, whatever it takes to help people understand how to get off the road that leads to hell and get on the road that leads to heaven! Whatever it takes is worth it!"

It's so easy to slip into patterns of complacency—to think that the church exists only for us. To forget that we really are on a mission, that Jesus told us to go into this, our world, and make disciples. To become preoccupied with the question of what the church has done for me lately.

May none of us ever forget the stakes are sky high! We're not playing games! We're not playing church! We're not just going through the motions of religion! It's eternal life and eternal death that hang in the balance. And, again, I'm not suggesting we get all neurotic about this. I'm just suggesting that we don't put it on the back burner and become complacent about matters that Jesus said and showed were the highest priority.

I think of Jesus in utter agony on the cross, in his darkest hour, feeling the full weight of the sins of the world on his shoulders, and he's asked by a common criminal if there is room in heaven for just one more sinner. And Jesus, wracked by physical as well as spiritual and psychological pain, is so moved to be able to snatch one more sinner from the claws of hell, he says, "Sure there's room. Today you'll be with me in paradise!" He was just thrilled to snatch one more sinner off the road to hell.

The reality of hell should move all of us to do whatever it takes to develop a contagious faith.

I'll close with one final motivator: it's "the reward of leading somebody to Christ."

I guess all I want to say about this point is this: just *one* time, have *one* person look you in the eye and say, "You know, I was heading down the road to hell, and God used *you* to bring me to Himself." Just have somebody say, "You

know, I needed an ambassador! I needed a credible witness. I needed someone whose life matched his message, and *you* were that person for me! Thank you! Thanks for being contagious with your faith. Thanks for reaching out to me. Thanks for helping to answer my questions. Thanks for putting up with my cynicism. Thanks for putting up with my colorful language! Thanks for loving me at a time in my life when I wasn't very lovable. Jesus saved me, but you led me to the cross where I found His grace!"

Just have one person say to you, "Thank you. Thanks for all of eternity!" Hear that once and watch what happens. You will be a motivated agent; you will feel a kind of spiritual adrenalin flowing in and through you; you will walk away saying, "I may have just experienced the greatest spiritual high I'll ever have in this life!"

Why develop a contagious faith? Why share Christ with others? Why?

Because our relationship with Christ is the best thing to come down the pike. He's it. He's wonderful and He blesses us. We have a stockpile. Live in the awareness of that and let it spill over to others. Why share our faith? Because we've been honored and empowered by God to participate in this grand endeavor to bring people to faith. It's an honor to be an agent. Why share our faith? Because hell is real! It is. Why share our faith? Because, in finally having the privilege of helping lead someone to Christ we'll experience a fresh awareness of the fact that

the angels in heaven are rejoicing and Christ is rejoicing. And what an incredible moment to have somebody say, “Thanks for all eternity for leading me to the cross!” It’s the greatest contribution you could ever make to someone’s life and the most fulfilling and rewarding thing you’ll ever do!

So I trust you’re all *in*! I hope that every one of you will jump into the discipleship class and experience the training component of this *Contagious Campaign* we’re embarking on as a church. I’m confident that the combination of what you’ll get here in the services and what you’ll experience in the class will absolutely change your life so you can change others.

One more thing before we pray and end the service: On what will be the sixth and final week of this series, I’m going to give a message called “God’s Contagious Love,” designed to communicate the core truths about how a person can understand and receive God’s forgiveness and leadership through a relationship with Christ. This is a service we’ll all want to bring friends and family to. So would you start now by praying and asking God to use you to reach out to and bring at least one other person? And would you also be praying that God would prepare and lead us together to make that day a life-changing day for our church and our witness to the community. Let’s ask God to be here working in a powerful way—and then let’s invite our friends, believing it’s gonna really happen!

Next week we will have a special worship service involving our children. This series will continue the following week with a message called, “A Contagious Heart.” Now let’s close in prayer ...