

Good morning. I want you to know about some great things happening around The Creek. Eight days ago, this church hosted an event for fourth and fifth graders. We had over 1,600 kids in this worship center, singing, dancing, and learning about Jesus. We have 1,608 seats in this room—every single one of them was filled with kids learning about Jesus. Five days ago, we hosted the national preaching summit, and 250 preachers from around the country came here to be equipped and encouraged as they serve their churches. Thank you for being a church that supports and empowers such great ministry. The last two weeks we have prayed for the tragedy taking place in Ukraine. Because of your generosity, our church has made a \$10,000 gift to relief efforts in Ukraine. As more opportunities come, we will do everything we can to assist and show the love of Jesus in a practical way. Let's take a moment and pray right now.

Show of hands—no shame here—how many of you parents have ever lost a kid before? Maybe it was at a grocery store, or a theme park, or a hiking trip? You thought they were with you, you looked up, and they were gone. That moment of panic sets in, your heart starts beating a little bit faster, and you do everything you can to find them. If you are a mom, your mamma bear instincts kick into overdrive. If you are a dad, it's a mixture of protection instincts and survival instincts, because if you don't find your kid, you know for a fact that your wife is going to kill you! When one of my kids is lost, my first game plan is not to check where I think it's most likely for them to be; I check where it would be most dangerous for them to be. Only after I've eliminated those options do I go to the most likely areas. Every parent has their own strategy, but we all know that when your kid is lost, you do whatever it takes—period—to find them and make sure they're safe.

What we know instinctively as parents is true of our heavenly Father. The Bible not only calls us God's children, but specifically tells us that some of God's children are lost. Of course, God knows where all his children are geographically, but many of them are far away from him spiritually, separated from him relationally. As a loving Father, God was willing to pay any price, to go any length, to be reunited with his children. The Bible says that God sent his son on a mission. In Luke 19 Jesus said, "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." Not only is that Jesus' mission, but the Bible tells us that he has called everyone who believes in him and follows him to join him on that mission! Today, as we continue to look at the wisdom of Jesus from the gospel of Luke, we'll focus on what Jesus had to say about evangelism.

The most well-known stories of evangelism are found in Luke 15. Jesus tells a story of a man who had 100 sheep: one was lost, so he stopped what he was doing and left the other 99 to find the one. He tells the story of a woman who lost 10% of her inheritance: she dropped what she was doing and went on an all-out search to locate her money. Then he tells the story of a father who had two sons. One rejected him and ran away from home. When he hit rock bottom, he came to his senses and returned home, never expecting to be welcomed into the family again, hoping only to be a hired hand with three square meals and a warm bed at night. But when the son came within sight of his home, his father saw him—meaning he had been waiting there on the front porch, looking and hoping and praying every day—and took off on an all-out sprint to embrace him. The father said, "Don't worry, you're not here as a servant. You are my son, you always have been, you always will be. Nothing can change that." Charles Dickens said, "It is the single greatest short story ever written." But it's more than just a story; it's the heart of God for his children.

God wants us to join him in that! I can only imagine what I would do if my son or daughter was lost—not playing hide and seek lost, but really lost, call-the-police lost. If you cared about me, if you called me your friend, I hope you'd drop whatever you were doing and go through the streets, the woods, the whatever to find my baby and bring them back to me! That's what any of us would do for our friends, and

that is what God wants us to do when it comes to his children who are far from him—leverage every resource, exhaust every opportunity, give everything we have to see people place their faith in God and be welcomed into his family. Jesus paid the ultimate price to bring us into the family of God, and he calls us as his followers to join him in that mission of welcoming others in as well.

There was a time in his ministry in Luke chapter 10 where Jesus sent 72 of his followers out on a mission to do this very thing: to tell others that the kingdom of God is near, that a relationship with God is possible, and that they need to respond to that by making a change in their life and place their faith in him. I want to read this passage together and then highlight ten principles on evangelism that I think will help us carry out the heart of God for the people he loves.

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

“When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If someone who promotes peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay there, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

“When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is offered to you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

“Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted to the heavens? No, you will go down to Hades.

“Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.” The seventy-two returned with joy and said, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.” He replied, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.” (Luke 10:1-24)

That’s our passage; let’s highlight ten principles on evangelism that Jesus reveals.

(1) Evangelism involves everyone. It's not just the inner three or the 12 apostles who are sent on mission; it's 72 people—not just the inner circle of people who were the closest to Jesus, but even those who were newer in their faith, who were still a little rough around the edges. Sometimes we think evangelism is the pastor's job. Sharing faith is the job of those who have been Christians their entire lives, or who at least have read through the Bible several times and supposedly “know all the answers.” Or we say evangelism is for the people who have outgoing personalities or are dynamic conversationalists. The truth is: evangelism isn't just for experts and extroverts, it's for everyone—the stay at home mom and the CEO, teachers and students, neighbors and family members and friends. I'm a Christian in large part because my parents brought me up in church. They evangelized me. But neither of my parents were raised Christian. A friend told my dad's brother about Jesus, who then in turn told my dad about Jesus, which allowed him to make a life-changing decision. My mom was invited to church by her teacher. She said yes, heard the gospel, and made a life-changing decision. A friend, a brother, a teacher—they invited, they shared, people followed Jesus, they got married and raised kids who followed Jesus. Now their kids are being raised to follow Jesus. It's generational transformation.

(2) Evangelism happens best in community. You may have noticed this already, but Jesus didn't send them out one by one; he sent them out in community, two by two. They would have told twice as many people if it was one by one, but the impact and effectiveness of evangelism typically multiplies exponentially as more people are involved. Anytime Keren and I are trying to share our faith with people, after we connect a few times we always invite them to do things with our friends. Come over for a cookout, come to a Super Bowl party, come to a birthday party, a July 4th party, a fishing trip, yoga—it doesn't matter. We want people who don't know Jesus to be able to connect with as many people as possible who do know Jesus. There is something that epistemologists, sociologists, and psychologists call “plausibility structures.” For the sake of this illustration, I need to come up with something that is very, very unlikely to happen. Almost impossible. Let's take the Pacers winning the NBA championship as an example. If I get hit by a car tonight, go into a coma for four months, and wake up in July and you come and visit me in the hospital and tell me the Pacers won the championship, what am I going to say? Are you sure you didn't get hit by a car? But if all thirty people who visit me in the hospital say the same thing, before long, what seemed impossible begins to seem more and more plausible. For a person who never considered Christianity a reasonable thing to believe, if they only know one or two people who believe, it's not that compelling. But the more kind, caring, and intelligent people they meet who follow Jesus, the more that what previously seemed impossible becomes more and more plausible.

(3) Evangelism begins with prayer. The very first thing Jesus told them to do, before determining where they would go, what they would do, what they are supposed to say, or who is going to run the power point presentation, was pray. Ask for the Lord to open a door of conversation, to soften a heart, to stir curiosity. Ask God for more people to share the message so you're not doing it alone. The general rule: talk to God about people before talking to people about God.

(4) Evangelism trumps socializing. Jesus told his disciples, as you travel to the city I'm sending you, don't greet anyone on the road. When you are walking along and you see your friends, it's going to be so natural to stop for a few minutes, catch up, ask how the kids are doing, how was the vacation you took a few weeks ago, what's up with the new job, let's set up a time to grab coffee. But Jesus is saying as pleasant as that might be, there's no time for that! When you are running a race, you don't stop to talk to friends. You focus on crossing the finish line. There will be time to socialize later. Socializing is important; catching up with friends and building deep relationships with other Christians matters. But we have to make sure we aren't hanging out only with family members and Christian friends, but with people who are far from God. After Keren and I had been married for about six months she asked if we could sit down and talk. I said, “Sure.” I hadn't been married long enough to know what was about to happen! I had no idea what I was in store for! Like a lamb to the slaughter. I'm just kidding. She was loving and

gracious as she said, “We have guests over to our house four or five times a week. We spend so much time with other people, and I love hosting and I love all these people, .but most of them are already Christians. I really thought when I married you that we would be more intentional in our relationships with people who don’t know God yet.” That conversation hit me hard. She was 100% right. I apologized to her for not leading our family on mission in the most God-honoring way. I sought forgiveness from God. I asked for accountability with my friends. We committed together, as much as we love socializing, evangelism has to take precedence.

(5) Evangelism takes time. Jesus says when you get to a town and someone welcomes you into their home, don’t stay there for one night, and then go to another home the next night and another home the next night. Stay in one place, eat your meals with them, invest into those key relationships. The people you spend the most time with are the people you are likely to have the greatest impact on. We have to make sure to have our expectations in order. We should never assume that one invitation to a meal or a few good conversations about things of depth and significance are going to take someone from committed atheist to being dunked in water. Don’t overestimate what is likely to happen in a few weeks; don’t underestimate what’s possible in a few years. Years ago, I met a guy who was not a Christian. He started hanging out with me and several of my friends every week. I didn’t make every conversation about faith, but I’d say every 3-4 months or so we’d get together just the two of us and talk for a few hours about deep things in life. Every time, after leaving those conversations I thought, “He’s going to accept Jesus tonight. How could he not?” But he didn’t. Then randomly one day, without any big pitch, he just told me, “I’m ready.” “Ready for what?” “I’m ready to become a Christian.” I was blown away—where did this come from? He said, “I’ve had all the time I need to think about it. I’m all in.” His baptism was one of the biggest celebrations our community ever had. It was three years of investment and worth every second!

(6) Evangelism shouldn’t be forced. If people didn’t want to hear what Jesus’ disciples had to say, what did he tell them to do? Keep pounding on the door until the cops showed up to serve them a restraining order? No! Pester them and talk about Jesus in every conversation for five straight years? No. He said, “Walk away, shake the dust off your feet,” which at that time was a culturally appropriate way of saying, “I’ve tried my best, I’ve done all I can. The responsibility is no longer on me, it’s on you.” Colossians 4:5-6 says, “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Did you see that? We are supposed to make the conversion desirable; it’s supposed to be seasoned with salt and taste good, not be crammed down someone’s throat. That is truer today. People are turned off by religious people who are overly aggressive and pushy. They are well-intentioned, but all their forcefulness has a counterproductive impact; instead of drawing people closer, it pushes them further away. We are called to show his love and share his love, and then let people decide.

(7) Evangelism is spiritual warfare. When the disciple reported back to Jesus what happened as they told people about the kingdom of God, they said, “Demons submitted to us in your name.” To which Jesus replied, “I saw Satan fall from heaven.” Jesus is helping us remember two things: (1) there is a spiritual component to our world that is every bit as real as flesh and blood, and (2) in that spiritual realm, he has already won the ultimate victory: Satan has fallen, Jesus has won. But though defeated, Satan is still active and powerful, and he is fighting tooth and nail to keep people in his grip, living in sin and misery, separated from God. Colossians 1:13 says, “For God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.” When you are telling people about Jesus, don’t be surprised if there is opposition, if there are challenges and difficulties. The enemy wants to keep that person in his talons—but God is stronger than the enemy! That leads to the next point

(8) Evangelism has eternal consequences. Jesus tells his disciples to rejoice that their names are written in heaven. When someone accepts Jesus, they receive the greatest gift in all the world: eternal life. That really is what’s at stake. James 5:19-20 says, “My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from

the truth and someone should bring that person back, remember this: whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.” Jude 1:24 says, “Save others by snatching them from the fire.” People who don’t know God are in unspeakable peril. If a change is not made, they will spend eternity apart from God, there will be detrimental and irrevocable consequences—that ought to be enough to light a fire under our bellies to do anything and everything we can to be an influence in their lives toward Christ. In the past two weeks the world has been so taken by the needs of people in Ukraine who are being unjustly attacked by Russian that over 20,000 people from various nations across the planet have flown in to take up arms and fight. It’s a fight for a land that isn’t theirs, for people who aren’t their family and friends, but they are joining the battle because they want to save innocent lives. How much more should we do whatever it takes to join the spiritual battle for friends and family who we know and love and want to spend eternity with.

(9) Evangelism flows out of joy. Not only does Jesus pray to his heavenly Father filled with joy because people’s eyes are being opened to eternal realities when they hear the gospel, but he tells the disciples to be full of joy as well because they are seeing things that for over a thousand years all the kings and prophets hoped and longed for. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Joshua, Samuel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah: they hoped for such a day when God would take on flesh, when all their sins could be forgiven finally forever, when God would dwell inside of them. That day has come! Our lives have been changed! The most powerful and effective evangelists are those whose lives are filled with so much joy that others have to know what’s happening in their life to cause it. No one listens to an Eeyore complaining for two hours about the weather and politics and COVID and their mother and then asks, “Wow, tell me about your faith!” But when they see your gratitude and hope, your kindness and joy, your generosity and warmth, they oftentimes do!

(10) Evangelism brings tears. I want to reference a passage not out of Luke 10, but at the end of Jesus’ ministry, in Luke 19. As Jesus is nearing Jerusalem, where he will give his life for the world, this is what we read: “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.’” When people rejected Jesus and his truth, Jesus didn’t have a cold or calloused heart; he was crushed and wept. When we see people who are far from God, we should weep, too. Sometimes, those tears are what soften the soil for someone to respond. A while ago a young lady came up to me with her friend who she has been talking to about Christianity. Her friend asked some great questions that she didn’t feel like she had good answers to, so she brought her to me. We talked for quite a while. I think I addressed most of her questions, but as I was wrapping up my intellectual response, I looked over and saw her friend, with tears streaming down her face, saying, “Jesus loves you so much, he loves you so much, and I just want you to know him so badly.” A love that is so deep and so sincere that it brings tears is powerful. I was talking to parents the other day whose grown child wasn’t making the best decisions. They were concerned. They shared those concerns with their daughter many times of the course of a few years, so they decided to start fasting for their daughter. They fasted once a week for two years. They cut out food, and instead of eating, they got on their knees, shed tears, and pleaded with the Lord. Thank God, today, their child is thriving and is right in the center of God’s will. That doesn’t happen every time, but one thing I can tell you for certain: in the heavenly realms, tears can move mountains.

Jesus was willing to leave heaven and go to a cross so that we could be saved. What are you willing to do so that others can hear that message of salvation?

Pray for someone. God, bring a person to mind. Pray for them. Open a door this week for a touch point toward Jesus.