

Preparing for a Miracle

Rich Nathan
March 9 & 10, 2019
The Story Continues
John 6:1-15

Last week, I announced that our 2019 discipleship campaign will be titled “The Story Continues”. For those of you who are new to Vineyard Columbus, we have, over the past four years, tried to bring focus during the season of Lent, that time of year on the Christian calendar between Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday (the week before Easter) – we try to focus on deepening people’s relationship with Jesus. During this season that Christians call Lent we spent a lot of time discussing how we can become better followers of Jesus.

This is an historic time in the life of our church, small groups have always been part of our history and we want to see everyone in our church family connect in a smaller community for this important time. We want to pray and encourage each other and ask God together to do a miracle!

This is the LAST week you can sign up to HOST a group or join a group. If you have a few people you can gather from our church, or if you want to jump into one of our new or existing groups, stop by the small group counter in the lobby or email

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smallgroups@vineyardcolumbus.org

I mentioned last week that this year’s discipleship campaign is going to also include an element of financial giving.

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Our giving campaign: The Story Continues

This is only the fourth giving campaign that we have conducted here at Vineyard Columbus in the past 30 years. Giving campaigns are a really infrequent thing here at the Vineyard.

In 1991, we did a giving campaign called “The Deeper Flow” and that was to raise money to help build our original building at Cooper Road. We were meeting in a tiny church building south of Morse Road on the north side of Columbus and we outgrew that building. So we did a giving campaign to help build our initial building at Cooper Road in Westerville. Our attendance rapidly grew through the 90’s. By 1998, we outgrew the room we were meeting in in our original building on Cooper Road.

So, we did a second giving campaign which we called:

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Responding to God's Extravagant Grace logo (do we have one? I may have one that we can scan if that's helpful)

That giving campaign was designed to build our current Cooper Road auditorium and to add a significant number of children's ministry rooms. As our church continued to grow, we expanded our outreach to the Central Ohio community through ministries of Mercy and Justice.

In 2005, we did our third giving campaign titled:

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Blessed to be a Blessing logo (do we have one?)

That giving campaign was to build the Vineyard Community Center so that we could be the best friend our city ever had. We also raised money to send out three international ministry teams, including a team to Tanzania and a team to Amsterdam. Our team in Amsterdam was led by Eric and Julia Pickerill who many of you know will be succeeding me as senior pastors here at Vineyard Columbus in a couple of years. They successfully planted a thriving church in the diverse and highly secular city of Amsterdam in The Netherlands.

Now, 14 years later, after our Blessed to be a Blessing campaign, we're going to have our fourth giving campaign over the next six or seven weeks that we're calling

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The Story Continues logo

Before I talk about the targets of that campaign, I'd like to acknowledge the contributions of people in the past to our previous giving campaigns. If you were part of at least two of our previous campaigns, would you stand? I want to thank you for making Vineyard Columbus what it is today.

Now, this is for old timers. If you were a part of our previous three giving campaigns – that would go all the way back to 1991 – would you stand? Can we cheer for the faithfulness of these people for all their years of giving and service to our church.

This campaign is going to be focused on four particular targets. First of all,

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New Campuses

As the culture around us becomes increasingly secular, the question that needs to be asked is “What kind of church will reach the neighborhoods in Central Ohio with the good news of the gospel and the inbreaking of God’s Kingdom in today’s world?” We know that we can’t reach the Central Ohio community by ourselves, no church can. But we would like as a church expand our mission field thinking to reach more of Central Ohio with the ministry of Vineyard Columbus by starting five new campuses by the year 2025.

Vineyard Columbus currently has five campuses. If we count VC Twenty, which we just started back up, that would mean that we have six campuses. We want to grow to 10 or 11 campuses by the year 2025.

We want people in different neighborhoods and different ethnicities to have a local expression of Vineyard Columbus in their neighborhood where people can meet and experience God’s life-transforming, loving presence. We want folks to have a campus in their community where they can overcome life-controlling habits that keep them stuck. We want people to have a campus in their community where kids and youth can grow up knowing Jesus and his love and wisdom for life, instead of going through 30 or 40 or 50 years being far from God. We want to plant campuses around Central Ohio where the felt needs of everyone – the least, the last, the lost – whether people are poor or homeless or prisoners or addicts, women in crisis pregnancies, immigrants, refugees, the wealthy. We want campuses that are particularized to the needs of a particular community – so one downtown might feel different than one in Hilliard. Or one in Linden might minister with a different focus than one in Dublin. We want people from every ethnicity to experience in a church like Vineyard by starting new campuses around our city.

The second target is to raise up

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New Leaders

We’ll launch new campuses and plant new churches. But to do that we need new leaders. We need to identify those who are called to lead in the church and then train them.

The founders of this church are getting older. The baton needs to be passed to a new generation who are deeply rooted in God’s Word and soaked in Vineyard’s DNA. One of the goals of this campaign is to start a

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Pastors’ Residency Program

where we can take the best of our young leaders, train them for a couple of years here at Vineyard to be sent out locally to start new campuses and internationally with the good news of Jesus Christ.

We want to start new campuses. We want to raise up new leaders. And we want to build

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New Buildings

That's the third target of the campaign. We know that in order to plant new campuses in different areas, the campuses need to meet somewhere – whether it's new builds or renovated space. Older Vineyard buildings need to be renovated. We'd like to raise capital to build and renovate buildings as we expand and our footprint across the city.

We want to start new campuses, raise up new leaders, build new buildings and, finally, we want to send out

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New Missionaries

For over 35 years, Vineyard Columbus has been partnering with God sending out international workers to share the good news of Jesus and to plant Vineyard churches around the world. One the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter said this:

Slide Acts 2:39

³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Vineyard Columbus is a church that is not just concerned about ourselves and our children, but also those who are far off geographically, demographically, culturally. We want to play our God-ordered part of bringing the whole world under the good and kind rule of Jesus Christ.

As part of this campaign, we want our whole church to have an opportunity to hear more about our campaign and our targets and be able to ask questions. I just mentioned our four targets, but there's so much more about the church's future that we'll be discussing. We are offering Vision Gatherings from March 18 to April 4 hosted by our pastors almost every day of the week at all our campuses. Find one slot that works for you. Come with your small group. Small group leaders, find a day and come out with your group! Register online, especially if you need childcare.

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<https://www.thestoryvc.org/vision>

Today, as I continue this series titled “The Story Continues”, I’m calling this message “Preparing for a Miracle”.

In terms of the Big Story of the Bible – if the Bible has one major distinction compared to most other books you’ll ever read – it’s that the Bible is a continual record of miracles. The Bible is a book that purports to record big miracles like Creation – God speaking the universe into existence. Splitting the Red Sea so that the Israelites could be set free from slavery. Miracles like the Virgin Birth of Jesus. Extraordinary healings of people who are blind or deaf, crippled. Most prominently, at least in the New Testament, the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. A dead man came back to life!

The Bible records hundreds of these great miracles and thousands of small miracles. The small miracle of the transformation of people’s lives. A greedy tax collector suddenly becomes a generous giver. A woman who has lived an immoral life is set free through the power of love and forgiveness. A man who hates Christians becomes one of the greatest lovers of Christians the world has ever known.

In terms of the Big Story of God and the Bible, if the Bible is anything it is a record of miracles. I want to read to you from the gospel of John:

Slide John 6:1-15

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), ² and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing the sick. ³ Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. ⁴ The Jewish Passover Festival was near.

⁵ When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, “Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?” ⁶ He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do.

⁷ Philip answered him, “It would take more than half a year’s wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!”

⁸ Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, spoke up, ⁹ “Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?”

¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

¹² When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, “Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.” ¹³ So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

¹⁴ After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” ¹⁵ Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

Now, this miracle of the multiplication of loaves and fishes is the only miracle apart from the resurrection that appears in all four gospels. Jesus is out in the middle of nowhere, John tells us that he was on the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. The story is told from a Jewish perspective. The Jews would have been on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. The far shore is the east side – far from any town. And a great crowd of people follow Jesus out into the middle of nowhere because they saw healings and miracles.

The miracle was the multiplication of these five small loaves of bread. They were not actually loaves as we would think of them, like loaves of Wonder Bread. They were more like small pancakes, tiny pita breads. Little, flat cakes of bread that would have been cooked on a stone. Somehow Jesus multiplies these five little flat cakes of bread and little fishes so there’s enough food to feed not only 5,000 because that’s the count of the men.

We read in verse 10:

Slide John 6:10

¹⁰ Jesus said, “Have the people sit down.” There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there).

So it’s very likely that the men traveled out there with their wives and children. So Jesus multiplied food so miraculously there was enough for 20,000 to 25,000 people.

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Miracles are real

This is a genuine miracle. The miracle was not, as some naturalistically interpret it, that Jesus got this little boy to share his lunch and then everyone saw the act of generosity and they were so convicted by the boy’s example that they began to share their lunches and what we had was a miraculous pot luck. One woman shared her tuna casserole and another brought her jello surprise. We’re not reading here about the first church potluck. It was a miracle. Jesus took five little pita breads and two little fish and multiplied them. There was enough bread and fish to stuff 25,000 people.

This miracle didn’t just take place in the hearts of people. It wasn’t that people had a warm experience of fellowship where they came away saying “It’s just a miracle to be together”. The miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fish took place in the real world with a direct, clear intervention into our world by almighty God.

I don't know about you and what your experience of the supernatural has been in your life, but I've seen real miracles. Miracles don't just take place in people's hearts. Miracles take place in the external world that we live in.

I watched a man who suffered from epilepsy for 20 years. A man who had three grand mal seizures a week and hundreds of petty mal seizures and was on 62 doses of medicine a day to keep his seizures in check. I watched that man, with my own eyes, receive prayer and suddenly and miraculously get entirely healed so that he never had another grand mal seizure again.

I personally had the privilege of praying for hundreds of people over the years, some of whom got healed. A man who had a detached retina suddenly had the retina reattach. A woman who was deaf in one year regained her hearing. I had two bulging discs in my back. I was going to go in to an orthopedic surgeon to have back surgery and two weeks before, as a result of prayer, I was healed and canceled the surgery.

We've seen big miracles and small miracles. At Vineyard Columbus, we've seen over 10,000 commitments to Jesus Christ in the last 17 years? We've had over 5,500 baptisms since 2002. More than 5,000 women who faced unintended pregnancies have been served by our Value Life ministry in the last decade. There are 5,000 babies and children who are alive, in part, because of Vineyard's Value Life ministry.

We experienced a miracle here of the breaking down of dividing walls between races and ethnic groups. I can tell you without fear of contradiction that there are very few places in Central Ohio, indeed, in the whole country where you could be in an environment where there is as much racial and ethnic diversity as you will experience here at Vineyard Columbus. On any given week, we have attendees from nearly 130 different countries coming to the church.

We've seen remarkable life-altering transformations. Scores of addicts set free. Thousands of people transformed into followers of Jesus. We want the stories of God's miracles through Vineyard to continue into the next generation and to break like a wave over Central Ohio into new neighborhoods and new groups. That's why we're doing this campaign. We believe in miracles. We've seen them in the past and we're believing for more in the future.

By the way, if you have a story of a miracle – big or small – regarding God's work in your life through the church share your story by emailing me at

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ShareYourStory@vineyardcolumbus.org

You say, “Rich, I want to see a miracle. I want to see a big miracle of God clearly intervening in the real world. I want to see a bunch of little miracles of God transforming people’s lives.” Well, friends,

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Miracles happen when we become aware of needs

The disciples are aware of the hunger of the crowd. Jesus is aware of the hunger of the crowd. Miracles often begin with a deep awareness of people’s needs.

Do you know why some of us rarely see God’s miracles? Because we get out of touch with the needs all around us. It’s easy to be out of touch with need. We can often content ourselves with the status quo, even if the status quo is at a low level. Well, so long as my children aren’t doing any drugs, at least so far as I know, so long as I’m not getting any calls from the police, everything’s ok with my kids. So long as my spouse and I aren’t fighting a lot, everything is ok with my marriage. So long as I got a promotion at work or I live in a nice house or I drive a nice car, then everything is ok in my life.

One reason why we see few miracles is because we content ourselves with mediocrity. We protect ourselves from seeing the needs around us of often by burying ourselves in busy-ness and in work.

What do you think Jesus sees when he looks at the Central Ohio community? Do you think Jesus sees any needs? I think Jesus sees hundreds of thousands of people who are lonely. According to a recent large-scale survey from the health care provider Cigna, most Americans suffer from strong feelings of loneliness and a lack of significance in their relationships. Nearly half say they sometimes or always feel alone or “left out.” Thirteen percent of Americans say that zero people know them well. Jesus sees all the lonely people.

I’m sure Jesus sees thousands of people in Central Ohio who are addicted to opioids. And I’m sure his heart breaks for the thousands of folks who have overdosed and for their families who had to bury a son or a daughter, a brother or sister. Kids who are growing up without a dad or a mom.

What does Jesus see when he looks out at our community? He sees the school system of Columbus getting failing grades. Teachers are overwhelmed by social issues that kids have when they come to school. Jesus sees thousands of kids not learning and being unprepared to succeed in the 21st century American economy.

What does Jesus see when he looks out at our community? He sees here in the state of Ohio every one of the five people who kill themselves every day, many of them teenagers. On any given day in our community there are 1,800 homeless people. One-

third of the people who are homeless on any given day are families including children. Most of the people in our community who are homeless are working people – they just don't have affordable housing.

Jesus sees people who are moving farther and farther away from church. Over the past 10 years, the percentage of people who say they are religiously unaffiliated – they say they are nothing in particular – jumped nine points from 16% of Americans to 25% of Americans. Virtually every church denomination is in decline. It used to be just the mainlines, but now evangelical churches are also suffering significant decline.

Jesus sees marriages in trouble. He sees people without peace behind the doors of nice suburban homes. He sees children alienated from their parents and parents who are alienated from each other. Jesus sees people who are struggling for meaning and purpose, who don't know why they exist and are spending their lives on trivial pursuits.

Do you think Central Ohio needs more of Jesus? Do you think if anyone just scratched one millimeter below the surface here in our community, that it would be hard to find people with gaping wounds? Do you think that our community needs more of the ministry of a church like Vineyard Columbus? Miracles happen when we become aware of needs.

Brothers and sisters, if we don't need a miracle, we don't pray for a miracle, so we probably won't see a miracle.

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Miracles happen when we reach our limits

So long as you can pull something off by yourself – a test in school, a task at work, a conversation with a friend – you don't need God's help or God's miracles.

It's when we hit the wall, when we reach our limits – I can't fix my child, I can't overcome this addiction, I can't figure out what to do in this situation – that we cry out to God for his intervention.

Friend, have you reached your limits – the limit of what you can pull off on your own? I believe that God allows us to reach the limits of our finiteness so we can turn to infinite God for help. As I said last week, understanding the Big Story of God involves us stepping away from being the lead actor, the hero, the protagonist and inviting God to occupy center stage in the drama of our lives.

Have you reached your limits in any area of your life? Do you need to call out to God in some area of life for his help, his intervention, his miracles?

Jesus asks a question: Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat? The disciples look at the little bit that they have and say, "This is absolutely impossible! We don't

have what it will take. They're acknowledging their limits! We don't have that kind of money. We can't feed this crowd. It can't be done."

All of us have our own lists of impossibilities. Let me ask you: What good thing do you say is utterly impossible to happen in your life? What do you judge to be impossible? The healing of your marriage? The healing of your child? The healing of a long-destroyed relationship? Improvement in your financial situation? A ministry need that you see, but there's no way that ministry could ever happen? Vineyard Columbus can't start five new campuses. We can't transition this church to a new generation and do even more than we've done in the past! What do you say is utterly impossible? Can't happen! No way!

Consider for a moment the God who spoke the stars into existence. Consider the infinite size and power of God. The one who flung the galaxies out so that they are still in motion after billions of years. Consider Jesus who turned tap water into wine, who raised a little girl from the dead, who touched the eyes of a man born blind and caused that man to suddenly see. And we say impossible? No way? Can't happen? As the Lord said to Abraham in Genesis,

Slide Genesis 18:14

¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

And as the Angel Gabriel said to the Virgin Mary the words that became the state motto for the state of Ohio:

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With God all things are possible

Never say impossible. Never say insufficient. Never say can't happen. With God, all things are possible. But we must first reach our limits.

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- Miracles happen when we become aware of needs
- Miracles happen when we reach our limits

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Miracles happen when we all participate

We want God to save someone from heaven. Convert our spouse who we've been praying for for years. Heal and restore a broken marriage. Set someone free from an addiction. Open a door to a job. We want God to intervene from heaven and do miracles by himself. Send your miracle down from heaven, Lord. We want God to fix our broken schools. We want God to free people from opioid addiction. We want God

to relieve loneliness. We want God to reconcile families, to bring the religiously unaffiliated to himself. Lord, we see the needs around the world. Millions of people don't have Jesus in their lives. Change our world. Change people's hearts.

I pray these various things to the Lord and do you know what the Lord says? Here's what we read from Mark's version of this story:

Slide Mark 6:37a

³⁷ But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

The Lord constantly says to you and me, "Christianity is not a spectator sport. It's a participatory sport." I want you to notice this. Everyone was involved in this feeding. Andrew brought a little boy to Jesus. The Greek word paidarin communicates someone who is not yet an adolescent. Children were involved in this miracle. This boy's little lunch of five barley loaves and two fish. We're talking about five little pancakes and two tiny fish, probably little sardines. Barley bread was the food of the poor. The poor were involved in this miracle.

How are these five barley loaves and two little sardines multiplied? Most people assume that the bread and the fish were multiplied in the hands of Jesus. He just stacked up tens of thousands of loaves and barrels and barrels of fish, which the disciples took in wheel barrows and distributed to the crowd. But in Mark 6, where we read before, Jesus said to the disciples.

Slide Mark 6:37a

³⁷ But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

John Wimber, the founder of the Vineyard movement, has some real insight. He taught us that the miracle of multiplication happens not through the hands of Jesus, but almost certainly through the hands of the disciples. John taught (and what I believe to be the case) that Jesus took a little piece of fish and a little piece of bread and he gave it to the disciples and said to the disciples, "Now go. Go feed these folks. Andrew, you go feed those people. Peter, you feed those people over there."

Peter probably looked at the bread and fish and probably said to himself, "This is crazy. I mean these guys are hungry. They're fishermen. I know what they're like. They're going to tear me limb from limb." He looks at the bread in his hand and he says, "Maybe if I tear it, I can give it to that big guy over there first. Why does Jesus make me do these crazy things? This is embarrassing." But he obeys Jesus. He goes up the hill and tears off a little piece of bread and it starts multiplying in his hands. Peter shouts, "Wow, did you see that?" He tears off another piece and there's more bread. He's tearing up more pieces and ripping up the fish and it's multiplying. He screams, "Do you see this? Do you see this?" People are yelling. Peter is crying. The crowd is celebrating. They are watching a miracle take place. The miracle happened through the

hands of the disciples. It required their participation in faith. Christianity is always a participatory sport. It's not a spectator sport.

Vineyard Columbus, I encourage you to look out over our city with the eyes of Jesus. We're going to see need after need all around us. There are lists and lists of needs. We can't meet all these needs. We are limited. But we can pray. We can ask for God's miracle working power for the hundreds of needs around us. Friends who have lost a spouse. People whose families have collapsed. People whose children are addicted. Couples who are infertile. Kids who don't have dads in their home. But after we pray, we need to hear Jesus say to us, "Now, you go feed them."

I believe, friend, as we look out on the future, this giving campaign is one more big step in Vineyard Columbus' journey of transforming the life of our community. The Story Continues. Let's pray.

Preparing for a Miracle

Rich Nathan
March 9 & 10, 2019
The Story Continues
John 6:1-15

- I. Our giving campaign: The Story Continues
 - a. New campuses
 - b. New leaders
 - c. New buildings
 - d. New missionaries

- II. Miracles are real
 - a. Miracles happen when we become aware of needs
 - b. Miracles happen when we reach our limits
 - c. Miracles happen when we all participate