

THE LIFE WE WERE MEANT FOR

INTRODUCTION

Acts 8:26-40 tells the story of a man named Philip, who followed the prompting of the Holy Spirit to go to a certain location, a desert road south of Jerusalem. Very little instruction is given, except that which is given to all Christians everywhere: "Go..." (Matthew 28:19). Philip doesn't know what he is to do or who he is supposed to talk to; he just does what he is told.

Then the chariot appears.

As Philip stands on the desert road, a chariot rolls up, and the passenger is actually reading the Bible! Not only that, but he is reading a passage that specifically describes the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The man is eager to have Philip explain the scripture to him. Imagine the thrill and excitement of sensing God prompting you and telling you to talk to someone about Jesus. Imagine the nervousness you'd feel, followed by the sense of peace as you realize that this is a divine appointment, a circumstance entirely created by God to use you in bringing someone to faith in Jesus.

We have a MISSION, and that mission requires **taking risks**. It requires being willing to share with others about Jesus, and it brings with it a sense of **purpose, adventure** and **reliance upon the Holy Spirit**.

It is the life that we were meant for.

- *How does Philip's story affect you?*
- *Have you experienced anything remotely similar, any internal tug or pull to talk to someone about Jesus?*
- *What is your reaction to hearing this described as the life we were meant for?*

When we follow Jesus who said, "Take up your cross," everything is most definitely NOT about us. When you consider what He did for us, we should be eager to obey even difficult commandments like "Go...", but even though we all experience fear and uncertainty when it comes to talking to someone about Jesus, what it can do in our hearts is almost indescribable. The joy of joining God in His mission for planet earth is what this study is all about. We'll look at the heart of God, facing our fears, and then some tools and resources that can help us in sharing with others. Finally, we'll look at becoming normal, learning how to communicate about God without becoming spiritually weird.

PART 1: THE HEART OF GOD

"...God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

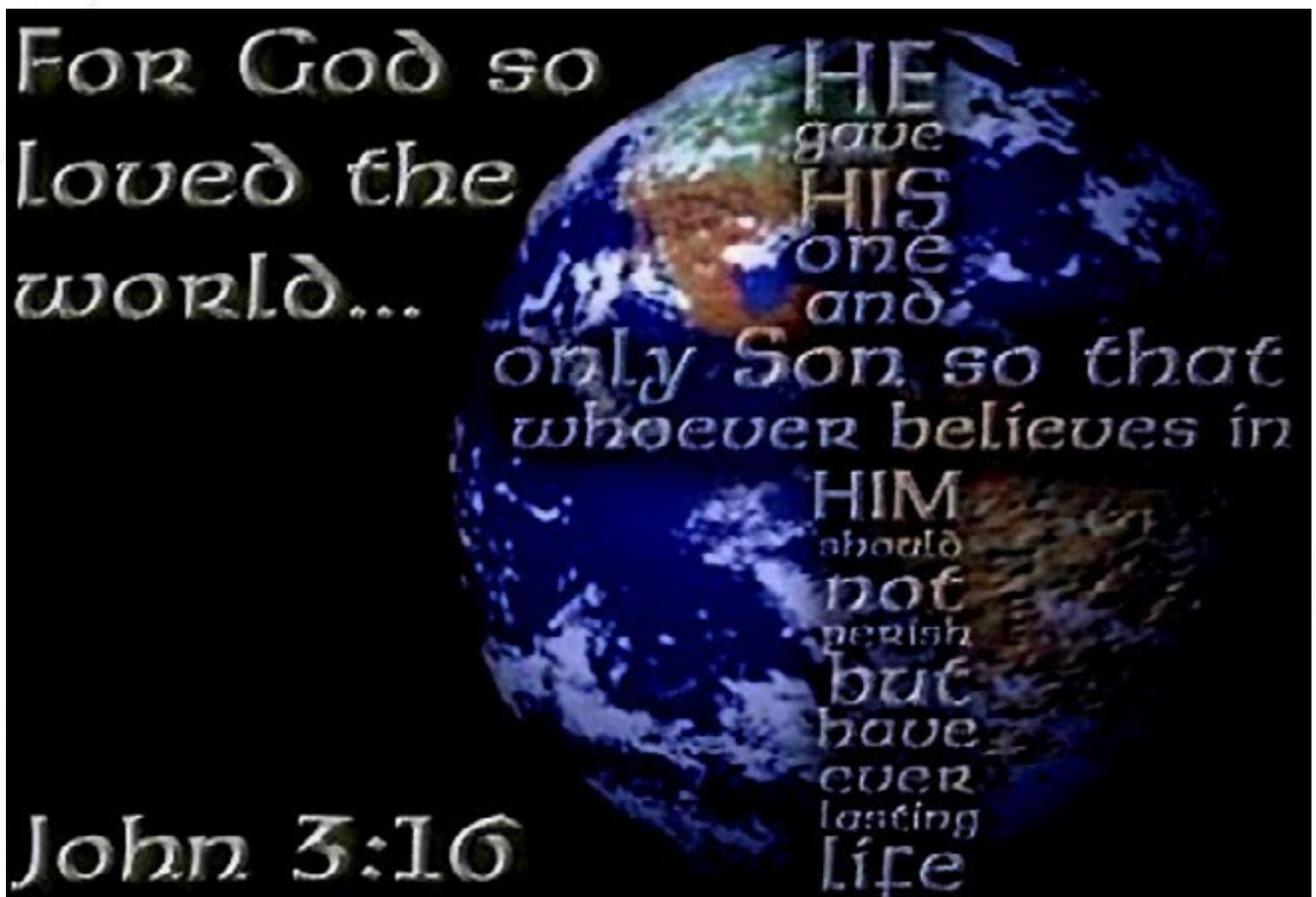
~ 1 Timothy 2:4

"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

~ 2 Peter 3:9

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."

~ John 12:32



What is on the mind of God, on the heart of God, is people. God is **passionate** for people. Jesus illustrated this, time and again, through His bold, loving initiation of relationship with everyone, anyone that He met. In John 3, He told the most likely candidate for salvation, a man named Nicodemus that he must be born again. In John 4, He told the least likely candidate for salvation, the Samaritan woman, that if she only knew who she was talking to, she'd ask Him for "the gift of God", the "living water" that He gives to all who believe. These two episodes reveal what all Jesus followers anywhere need to get hammered into their hearts:

Jesus reveals the heart of God.

God is a missionary God.

Not only is God passionate for people, He is actively working in their lives. Look again at John 12:32. When we talk with someone about Jesus, we enter into a dialogue that has already begun; God has already begun to draw that person to Jesus. That's what makes it a divine appointment. When we see Jesus' passion in the gospels, we see a glimpse of how active is NOW, in heaven, drawing all people to Himself.

"He lost no opportunity to impress upon His followers the deep compulsion of His own soul aflame with the love of God for a lost world. Everything He did and said was motivated by this consuming passion. His life was simply the revelation in time of God's eternal purpose to save for Himself a people. Supremely this is what the disciples needed to learn, not in theory, but in practice."

~ Robert Coleman

What this means is this: No one is ever out of reach from this passionate, pursuing God! Therefore, learning how to influence people for Jesus doesn't begin with us; it begins with becoming crystal clear that God is at work in this world in every person we know and even in those we don't! If Jesus truly is the Head of the church, as scripture teaches, then the church is following Him to the extent that we have His heart and passion for lost people. Here is a slightly different way of putting it:

"The church is the church only when it exists for others."

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The Apostle Paul clearly caught the heart of God. As a result, he said **he'd be willing to lose his own salvation (if he could) and go to hell, if only he could reach those who didn't know Jesus** (Romans 9:1-3). That is the heart of God! As a result, we believe that the mission of the church is the greatest cause on planet earth and **we'll do anything short of sin to reach people who don't know Christ.**

- *How would you summarize what is on God's heart?*
- *What specifically can you do to follow after God's heart?*
- *Why do you think Christians sometimes miss this all-important truth?*

PART 2: LOVING WITH OUR LIVES

We need to realize that people's lives are at stake. As Eugene Peterson said, "The idea that the Christian faith could serve as a basis for living never even crosses the minds of most people. Instead, they attempt to satisfy their feelings of inner emptiness and malaise by pursuing experiences that provide momentary illusions of well being...As one put it, 'My life consists of going from one experience to another, none of which lasts longer than the time it takes to live it.'"

What provokes people's thinking is a life that is so joyous, so content in Jesus, so thankful to God, that people are drawn to us. As Joe Aldrich said, "Outsiders to the faith are first drawn to Christians, then to Christ. Yet, not all Christians attract; like a turned magnet, they can repel."

Or as Sheldon Vanauken put it, "The best argument for Christianity is Christians: their joy, their certainty, their completeness. But the strongest argument against Christianity is also Christians--when they are somber and joyless, when they are self-righteous and smug in complacent consecration, when they are narrow and repressive, then Christianity dies a thousand deaths." ***Loving people with our lives is simply applying the gospel of what God has done for us to our relationships.***

Becoming Normal

Christians often develop bad habits, ways of communicating that seem strange to those outside of Christ. Often, we pick up these things from being around very churchy people. These patterns include:

- 1. Using words that no one else in our culture uses**
- 2. Getting personally offended when non-Christians use words or reveal attitudes or practices we don't like**
- 3. Acting as if we're "holier than thou" or really "spiritual"**
- 4. Sticking together in a holy huddle rather than forming genuine friendships with those who are lost**

As a result, we can often come across like a person whose clothes just don't fit. To them, we look like someone from about 20 years ago, someone out of step with our culture. For this reason, some Christians need to become normal again. Two aspects of becoming normal again are:

Learning to Listen

We've all heard the old adage, "No one cares what you know until they know that you care." Well, it's true. We are called to simply love people enough to engage in their lives as genuine friends and to really hear and understand their stories. Telling the gospel, perhaps, best begins by listening. If you love, listen and ask questions out of genuine interest; you'll get to know the heart of your friend. You won't be treating them as a project because you genuinely care.

Refusing to Hide

The other aspect of becoming normal is refusing to hide your struggles, your doubts, your sin struggles and your fears. We all have those in our lives, right? So, why would we think we'll have a negative impact on unbelievers by sharing them? The opposite is actually true. Vulnerability is very powerful in illustrating how faith in Jesus actually works in real life. It normalizes you and helps those outside of Christ have hope for themselves.

- *Do you understand what is meant by the need for Christians to become normal? Have you experienced this in yourself or in others?*
- *Why is transparency about our struggles a powerful tool in influencing others for Christ? What is the boundary of what to share vs. what not to share?*
- *Why is listening a powerful tool as well?*

If you are not crystal clear on the fallen world we live in or on what God accomplished through Jesus' cross, please go to 101 study, "Our Great Salvation."

PART 3: GOSPEL TOOLS

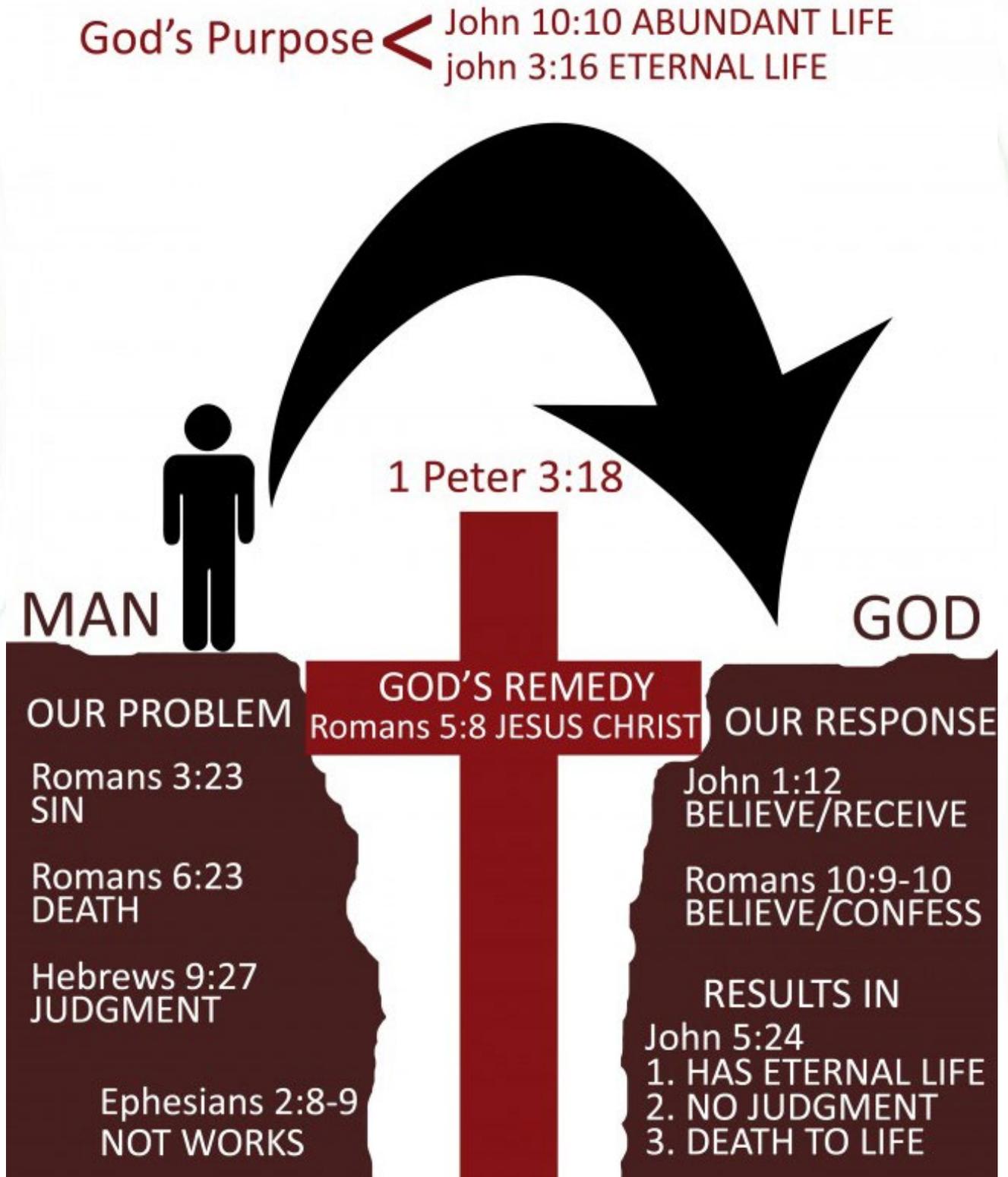
This section is about learning how to communicate the gospel through a number of different tools. There are several options, and you really need to find what works best for you.

Option 1

Download "God tools" from the app store, and practice sharing "Knowing God personally" or "The Four Spiritual Laws" in a role play, with one person taking the role of a spiritually open, but inquisitive, unbeliever. Take at least 15 minutes to role play this.

Option 2

Role play sharing "The Bridge diagram," illustrated below through four main steps. Take at least 15 minutes to role play this



Step 1: Write “God” on the right, then look at the two verses on the right side of the diagram, illustrating our creation in His image and God’s loving desire to bless us with eternal life. Write “eternal life” on the right.

Step 2: Write “man” on the left, then look at the three verses on the left side of the diagram about sin, death and judgment, writing these words on the left.

Step 3: Draw a cross, bridging the gap between God and man, looking at the two verses below and writing “Christ” as the solution for our dilemma.

Step 4: Draw an arc between God and man, looking at the two verses above, writing the word “believe” as our response to what Jesus has done.

PART 4: FACING OUR FEARS

*“but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you;
and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria,
and even to the remotest part of the earth.”*

~ Acts 1:8

If we are going to talk with people about Jesus, we have got to cross the bridge of fear. There simply is no other way to put it. We all have fears because the bridge doesn’t look like it can hold us up; we’re not sure what’s going to happen. Unfortunately, there is no way to talk to someone about Jesus without crossing the bridge of our fears.



- *What fears do you have when it comes to talking with someone about Jesus?*
- *Are these fears realistic?*
- *What practical things can we do to face our fears?*

If we are going to talk with people about Jesus, we need the Holy Spirit's help! Here in this section, the help He gives is described as "power". This English word, power, is *dunamos* in the Greek language in which it was written. This is the same root word that we get dynamite from. That should make the point really clear; if we are depending upon God and not on ourselves, we'll experience dynamite, genuine power, when we open our mouths.

"but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence."

~ 1 Peter 3:15

If we are going to talk with people about Jesus, we've got to be ready to speak up. This includes two things. First, sanctifying Christ as Lord; that is being crystal clear that He is my Lord. I will open my mouth and speak. I will not let others keep me silent. Second, it means knowing how to defend your faith without attacking the other person. You want to treat the person whose views you may completely disagree with, with gentleness and reverence.

"do not worry about how or what you are to say; for it will be given you in that hour what you are to say"

~ Matthew 10:19

If we are going to talk with people about Jesus, we've got to rely upon God's help when the moment comes. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would give us the words to say AND how to say it. Our ability to share about Christ effectively will certainly grow as we mature in Christ, but if we're not overcome with fear and anxiety, we'll be in a better position to sense how and what to communicate.

- *Why is it important to treat people with gentleness and reverence?*
- *What fears do you have in talking to someone about Jesus?*
- *Do these fears get smaller or larger when you keep silent?*
- *What practical things can we do to face our fears?*

PART 5: TELLING YOUR STORY

Telling your story is simply communicating what God has done in your own life, something you should be able to share in about 3-5 minutes. To develop this, write out what you would share about.

- **Your life before Christ**
- **How you came to know Jesus**
- **What has changed your life since**

Things to remember:

- Be yourself, and tell it the way you would talk to a friend.
- Keep it short; it should be 1,000 words or less.
- Don't get preachy or churchy. Have someone listen to your story and help you understand what words come across the wrong way.
- Remember that your story is what you yourself have experienced. Own it! Don't be ashamed of what God has done in your life!
- Don't tell every detail; keep to the things that someone outside of the faith would want to know.

Take 3-5 minutes to role play this, receive feedback on how to improve, and then practice again!

SUMMARY

In this study we've looked at the heart of God, loving with our lives, telling our story, and practicing communicating through a gospel tool. While those pieces are incredibly important, the ultimate take-away is catching the heart of God. Once we see that, we simply can't be the same.

ACTION POINTS

1. **PRAY.** Think through all the people who you know that may not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Take a few minutes, several times this week, and pray for these people that God would use YOU to bring them to know Him.
2. This week, practice sharing the bridge diagram and your own story until you feel comfortable sharing it with others.