

Unleashing the Gospel - Telling God's Story

Update about Julie

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Nepal is still a pretty poor country, especially out in the very remote areas. If a villager was asked what they wanted most: a school, a health post, or a road. The answer is "we want a bridge".

50 years ago a geologist wrote, "The overwhelming wish of the whole population is to have suspension bridges. There is really no other development project which, with so little money and in such a short time, would directly affect so many people."

The reason was not just accessibility. It opened up remote valleys and villages to the outside world, it made it easier for produce to go to market, it brought down the prices of commodities imported from outside and it became easier to take the sick to hospital. A bridge solved so many problems.

And now you see bridges all over the place as you drive up the main road and some of them look very scary.

Bridges are vital in all sort situations. God went to great lengths to build a bridge, a bridge of connection between himself and us. He wants to connect with the people that he created and that he loves. He wants to connect with you. And Jesus, sacrificed his life to build that bridge, He is the one who connects with God. Have you crossed the bridge?

This morning continue our series called *Unleashing the Gospel* with a message I've called "Telling God's Story." Last week we said that all of us have a story to tell. And if we've met Jesus we have a faith story to tell about what our life was like before we met Jesus, how we met Jesus, and since we met Jesus.

This week I received a number of stories and right now I just want to read one...

I was raised in a practicing Catholic family and I remember at 12yrs asking questions like 'why can't I go straight to God instead of going to the priest for confession?' I knew and believed that there was a God but why would he be interested in me – he seemed far too remote.

In my 20's I tried to give 'going to church' away, but felt sooo guilty that I went back, but that soon faded away. Later, married, with 2 sons, I started searching – there must be meaning to life and what was I going to teach these 2 little guys.

Suffering postnatal depression, I was invited by a Christian friend to come along to her girls group which consisted of girls from different denominations who got together to study the bible and share life together. I was a mess, bored and lonely, so off I went! They kept talking about Jesus all the time and gradually I came to see that it was a relationship with Jesus that I needed and faith could be real.

I threw away my pills and with their love and support I started on my journey of faith. The very first thing I experienced was amazing peace, which I had been searching for forever.

What a great Story! I love it. Simple and easy to understand, clear and doesn't have any Christianese or code words in it. A little bit longer than the 150 words, but who is counting?

Could she have added more detail? Absolutely. I'm sure this person could talk for hours about what Jesus has done in her life. But when someone asks us, "Why God is so important to us?" they usually don't have hours to listen, but they do have a minute or two. And if we're in relationship with them we can always add more detail later when they ask for more.

We all have story's to tell, but God has a story to tell as well, and as I said last week one of the greatest "ahha moments" we can ever have in life is when we realize that our story fits into God's story.

While I have asked you to confine your story to about 150 words, God's story and his relationship with us is big, huge, it spans thousands/millions of years. It's way too big for one book to hold. Instead, it's contained in a library of books that we call the Bible. 66 books to be precise. The Bible isn't simply a book, it's a collection of letters, poems, stories, visions, prophetic oracles, wisdom and other kinds of writing. It was written over a period of about fifteen hundred years by over forty authors but it tells one story. That's amazing! In some ways the Bible is a miracle.

So what is this one story? What is God's story? Well it can be described in a number of different ways but I would like to present 6 acts to the drama.

Act 1: God's Plan.

The drama begins (in the first pages of Genesis) with God already on the stage creating a world. He creates a man and a woman, The earth is created to be their home. In God's big story it is not important whether it took 6 days or millions of years, God's intention is for humanity to be in a close, trusting relationship with him and in harmony with the rest of creation. That was the plan, that is the plan.

God created us in his image and we are significant, decision-making, world-shaping beings. That is how he created us that is all part of the plan.

And it is also significant that God comes into the garden to be with the first human beings. Not only is the earth the God-intended place for humanity, God himself comes to make this beautiful new creation his home as well.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

Act 2: Exile.

Tension and conflict are introduced to the story when Adam and Eve decide to go their own way and seek their own wisdom.

The disobedience of Adam and Eve brings devastating consequences. Humanity must live with the breakdown of all these relations and with the resulting shame, brokenness, pain, loneliness—and ultimately death.

As a result of this rebellion, the first exile in the story takes place, the first of many. The humans are driven away from God's presence. Their offspring throughout history will seek to find their way back to the source of life. They will devise any number of philosophies and religions, trying to make sense of a fallen world.

The underlying question in this second part of the drama is: Can this curse on creation be overcome and the relationship between God and humanity restored?

Act 3: Calling Israel to Mission.

We begin to see God's rescuing plan when he calls Abraham, promising to make him into a great nation. God narrows his focus and concentrates on one group of people. But the ultimate goal remains the same: to bless all the peoples on earth and remove the curse from creation.

Israel is called by God to be a light to the nations, showing the world what it means to follow God's ways. If they will do this, he will bless them in their new land and will come to live with them again.

However, God also warns them that if they are not faithful, he will send them away, just as he did with Adam and Eve. AS you know they failed to be faithful on a pretty regular basis. However God remained committed to his people and his plan, so he sowed the seed of a different outcome. He promises to send a new king, a descendant of Israel's great King David, who will lead the nation back to its destiny.

Act 3 ends tragically, with God apparently absent and ungodly nations ruling over Israel. But the hope of a promise remains. There is one true God. He will return to his people to live with them again. He will bring justice, peace and healing to Israel, and to the world. He will do this in a final and climactic way. God will send the Messiah. He has given his word on this.

Act 4: The Surprising Victory of Jesus.

“He is the god made manifest . . . the universal saviour of human life.”

These words, found in a Roman inscription from 4 BC in Ephesus, referred to Caesar Augustus. This version of the good news announces that Caesar is the lord who brings peace and prosperity to the world.

Into this empire Jesus is born,

- and Jesus announces the coming of God's reign.
- He begins to show what God's new creation looks like.
- He announces the end of Israel's exile and the forgiveness of sins.
- He heals the sick and raises the dead.
- He overcomes the dark spiritual powers.
- He welcomes sinners and those considered unclean.

But the established religious leaders are threatened by Jesus and during the very week that the Jews were remembering and celebrating passover—God's ancient rescue of his people from slavery in Egypt—the Romans nail Jesus to a cross and kill him as a false king.

But this defeat is actually God's greatest victory. Jesus willingly gives up his life as a sacrifice. Through his death Jesus pays the price and reconciles everything in heaven and on earth to God.

Act 5: The Renewed People of God.

If the key victory has already been won, why is there an Act 5?

The answer is that God wants the victory of Jesus to spread to all the nations of the world. God Loves the whole world and wants to restore the relationship so the risen Jesus says to his disciples, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent

me, I am sending you.” So this new act in the drama tells the story of how the earliest followers of Jesus began to spread the good news of God’s reign.

So the challenge of a decision confronts us. What will we do? How will we fit into this story? What role will we play? God is inviting us to be a part of his story, of bringing restoration, justice and forgiveness.

Act 6: God Comes Home.

God’s future has come, but the present evil age also continues.

Brokenness, wrongdoing, sickness and even death remain. We live in the time of the overlap of the ages, the time of in-between. The final Act is coming, but it has not yet arrived.

We live in the time of invitation, when the call of the gospel goes out to every nation. Of course, many still live as though God doesn’t exist. They do not acknowledge the rule of Jesus. But the day is coming when God’s presence will be fully and openly with us once again, as it was at the beginning of the drama. God’s plan will reach its goal.

That's God's story. That's what the Bible is all about. It's all about rescue and renewal and resurrection and restoration. It's all about God not giving up on his creation, but saving it through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus the Messiah. But again, that's a lot to communicate to someone who needs to hear the gospel.

And so just like we need to limit our stories to a 150 words or less, we need to limit God's story too. Jesus and the apostles were always shrinking down the story to help people understand how it related to them.

- Jesus would say in verses like John 6:47, *The one who believes has eternal life.*
- Paul would say in verses like Acts 16:31, *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.*

I certainly didn't understand the whole story of the Bible when I was a kid at Sunday school. But I did hear that I needed to be forgiven and that Jesus offered me that forgiveness through his death on the cross.

And so let me give you some simple, clear, and brief ways that I've discovered to share God's good news with others. They don't go into every detail, instead, they focus on how we can have our sins forgiven and come into a relationship with God.

Bridge to life

One of the more traditional illustrations is called *The Bridge to Life*. I opened this message with it. The bridge is so simple you can draw it on a serviette. It simply says that God is on one side and we are on the other. And between us and God there's a great chasm that the Bible calls sin. Our sin separates us from a holy God.

And so we can try all kinds of ways to get across that chasm by trying to be good, going to church, giving to charity, but all those ways fall short and lead only to death. We can't the build the bridge with our own hands.

So God built the bridge for us and that bridge looks like a cross. And the construction of that bridge cost Jesus his life. But now the bridge is open to anyone and everyone who wants to cross over it. And we cross over it when we believe in Jesus.

The Bridge illustrates what Jesus said in John 5:24,

²⁴ "I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already crossed from death into life."

Jesus is the bridge and when we believe in him we cross over from death to life. We will never be separated from God.

Do verses Done

Let me give you another simple illustration that I feel sets the Christian faith apart from every other world religion. It's called "Do versus Done." Religion is spelled D-O. Do this, do that, do more of this, do more of that, and maybe, just maybe you'll please God whoever you conceive him to be.

At the end of the day, religion is all about whether you do enough right things to earn God's favour and get in God's good books. And so people spend their whole lives doing this and doing that, striving and sacrificing and cleaning up their act and making all sort of promises. But you can never be sure if you ever do enough.

The Christian faith on the other hand is spelled D-O-N-E. The Bible says that what Jesus did on the cross is enough. "It is finished," he cried. Paid in full. Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves. He satisfied God's requirements for a perfect sacrifice to take care of our past, present, and future sin. And if we acknowledge/believe in what Jesus has done for us we will not only be in God's good books, but he will make our lives brand new.

"Do versus Done" illustrates what the apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-9, ⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

John 3:16

Perhaps more people have come into the kingdom of God through John 3:16 than through any other verse of Scripture.

In John 3:16 Jesus says, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

A simple way to communicate the gospel from John 3:16 is ...

- God loved.
- God gave.
- We believe.
- We live.

You can't get much simpler than that.

There are a variety of ways that we can share the good news of Jesus. There's not one magic formula or one magic prayer for that matter. You can't find what we call "The Sinners Prayer" in the Bible because it's not a prayer that we pray that gives us eternal life. Instead, it's faith in Jesus. Prayer can be a wonderful way to articulate that faith, but its faith alone in Christ alone that gives us forgiveness of sin, eternal life, and entrance into his kingdom.

Evangelism is cooperating with the Holy Spirit to help a person move one step closer to Jesus. And sometimes that next step is sharing the God's Story with them. And when then happens I want us to be ready to use *The Bridge* or the Do versus Done or John 3:16, some simple, clear, and brief way to introduce a person to Jesus. And of course telling your own story is often with thing that leads to telling God's story.

And what a privilege to be part of someone else's story. And we all can be if we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to help a person move one step closer to Jesus.

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While I have asked you to confine your story to about 150 words, God's story and his relationship with us is big, huge, it spans thousands/millions of years. It's way too big for one book to hold. Instead, it's contained in a library of books that we call the Bible. 66 books to be precise. The Bible isn't simply a book, it's a collection of letters, poems, stories, visions, prophetic oracles, wisdom and other kinds of writing. It was written over a period of about fifteen hundred years by over forty authors but it tells one story. That's amazing! In some ways the Bible is a miracle.

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God created us in his image and we are significant, decision-making, world-shaping beings. That is how he created us that is all part of the plan.

And it is also significant that God comes into the garden to be with the first human beings. Not only is the earth the God-intended place for humanity, God himself comes to make this beautiful new creation his home as well.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

Act 2: Exile.

Tension and conflict are introduced to the story when Adam and Eve decide to go their own way and seek their own wisdom.

The disobedience of Adam and Eve brings devastating consequences. Humanity must live with the breakdown of all these relations and with the resulting shame, brokenness, pain, loneliness—and ultimately death.

As a result of this rebellion, the first exile in the story takes place, the first of many. The humans are driven away from God's presence. Their offspring throughout history will seek to find their way back to the source of life. They will devise any number of philosophies and religions, trying to make sense of a fallen world.

The underlying question in this second part of the drama is: Can this curse on creation be overcome and the relationship between God and humanity restored?

Act 3: Calling Israel to Mission.

We begin to see God's rescuing plan when he calls Abraham, promising to make him into a great nation. God narrows his focus and concentrates on one group of people. But the ultimate goal remains the same: to bless all the peoples on earth and remove the curse from creation.

Israel is called by God to be a light to the nations, showing the world what it means to follow God's ways. If they will do this, he will bless them in their new land and will come to live with them again.

However, God also warns them that if they are not faithful, he will send them away, just as he did with Adam and Eve. AS you know they failed to be faithful on a pretty regular basis. However God remained committed to his people and his plan, so he sowed the seed of a different outcome. He promises to send a new king, a descendant of Israel's great King David, who will lead the nation back to its destiny.

Act 3 ends tragically, with God apparently absent and ungodly nations ruling over Israel. But the hope of a promise remains. There is one true God. He will return to his people to live with them again. He will bring justice, peace and healing to Israel, and to the world. He will do this in a final and climactic way. God will send the Messiah. He has given his word on this.

Act 4: The Surprising Victory of Jesus.

“He is the god made manifest . . . the universal saviour of human life.”

These words, found in a Roman inscription from 4 BC in Ephesus, referred to Caesar Augustus. This version of the good news announces that Caesar is the lord who brings peace and prosperity to the world.

Into this empire Jesus is born,

- and Jesus announces the coming of God's reign.
- He begins to show what God's new creation looks like.
- He announces the end of Israel's exile and the forgiveness of sins.
- He heals the sick and raises the dead.
- He overcomes the dark spiritual powers.
- He welcomes sinners and those considered unclean.

But the established religious leaders are threatened by Jesus and during the very week that the Jews were remembering and celebrating passover—God's ancient rescue of his people from slavery in Egypt—the Romans nail Jesus to a cross and kill him as a false king.

But this defeat is actually God's greatest victory. Jesus willingly gives up his life as a sacrifice. Through his death Jesus pays the price and reconciles everything in heaven and on earth to God.

Act 5: The Renewed People of God.

If the key victory has already been won, why is there an Act 5?

The answer is that God wants the victory of Jesus to spread to all the nations of the world. God Loves the whole world and wants to restore the relationship so the risen Jesus says to his disciples, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent

me, I am sending you.” So this new act in the drama tells the story of how the earliest followers of Jesus began to spread the good news of God’s reign.

So the challenge of a decision confronts us. What will we do? How will we fit into this story? What role will we play? God is inviting us to be a part of his story, of bringing restoration, justice and forgiveness.

Act 6: God Comes Home.

God’s future has come, but the present evil age also continues.

Brokenness, wrongdoing, sickness and even death remain. We live in the time of the overlap of the ages, the time of in-between. The final Act is coming, but it has not yet arrived.

We live in the time of invitation, when the call of the gospel goes out to every nation. Of course, many still live as though God doesn’t exist. They do not acknowledge the rule of Jesus. But the day is coming when God’s presence will be fully and openly with us once again, as it was at the beginning of the drama. God’s plan will reach its goal.

That's God's story. That's what the Bible is all about. It's all about rescue and renewal and resurrection and restoration. It's all about God not giving up on his creation, but saving it through the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus the Messiah. But again, that's a lot to communicate to someone who needs to hear the gospel.

And so just like we need to limit our stories to a 150 words or less, we need to limit God's story too. Jesus and the apostles were always shrinking down the story to help people understand how it related to them.

- Jesus would say in verses like John 6:47, *The one who believes has eternal life.*
- Paul would say in verses like Acts 16:31, *Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.*

I certainly didn't understand the whole story of the Bible when I was a kid at Sunday school. But I did hear that I needed to be forgiven and that Jesus offered me that forgiveness through his death on the cross.

And so let me give you some simple, clear, and brief ways that I've discovered to share God's good news with others. They don't go into every detail, instead, they focus on how we can have our sins forgiven and come into a relationship with God.

Bridge to life

One of the more traditional illustrations is called *The Bridge to Life*. I opened this message with it. The bridge is so simple you can draw it on a serviette. It simply says that God is on one side and we are on the other. And between us and God there's a great chasm that the Bible calls sin. Our sin separates us from a holy God.

And so we can try all kinds of ways to get across that chasm by trying to be good, going to church, giving to charity, but all those ways fall short and lead only to death. We can't the build the bridge with our own hands.

So God built the bridge for us and that bridge looks like a cross. And the construction of that bridge cost Jesus his life. But now the bridge is open to anyone and everyone who wants to cross over it. And we cross over it when we believe in Jesus.

The Bridge illustrates what Jesus said in John 5:24,

²⁴ "I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already crossed from death into life."

Jesus is the bridge and when we believe in him we cross over from death to life. We will never be separated from God.

Do verses Done

Let me give you another simple illustration that I feel sets the Christian faith apart from every other world religion. It's called "Do versus Done." Religion is spelled D-O. Do this, do that, do more of this, do more of that, and maybe, just maybe you'll please God whoever you conceive him to be.

At the end of the day, religion is all about whether you do enough right things to earn God's favour and get in God's good books. And so people spend their whole lives doing this and doing that, striving and sacrificing and cleaning up their act and making all sort of promises. But you can never be sure if you ever do enough.

The Christian faith on the other hand is spelled D-O-N-E. The Bible says that what Jesus did on the cross is enough. "It is finished," he cried. Paid in full. Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves. He satisfied God's requirements for a perfect sacrifice to take care of our past, present, and future sin. And if we acknowledge/believe in what Jesus has done for us we will not only be in God's good books, but he will make our lives brand new.

"Do versus Done" illustrates what the apostle Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-9, ⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

John 3:16

Perhaps more people have come into the kingdom of God through John 3:16 than through any other verse of Scripture.

In John 3:16 Jesus says, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

A simple way to communicate the gospel from John 3:16 is ...

- God loved.
- God gave.
- We believe.
- We live.

You can't get much simpler than that.

There are a variety of ways that we can share the good news of Jesus. There's not one magic formula or one magic prayer for that matter. You can't find what we call "The Sinners Prayer" in the Bible because it's not a prayer that we pray that gives us eternal life. Instead, it's faith in Jesus. Prayer can be a wonderful way to articulate that faith, but it's faith alone in Christ alone that gives us forgiveness of sin, eternal life, and entrance into his kingdom.

Evangelism is cooperating with the Holy Spirit to help a person move one step closer to Jesus. And sometimes that next step is sharing the God's Story with them. And when that happens I want us to be ready to use *The Bridge* or the Do versus Done or John 3:16, some simple, clear, and brief way to introduce a person to Jesus. And of course telling your own story is often with thing that leads to telling God's story.

And what a privilege to be part of someone else's story. And we all can be if we cooperate with the Holy Spirit to help a person move one step closer to Jesus.

Here is a video of someone way cooler than me presenting God's story

Life in 6 words – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-PtE1BrqKU>

Unleashing the Gospel - Telling God's Story

Update about Julie

When we arrived in Nepal we decided to take the bus to Pokhara where Julie lives. We enjoyed 6 hours of amazing sights and scenery. Some would say a 6 hour dice with death. The hills and views were amazing, it is so remote out there and the places that they put their rice fields are just crazy.

Nepal is still a pretty poor country, especially out in the very remote areas. If a villager was asked what they wanted most: a school, a health post, or a road. The answer is "we want a bridge".

50 years ago a geologist wrote, "The overwhelming wish of the whole population is to have suspension bridges. There is really no other development project which, with so little money and in such a short time, would directly affect so many people."

The reason was not just accessibility. It opened up remote valleys and villages to the outside world, it made it easier for produce to go to market, it brought down the prices of commodities imported from outside and it became easier to take the sick to hospital. A bridge solved so many problems.

And now you see bridges all over the place as you drive up the main road and some of them look very scary.

Bridges are vital in all sort situations. God went to great lengths to build a bridge, a bridge of connection between himself and us. He wants to connect with the people that he created and that he loves. He wants to connect with you. And Jesus, sacrificed his life to build that bridge, He is the one who connects with God. Have you crossed the bridge?

This morning continue our series called *Unleashing the Gospel* with a message I've called "Telling God's Story." Last week we said that all of us have a story to tell. And if we've met Jesus we have a faith story to tell about what our life was like before we met Jesus, how we met Jesus, and since we met Jesus.

This week I received a number of stories and right now I just want to read one...

I was raised in a practicing Catholic family and I remember at 12yrs asking questions like 'why can't I go straight to God instead of going to the priest for confession?' I knew and believed that there was a God but why would he be interested in me – he seemed far too remote.

In my 20's I tried to give 'going to church' away, but felt sooo guilty that I went back, but that soon faded away. Later, married, with 2 sons, I started searching – there must be meaning to life and what was I going to teach these 2 little guys.

Suffering postnatal depression, I was invited by a Christian friend to come along to her girls group which consisted of girls from different denominations who got together to study the bible and share life together. I was a mess, bored and lonely, so off I went! They kept talking about Jesus all the time and gradually I came to see that it was a relationship with Jesus that I needed and faith could be real.

I threw away my pills and with their love and support I started on my journey of faith. The very first thing I experienced was amazing peace, which I had been searching for forever.

What a great Story! I love it. Simple and easy to understand, clear and doesn't have any Christianese or code words in it. A little bit longer than the 150 words, but who is counting?

Could she have added more detail? Absolutely. I'm sure this person could talk for hours about what Jesus has done in her life. But when someone asks us, "Why God is so important to us?" they usually don't have hours to listen, but they do have a minute or two. And if we're in relationship with them we can always add more detail later when they ask for more.

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