

Life Notes *Sharing Your Faith with Pastor Justin*

8. Communicating God's Heart – The Message of the Gospel

When it comes to communicating God's Heart, Christians can be the world's worst for making it too simple or too complicated! On the simple side we are tempted to say things to our friends and family like, "God loves you" or "just believe in Jesus." These statements are true but they leave out a lot of essential information our friends need to understand.

It's also tempting for the more scholarly among us to complicate the message with lots of details about theology, church history, and biblical interpretation – including definitions out of the original Greek or Hebrew! These things can be important in the right context, but too much information can actually cloud the understanding of the people we hope to reach.

Remember, Jesus said we must become like children in order to come to him. So it is important for us to learn to convey the gospel with all of its essential ingredients, but in terms that even a child could understand.

To help us do that, let's take a look at the Five-Second Gospel. Here it is:

"God loves us,
we blew it,
Christ paid for it,
we must receive Him."

There are four characters in the gospel story. God, Us, Christ, and You.

Character 1: God. "God loves us."

- God is loving.
 - God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in Him (1 John 4:16b)
- God is holy.

- And they were calling to one another, "holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3)
- God is just.
 - The Lord is known by his justice (Psalm 9:16a)

The Bible sums up God's nature in 1 John 4:16, when it says God is loving. But it also tells us he is holy and just and must judge sin according to His perfect standards. Now if he were only holy and just we would be in a lot of trouble – hopeless, in fact. Thankfully, because of God's love and the fact that we matter so much to Him, He graciously provided a way of escape from the judgement we deserve

Character 2: Us. "We blew it."

- Humans were originally created good, but we became sinful.
 - For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)
- We deserve death.
 - For the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23)
- We were spiritually helpless.
 - All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:6)

God created humans to be morally good, but we, starting with Adam and Eve and all the way down to you and me, chose to go our own way, and we became sinful. God is holy and just and must punish our sins. Romans 6:23 tells us, "the wages of sin is death." The death means spiritual separation from God for all of eternity in a real place called hell.

People don't like to think about these things, but Jesus clearly warned about them. We need to do the same, knowing that our friends will be a lot more interested in God's solutions after they realize their predicament – that they are morally bankrupt, spiritually helpless, and absolutely in need of God's forgiveness and help.

Character 3: Christ. "Christ paid for it."

- Christ is God who also became man.

- Christ Jesus: Who being in very nature God, was made in human likeness. (Philippians 2:5-7)
- Christ died as our substitute.
 - For Christ died for our sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (1 Peter 3:18)
- Christ offers his forgiveness as a gift.
 - For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The gospel is good news. Christ is God, who also became man, and came to earth to pay the spiritual death penalty that we owed by dying on the cross for us, and then He rose from the dead to give us new life. This is the central concept of the gospel: Jesus is our substitute. By paying the penalty for our sins, he provided the way for us to receive His forgiveness and salvation. And now the risen Christ offers His forgiveness to us – and to our friends.

Character 4: You. "We must receive Him."

- We must respond.
 - Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in His name, he gave the right to become the children of God. (John 1:12)
- We receive Him by asking Christ to be our forgiver and leader.
 - If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)
 - But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. (1 Peter 3:15)
- The result of receiving him is our spiritual transformation by the Holy Spirit.
 - What this means is that those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun! (2 Corinthians 5:17, NLT)

It's not enough to simply know about Jesus and His payment for our sins – we must respond by receiving His payment as a gift to us. Merely knowing about it, and even agreeing that it's true, is

like being told that a friend has bought you a ticket to a concert or play, but never actually reaching out and taking that ticket or attending the event.

Next week we will look at relevant and helpful illustrations that will enable us to communicate the gospel more clearly to our friends and family!