

An elderly couple had dinner at another couple's house, and after eating, the wives left the table and went into the kitchen. The two men were talking and Albert said to George, "Last night we went out to a new restaurant and it was really great. I would recommend it very highly."

George asked, "What's the name of the restaurant?"

Albert thought and thought and finally said, "What is the name of that flower you give to someone you love? You know... the one that is red and has thorns on it."

"Do you mean a rose?" "Yes," Albert said.

Then Albert turned toward the kitchen and yelled, "Rose, what's the name of that restaurant we went to last night?"

I know this is funny, but I bring this up because, at times, this how many of us get when it comes to sharing our faith. Our thoughts get all jumbled and disorganized, we can't think straight, we stumble over our words, and we can't remember a single Bible verse – to include **John 3:16**. **Am I right?** I want to avoid that – we need to somehow get past that.

We are in the third week of a sermon series about sharing our faith. The first week I talked about our fears. And even though we are a people of faith, who are called to walk by faith, we still deal with fear – namely the fear of rejection, the fear of not knowing what to say, and the fear of failure. Ultimately, to get past our fears, we have to trust God enough to take us where we are afraid to go.

Last week, I talked about the motivation for sharing our faith. I felt we needed to consider the *why's* of sharing our faith before we thought about *how* to share our faith; otherwise, there is no rhyme or reason for what we are doing and our sharing efforts will eventually fall by the wayside if we are not properly motivated.

This morning, I want you to give you some fresh insights about sharing the gospel, a different mindset to consider, and many of the insights I am going to share with you this morning come from a book a read a several years ago entitled "*Sharing Jesus Without Freaking Out*." That's a great title because that's what many of us do – freak out.

So, turn with me to **Luke 24:44-48**.

⁴⁴ Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." ⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, ⁴⁶ and He said to them, "Thus it is

written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.”

In this passage, Jesus is talking to His startled and frightened disciples when He first appears to them after His resurrection, and we are told that He opened their minds to understand the very heart of the gospel – namely as part of God’s divine plan to redeem mankind and bring a lost people to Himself – Jesus had to suffer and die and rise again.

Jesus explained that everything written in the Law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms spoke about this – it spoke about Him. The gospel message started in the Old Testament and it continued throughout the New Testament. The gospel, the good news is central to the entire Bible – Genesis through Revelation, not just Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – and when you look at the gospel from that “big picture” perspective, you can also see the gospel as a grand epic story.

Think about your favorite movie for a moment. **Why do you like your favorite movie?** Most likely you like the story in the movie, it draws you in, it takes you for a ride, it touches you on a deeper level, and in some cases, you might even find yourself living vicariously through the characters in the movie. If you are watching Indiana Jones, you might become Indiana Jones, so to speak, because there is something inside of us that wants to be adventurous and heroic.

But consider this. There are thousands upon thousands of movies out there, telling all kinds of different stories – but there are only a handful of plotlines. Stories follow plotlines. A plotline is a series of orderly events that help to develop the main idea and the characters of the story.

For example, as you know I have given Hallmark Channel movies a bad rap in the past because their movies are so predictable, but the reason they are so predictable is because they use the exact same “*Boy Meets Girl*” plotline. This is the plotline where there’s a guy and a girl who somehow meet, and something like a chemical reaction begins between them. Then you see two things depicted in these movies. First, guys are dumb. The guy doesn’t get the girl’s subtle hints, or he does something stupid, or he’s really insensitive to her feelings. But then you realize the second thing: girls are crazy. The girl overreacts, she goes drama queen on the poor guy, and the movie continues with the two of them almost figuring things out,

until the very end when they actually do. That's the "*Boy Meets Girl*" plotline. That's the plotline for every Hallmark Channel movie.

Now to give the Hallmark Channel a break, there are other story plotlines as well. For example, there is the "*Man Falls in a Hole*" plotline. It starts off with the main character or characters doing well, but they fall into a hole of sort – that is, they get into a predicament, a person causes them distress, maybe they experience some evil thing like a zombie apocalypse or a sharknado, or they find themselves in some other kind of difficulty. They cannot save themselves, but eventually a hero comes to the rescue. Think of any Marvel action movie or any Star Wars movie or any Lord of the Rings movie. It's the same plotline.

The third is the "*Rags to Riches*" plotline. This is the typical Cinderella story where sadness ultimately leads to a rescue and the restoration beyond the wildest dreams of the main character of the story – who in the end, lives happily ever after.

Again, there are thousands upon thousands of movies – telling all kinds of different stories, but with only a handful of plotlines.

Think about the Bible for a moment. The Bible, from beginning to end, can be seen as a grand epic story with its own interesting plotlines – beginning with the creation in Genesis, weaving its way through the Old Testament as God interacts with His special people, then into the New Testament gospels where we see the earthly ministry of Jesus, then into the letters as God interacts with His church, and eventually into the book of Revelation leading to a dramatic climax and the trailer for a new sequel.

It's a grand epic story, and I am saying this on purpose. I know that most of us cringe at giving canned gospel presentations and shudder at sharing personal testimonies, but – we all like stories, even telling stories, whether they be stories from books, or stories from movies, or stories from real life – we all like stories. Stories are easy to tell, they are easy to follow, and they are easy to relate to.

As a former chaplain in nursing homes, I noticed that stories were much easier to tell, much easier to explain, and much easier for people to understand. I frequently used Bible stories as a way to share biblical truth that connected and related to their own unique circumstances that I became aware of through normal and natural conversations. Sharing stories made the difference for me in the nursing home ministry.

One Sunday morning, Aldous Huxley, the famous 19th-century agnostic, was staying with friends. His hosts left for church, but he declined to go. But walking

out in the village he encountered a simple fellow who lived nearby who, like Huxley's hosts, was on his way to church. Huxley said, "Instead of going to church today, will you sit down and tell me why you are a Christian and what your faith means to you?" The man said, "Oh but you could demolish all of my arguments in a minute." But Huxley said, "I do not want to argue with you. I have no intention of doing so. I simply want to hear your story." So, the man stayed with him and told him his story.

You see, it's not about arguing or proving or defending – it's about sharing a story. The gospel is a grand epic story, and as believers, we need to know the story before we can share the story. For many, the gospel has become fuzzy over time, it's not fresh anymore, and quite frankly, we just don't know it like we should. We need to be fluent with the gospel, we need a baseline of gospel understanding in order to have normal and natural conversations about Jesus, because the more we know the gospel, the more comfortable and confident we will be in sharing it.

This morning, I want to share the gospel story with you – from beginning to end. It's not perfect, but it doesn't have to be. And just so you know, the story doesn't begin with the manager, it begins at the very beginning – creation.

In the gospel story, God created a beautiful world – a very intricate world, a peaceful world, a harmonious world where everything in creation fit together and worked together. Everything. It was a perfect world with man as the centerpiece of God's grand design. God made man unique, in fact, we were made in the image of God, and He gave man stewardship over the rest of His creation. God created us to be in a purposeful, meaningful, fruitful, and eternal relationship with Him. God created us to know Him, and to relate with Him, to enjoy Him, and to bring honor and glory to Him. That was His purpose. We are the apple of God's eye, and when God finished with His handiwork – He said, "***It was very good.***"

But if you look around you now, it's obvious that something went terribly wrong. We live in a broken and hurting world. We live in a world full of all sorts of turmoil and disorder, and hate, and violence, and deceit. Life seems to be a struggle – a struggle for each one of us – **so what happened? What's the problem?** We are the problem. Man fell. Man decided to no longer value the relationship they once had with God. Rather, we chose to disobey and reject God – making up our own rules and going our own way – leaving Him completely out of our lives. And because of this disobedience and rebellion, sin entered the world, and sin resulted in this brokenness that we now see and experience. But it gets worse. The ultimate consequence for our sin is the penalty of death, and on top of that, sin creates a separation between man and God – the God who still loves people.

But in this grand epic story, God had a remedy. Because of His great mercy and grace and love for a people who had disobeyed and rejected Him, God set apart a special people through whom a Rescuer would eventually come – and that Rescuer was Jesus – God’s own Son. Jesus was the remedy to man’s problem. And when the time was just right, Jesus came to us. He lived a perfect sin-free life to show us what a loving relationship with God actually looked like, and then as an ultimate expression of His love, Jesus willingly chose to accept the death penalty of sin that was reserved for us. Jesus went to the cross – sacrificed Himself to pay a sin debt that He did not owe because we had a sin debt that we could not pay. Jesus then defeated death and rose to life to prove He was, in fact, the Son of God, that His payment for our sin was paid in full, and that we might experience eternal life through Him. Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves.

But knowing this is not enough. By faith, we respond to God by admitting our own sinfulness, by faith we accept His complete forgiveness through the sacrifice and the finished work of Jesus, by faith we turn from our sin and turn to God, and by faith we follow Him so He can make us the kind of person He wants us to be – which was God’s original purpose for our lives in the first place. And for those who respond by faith, the relationship with God is restored and eternal life is promised – in the here and now, and in the life to come.

That’s the gospel story, from beginning to end, and I know I threw a lot at you – but don’t panic.

Earlier, we talked about story plotlines. If you recall, a plotline is a series of orderly events that develop the main idea and the characters of the story. In the gospel story, there are plotlines as well, and I see four of them. Granted, you may not see what I see and yours may not be like mine, and that’s totally fine, but these are the four I saw in the story:

God’s Purpose, Our Problem, God’s Remedy, and Our Response. It goes like a tennis match doesn’t it – like a tennis ball going back and forth over the net.
God’s Purpose, Our Problem, God’s Remedy, and Our Response.

Many find plotlines important in sharing their faith because they serve as guide posts. They serve as framework to help to keep them on track and to ensure they don’t forget something important during a conversation because, as you know from your own conversations with people – conversations can go just about anywhere.

Think about plotlines this way. Trish likes putting jigsaw puzzles together. When she starts a puzzle, **where do you think she starts first?** I suspect like most of you, she works on the border first because it helps her to make sense of the overall

picture. The border will give her the necessary framework to build the rest of the puzzle from – likewise, knowing the gospel story and its plotlines is similar to the framework of a puzzle. You have something to guide you, to work from, and to refer to as you weave in and out of a normal and natural conversation.

Now, I admit that when I shared the gospel story with you a few moments ago, I gave you a lot, so, I am going to swing the pendulum the other direction to show you something that you might find interesting.

Take your Bibles and turn with me to **John 3:16**. This is a passage that most of you already know by heart, you can quote it in your sleep, and it has been said that this one verse is the entire gospel story in a nut shell – in other words, everything I shared with you earlier in that grand epic story is captured right here.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

Now, look at this passage really closely. Even though you may know it by heart, just look at it for a moment. **Do you see any plotlines in this verse that could guide you – that could serve as framework to help you explain it if you needed to?** I do. In this one simple verse, a verse most of you know by heart, I see the same four plotlines I mentioned earlier.

God’s Purpose, Our Problem, God’s Remedy, and Our Response.

Let me show you what I mean. **John 3:16** tells us that God has a purpose for our lives, and that purpose is that we would have everlasting or **eternal life**. That means, God’s purpose is that we would experience a full and meaningful and fruitful and purposeful life in the here and now, but also be with Him in the life to come.

Unfortunately, this verse also tells us that we have a problem and it’s a huge problem. If you notice, the word “**perish**” is mentioned and it’s a clue to our problem. We have sinned against God and the wages of sin is death. Because of our sin, because of our rebellion and disobedience against God, we have a death penalty hanging over us which prevents us from experiencing God’s purpose in our lives. In contrast to the eternal life that God desires for us, because of sin, we are destined for eternal death and separation from God.

But there is good news. God **loved** us so much, that He provided the remedy for our sin problem. Even though we had turned our backs on God – God still loved us, and **He gave His only Son** Jesus to take death penalty for sin that was reserved

for us. Jesus went to the cross and paid the sin debt that He did not owe. Jesus then defeated death and rose to life to prove He was, in fact, the Son of God, that His payment for our sin was accepted, and that we might experience eternal life through Him. God loved us that much.

And as a response to His love for us, we are to **believe in Him** – we are to place our faith in Him. That means by faith, we respond to God by admitting our own sinfulness, by faith we accept His forgiveness through the finished work of Jesus, by faith we turn from our sin and turn to God, and by faith we follow Him so He can make us the kind of person He wants us to be.

That's the gospel story using **John 3:16** as a biblical springboard. I know we have covered a lot this morning, and hopefully, I didn't overwhelm you. My desire was that for some of you, seeing the gospel as a story – would be freeing in some respect. If little children can learn the story of the "Three Little Pigs" and tell it, surely, we can learn the gospel story and share it.

For others, maybe the use of plotlines as guides was helpful. When I am talking to someone I don't know, I have those four same plotlines in my head, and if in the context of a normal conversation we end up anywhere in the gospel, I am ready.

Who knows where a question like, "Can I pray for you" may lead?

For those of you who have never heard of Karl Barth, he was the most prolific theologian of this century. He is the Wayne Gretzky, the Babe Ruth, of 20th century Christian theology. Karl Barth's theology was as complex as it was profound. When Barth visited the University of Chicago, students and scholars crowded around him to listen to the master. At a press conference, someone asked, 'Dr. Barth, what is the most profound truth you have learned in your studies?' Without hesitation he replied, 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so'. Karl Barth, perhaps the greatest mind of the 20th century, was impacted most, not by reading deep and exhaustive theological discourses, but by the simple truth, 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so'.

This is a great truth – Jesus loves me, but there is a grand epic story behind this truth that we need to know. I urge you – get to know the story. Write it out for yourself where it makes sense to you. Share it with yourself over and over, so you become comfortable in sharing it with someone else.

Source Material:

Holman Old Testament Commentary – Max Anders
Sharing Jesus Without Freaking Out – Alvin L. Reid
Exposition Commentary – Warren Wiersbe
The Bible Knowledge Commentary – Walvoord & Zuck
Enduring Word – David Guzik