

What About My Friend?
Inspiring Others When It's Up Close & Personal

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We're not in Kansas anymore! And this is a good thing.

Because the cultural landscape has dramatically changed, we're now in unfamiliar territory. Things don't look and feel like they used to. All of this is good because it drives us into the arms of Christ. The challenges & complexities compel us to listen more intently to Jesus...to stay closer to him...and to live out His call on our lives.

We began this series saying that it is all about God, and it is. What comes to your mind when you think about God is the most important thing about you.

In this church called Ironbridge Baptist Church, a faith community that we affectionately call *The Bridge*, we are here ***to inspire others to experience life with God***. Life with God is God's will for your life. You were created in the image of God to have an intimate, fulfilling, joyous connection with God both now & for all eternity. *"Surely goodness & mercy shall follow all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* (Psalm 23:6)

As we have discovered, God has created & introduced human sexuality to be a vital part of the human experience for the express purpose of showcasing His love & His devotion and His connectedness to us as His creation.

When we enter into a relationship with God, it changes the way we see ourselves and the way we see people who are very different from us.

More importantly, it changes the way we think about, relate to, & experience life with God:

What is God like?

Imagine a great and glorious king. In the midst of his benevolent reign, he hears that his subjects have revolted. He sends messengers to investigate. The rebels kill them. So he sends his own dear son, the prince. They murder him viciously, hanging his body on a tree.

[What would you expect the king to do now? Send in his armies and take revenge, right? Kill those rebels. Burn their villages to the ground! That king certainly has both the power and the right to avenge himself]

But what if the king turned around and offered these criminals a full pardon?

He says, "I will accept my son—whom you murdered—as the payment for all your rebellion. You may go free. All I require if for you to admit your transgressions and embrace my Son's purchase of your forgiveness."

The king says, "I invite any of you to come live in my palace, eat at my table, and enjoy all the pleasures of my kingdom. And I will adopt you as my own children and make you my heirs, so everything that is mine will be yours forever."

Then he says, “I won’t force you to accept my gracious offer. But the only alternative is spending the rest of your life in prison. The choice is yours. [Excerpt from p.34-35 in Randy Alcorn’s, *The Grace & Truth Paradox*]

We are the rebels in the story! Jesus is the King’s son who gave His life for us.

Frank Viola said one of the reasons he became a Christian was because...*“Jesus is the most compelling, intriguing, awe-inspiring, and amazing person I know of who is worthy of the greatest admiration, obedience, love, and worship. To my mind, truth, justice, and beauty are all grounded in Him, and His story trumps every other story known to humanity.”*

Jesus said, *“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”* (Luke 5:31-32)

Jesus said, *“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”* (Luke 19:10)

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.” (John 3:17)

What about my friend? What about my child? What about my coworker? How can I inspire them to experience life with God?

2 things you must know & always remember & keep in mind...

1. JESUS IS A FRIEND OF SINNERS!

Jesus loved spending His time in the company of sinners! This greatly annoyed the religious crowd. They hated the fact that he spent so much time with tax collectors & prostitutes.

Most sinners loved being around Jesus. They enjoyed His company, sought Him out, invited Him to their homes and their parties. Unbelievers tore the roof off to get to Jesus.

People sensed that Jesus loved them, even when He spoke difficult words.

The first Christians drew thousands to Jesus...

Was it their buildings? Didn’t have any.

Was it their programs & ministries? Didn’t have any.

Was it their political power? Didn’t have any.

Was it their slick advertising? Didn’t have any.

Was it because everyone was raised in a god-fearing home? Paganism & Plurality...

They drew people to Jesus by being like Jesus!

With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. **Acts 4:33**

Great Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39)

Who is my neighbor? Jesus told a story...the parable of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10:25-37) Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? (v.37) He

said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, **“You go, and do likewise.”**

God’s call on our lives is clear: Follow Me. Obey Me. Imitate Me.

Because Jesus was & is a friend of sinners, He wants us to do the same.

2. JESUS WANTS YOU TO BE A FRIEND OF SINNERS!

WE ARE HERE FOR THE BENEFIT OF THOSE WHO ARE NOT HERE YET!

WE MUST GO TO THE PEOPLE WHO WILL NEVER COME HERE.

LUKE 19:1-10. Jesus & Zaccheus!

So what do you say if someone tells you that they’re gay?

“Let’s have dinner together, I’d love to hear more about your life!”

Step 1: Listen to their story. Take interest in their life & their story.

Step 2: Tell your story. Talk about your relationship with Christ.

Step 3: Leave the results to God!

Followers of Christ make 2 mistakes when it comes to befriending sinners. We condone their sin or we condemn their sin. Both approaches are incorrect. We don’t want to shine the spotlight on our goodness/good behavior nor do we want to shine the spotlight on their different/bad behavior. Instead, shine the spotlight on Jesus Christ & His magnificence.

John 8:2-11 is the account of how Jesus responded to a woman caught in the act of adultery!

In this important passage, Jesus gives us the playbook for relating to sinners. He doesn’t condone her sin nor does He condemn her sin. He offers her grace. He is inviting her to a fresh start, a new beginning, a new life. He offers her forgiveness and life with God!

We should & must do likewise...

GETTING HONEST WITH GOD:

As rocky as the road may be, amid all the complexities and changes in our culture, our goal remains clear: Bear witness to the Supremacy, Centrality & Lordship of Jesus Christ!

Our message can be understood in one word: **Jesus**. Need three words? **Jesus is Lord!** Jesus is the King of this new heavenly Kingdom that will last for eternity. If the Gospel message could be shared in 30 words, we could share it like this: **“The Gospel is the Good News that God has come to us to show us His love, to save us from sin, to set up His Kingdom, & to shut down religion.”** [Bruxy Cavey inspired this tri-layered description of the Gospel.]

How you think about & relate to God is the most important thing about you. Life with God is the most glorious thing a person can ever have. Life without God is the most horrifying reality anyone can ever face. Every life is better with God at the center of that life.

Frank Viola recently shared 12 reasons why he's a Christian. Reason #8: *"Because Jesus is the most compelling, intriguing, awe-inspiring, and amazing person I know of who is worthy of the greatest admiration, obedience, love, and worship. To my mind, truth, justice, and beauty are all grounded in Him, and His story (as told in the Gospels) trumps every other story known to humanity."*

Life with God begins with some radically honest soul-searching. What we think about God, what we think about the culture we're in, & what we think about the Kingdom of God all lead us to the same place:

God's desperately desires for us to know Him, enjoy Him & to reflect His Glory forever & ever. We are destined to be His Image-bearers for all eternity!!

Imagine yourself having this conversation with God:

"God, everything I am, I lay before you! Your ways are higher than my ways! You are God & I am not. Forgive me God, for shutting you out of my life and ignoring you & trying to live my life without you. I need you Jesus. I open my heart & my life to you. Enter into my heart & life. Forgive me. I'm trusting in you to guide and direct my path. Help me to flourish as a human being according to your ways & your path. In your name, Amen."

Begin your life with God today. Trust Him completely. Follow Him starting today!