

THE BIG STORY: FINDING YOUR PLACE IN GOD'S EPIC

DAVE BENSON @ BRIDGEMAN BAPTIST COMMUNITY CHURCH, AUGUST 12, 2013

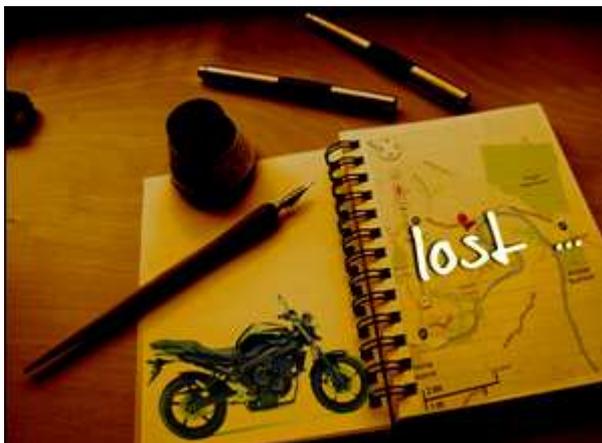
I. LOST: WHERE AM I?



Good morning. If I haven't met you before, my name is Dave Benson. Now if this is your first time at Bridgeman Community for a church service, then I want to extend an extra *warm* welcome for two reasons. First, because this is also *my* first time at Bridgey on a Sunday! So we have something in common already!

Typically I'm over at Kenmore Baptist Church, where I used to be a Pastor. Now that I've moved into lecturing at a theological college and doing my doctoral studies at Uni, I finally get the chance to drop in on some other churches around Brisbane. I've heard such great things happening at Bridgey, so I'm stoked to be here with you. A warm welcome 'coz I'm new too!

But my second reason for extending an extra warm welcome is because I'm still trying to warm up after a chilly motorbike ride here at 6:30 this morning. I know this is early in a talk to play the sympathy card, but it really is cold on the bike! And I live way over in Karana Downs—anyone know where that is?—it's in the sticks near Ipswich, so it's no short trip.



I'm not feeling the love yet, so let me explain. *It's lucky I made it here. You see, I'm known for getting lost.* I'm starting to understand why the absent minded Professor isn't a stereotype ... you spend eight hours a day reading academic journals, your head in the books, and you'll miss the signs too! Call it short-

sightedness. I'm just looking at what's immediately ahead, so miss a junction here, a left-turn there, and I'm wondering how I ended up in the departure lounge at Brisbane airport!

I can feel the sympathy rising – but I’ve got one last card to play. For all you cushy people cruising in your car with your Navmans and sweet SIRI on your iPhone suggesting via GPS where to head, I’m riding solo. Once I jump on the bike, I’d better have the map memorised or say goodbye to your guest speaker. So I study it real good, like I’m sitting a test. Up comes Google maps. Where does the journey start? Where am I presently? Are there any road-blocks or detours? And where am I headed? Without this bigger picture offered by the map-makers looking down from above, I’m liable to get lost.

So, any sympathy is accepted! And an extra warm welcome from me!

So, I’m wondering: have *you* ever been lost? Like really lost? When was it? Maybe on a hike? Or navigating the winding streets in Rome? Maybe driving around Brisbane!

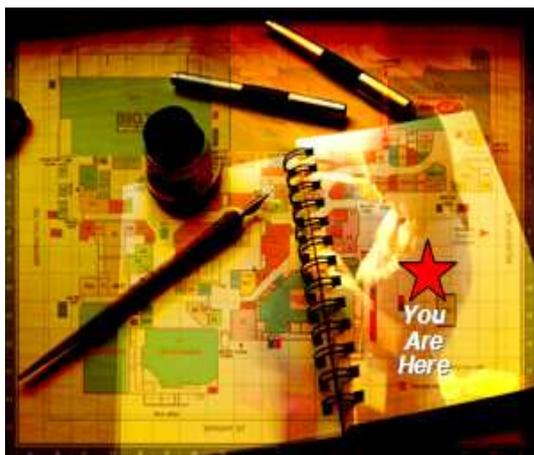


Or, take it deeper—more metaphorical. Have you ever felt lost in life? Confused about where you were going, and what’s the point of it all. I mean, you get up, day in, day out, to study, or work, to earn your way, to take a holiday, to refresh for more work, to buy stuff, that costs money, so you work more ... and

what for? Often we’re so busy driving ahead that we never pause to ask where we’re going and why? We’re lost and we don’t know it.

Sometimes it takes misreading a sign or two to make us look up and wonder where we are. A good friend of mine, a really successful Professor in a University, just lost his Father—he died of cancer. His dad was also a successful man, but as his life rolled on, he became more and more detached, and cynical. He didn’t finish strong—seems like he took a detour. So my friend finds himself stepping back from the rat-race, and wondering what life is all about. Who does he want to be? How is he travelling? How should he act now that he’s performing solo, apart from his role model?

II. LOCATED: STORIES ARE OUR MAP FOR LIFE



My point is this: What a map is to your drive, a story is to your life.

I'll say it again. *What a map is to your drive, a story is to your life.*

To get the most out of a drive, I need to locate myself within the right map. And to get the most out of life, I need to locate myself within right overarching story.

In my study I came across this quote from a renowned philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre, in his landmark book *After Virtue*. It's long, but I think important:



"Man [sic] is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. ... *I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question 'Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?'*

We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters—roles into which we have been drafted—and we have to learn what they are

in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. ... Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words." Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources.

Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things."



Did you catch what he's saying.

He's saying that humans are like performers on a cosmic stage. Yet, we're anxious stutterers until we embrace a larger story that locates our role.

Have you ever felt like an actor without a script?



It's a lot like the T.V. show "Thank God You're Here"—have you seen it before? The premise of the show is simple: dress someone in a costume and get them to step through a door into a world they know nothing about. Who knows what the scene is on the other side of the door—a party, a courtroom, an

emergency? Whatever it is, the actors, with minimal knowledge, have to bluff their way through until they can *understand the story they're living in*. The humour—or tragedy—comes as they do and say things totally inappropriate to the scene. But isn't this a lot like our lives on Earth? We are born into a confusing world, exiting the dark and comfortable room into piercing light! We're greeted with "Thank God you're here!" Everyone cheers, we cry, and then we wander the planet for decades trying to make sense of our lives and how to act!

Do you sense that you're part of something bigger—not just a producer in an economic machine to work and spend and work and spend, where the one with the most toys at the end wins? No, it's like we're in an epic story of sorts.

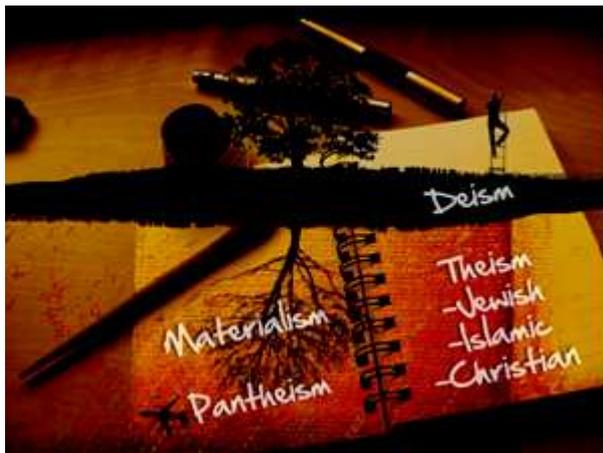


I think this is part of our fascination with movies. They draw us into a sweeping drama, where the stakes are high and real choices can radically altar a character's life.

My favourite movies are the Lord of the Rings series. So I'm presently working my way through the books. And J. R. Tolkien catches this so well in the dialogue between Sam and Frodo, two seemingly insignificant hobbits on a risky adventure in a mysterious world.

Sam muses, "The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them. I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of sport, as you might say. But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folks seem to have been just laded in them, usually—their paths were laid that way, as you put it. ... I wonder what sort of tale *we've* fallen into?"

III. DISORIENTED: WHICH STORY?



Precisely. What kind of story are you in? Is it a comedy or a tragedy? A meandering Indie flick? Or a sweeping drama like Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, with a battle to fight, and where love wins? *And how could you tell?* Stories abound. I'm a cosmic accident; I'm just an animal; I'm a reincarnated lost soul; I'm the

experiment of a disinterested deity. Which, if any, is the *true* story?



Now we could, like *Thank God You're Here*, look for clues as we walk through that door. In this life, what is the set like? How does the world work? Who are the other cast members? What do they live for? We might try and *reason up* to the bigger story. From **science** we might reason up to a rational universe and even a

cosmic law-giver. From our **consciousness and minds** we might reason up to a universe where matter in motion isn't all there is. From our **conscience and moral compass** we might reason up to a story where we don't construct right and wrong for ourselves, and that good and evil truly exist. We have real choice and our choice matters—we're not machines. We might reason up from **our addiction to love** and how widespread is **worship and religion** across all cultures over history, to a story where our source is a community of love that calls us into relationship.

This is all helpful. But it's informed guess work at its best.



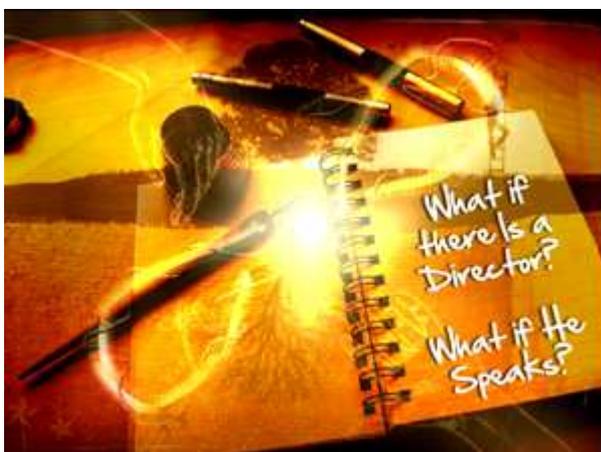
You see, we are in a story, whether we like it or not. But for little hobbits like us, we're too short to see. That's because we're in the *middle* of the story. We're *thrown* into this story ... we didn't choose our start, and we certainly didn't craft the script to know how it will finish. As one author put it, we're "*inextricably muddled—and hence, muddled*".

Alasdair MacIntyre, who I quoted earlier, said we're actors without a script, anxious stutterers, unless ... unless we have access to "the stock of stories which constitute our culture's initial dramatic resources." He wasn't a Christian when he wrote this, but he *was* referring to the Bible. This initial dramatic resource is the biggest story there is, sweeping across all of history and locating us in the middle.

As it says in the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 3 verse 11, "God has set eternity in our hearts [... *a kind of timeless story*], yet we cannot tell the beginning from the end."

We might wonder with Sam and Frodo about our own lives, "shall [we] ever be put into songs or tales?" Yet we've forgotten the big story of the Bible ... or just assumed that it's a fairy tale and never opened the cover. If only we would be humble like the hobbits and see that, "were in the same tale still! It's still going on. Don't the great tales ever end?"

IV. DIRECTOR: A VIEW FROM ABOVE



Well, what if there is a story that just fit? A story that embraces your own story, and everyday experience? A bigger story that makes sense of how we got here, of life's meaning, the heart of our problem, and the solution to it all?

The only way to rise above our horribly muddled condition is to hear the story told from above. The best maps are taken from above, from a plane or a satellite, capturing the contours of the land over a long journey.

What, then, if there is a Director above who isn't silent, who has told us stuff we could never work out for ourselves, even about what happens when you shut your eyes for the last time?



We all live according to the story we think we're in. So take a chance and step into the following epic: *a story with five scenes*. It's a basic summary of another story, the Bible, which Christians believe is God's take on how all our stories hang together. It's God's map to locate our lives, so the lost can be found. Just like

Hayley who shared earlier in the service, see if your life makes more sense in the pages of this epic story.

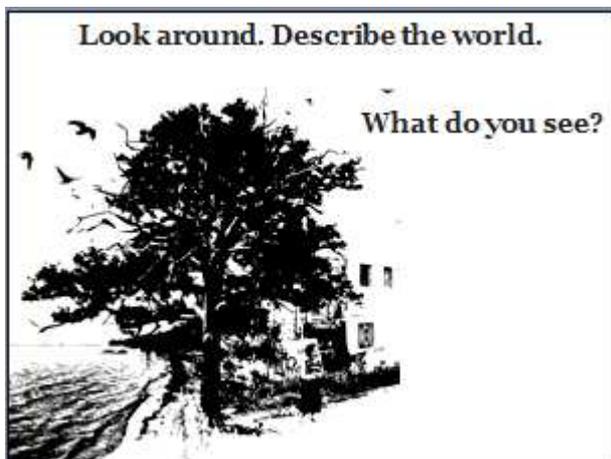
a. NOW? CLUES TO OUR STORY



On this white board you'll see five circles. A bit like a story-board for five acts in a movie. It represents where the story starts, and where it's going—past, present, future. The outside circle represents the world, all that is. The people represent all of humanity, and our relationships together. And the inside circle

represents our deepest identity—call it your heart, your soul, your spirit if you will ... it's the essence of who you are.

Let's start in the present though.



Look around. Describe the world. What do you see? *Good stuff?* Like friends, footy, flowers, mountains, concerns, travel, Thai food, and so on. (Is there another planet where you'd rather be?!) *But is that all?* Flick on the news. What about the not so good stuff? Like addiction, depression, divorce, death, rape,

corruption, war, global warming, poverty, pollution, and on it goes. Do you ever get the sense that something's gone wrong? That this is *not* the way it's supposed to be?

Why is that? We're thirsty for a perfect world, but what can satisfy? Maybe it was good, or will be good, but right now it's messed up. Let's enter the Director's Epic Story, right at the beginning, and it'll start to make sense. ...

b. DESIGNED FOR GOOD ... WHEN WAS I TRULY HAPPY & ALIVE?



The epic starts with God. Drop the images of a distant deity wilding lightning bolts. This story's Director is passionate and relational, an artist who paints an Oasis and plants us there. And in the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth. Why? Well, He made us to love God, love each other, and cultivate the

world as good gardeners should. (Imagine connection with your Creator, society in harmony without selfishness, and work which you enjoy that helps the world thrive.) This is the form in which we find freedom.

Like Hayley ... she shared of times of innocence as a kid, feeling connected in a happy home ... times when she felt alive, and really happy (sounds like Frodo in the shire!). What does this look like for you? Maybe when you're climbing mountains or out in the beauty of nature. Or when you're playing music, or helping your kids. All of this points to the truth, goodness, and beauty of God who scripted the story.

But just as love is only real when it isn't forced, the Director gives us all a choice. And clearly we're not in Eden anymore.

c. DAMAGED BY EVIL ... WHAT ARE MY DEEPEST HURTS?



“Who’s God to tell me what to do?” So we, the actors, rebelled against the Director and tried writing our own script in a form we preferred. We’ve eaten the forbidden fruit, and tried to play God. Meaning? We’ve ignored and despised God, abused each other, and vandalized the planet. That’s sin—missing the mark for which we

were made. We’ve turned inward, and act like the universe revolves around us. And we’ve built our lives around good stuff that can never satisfy like God: relationships, sex, status, sport ... our symptoms differ, but the syndrome’s the same. The result? The world’s damaged, our relationships are divided, and our identity (our heart) is a mess. We’re broken, and we break. Worse, we’re to blame.

Like Hayley ... a feeling of restlessness grew into writing her own script, going her own way. She took a detour, but directing her own life lead her to dead ends. We’re not God, so acting like we’re the centre of the universe will only cause pain. When we fail our self-centredness turns to disappointment ... even self-loathing, self harm. Everything groans. We can make it work for a while, and maybe even get used to the dull ache, but deep down we sense there must be something more. That this is *not* the way it’s supposed to be. *What’s your ache, your hurt?* How have you put yourself, or something that isn’t God, at the centre? Are you willing to face it head on?

God is loving and just, so what’s a passionate Director to do?

d. RESTORED BY BETTER ... WHO OR WHAT IS MY SOURCE OF HELP?



The Director could have fired the cast for a do-over. But instead, He entered the story through His Son. *When?* The Roman Empire, Israel, when BC became AD. *How?* Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus uniquely claimed to be God in the flesh, the long awaited and predicted Saviour (Messiah or Christ)

of the world. He gave us a model of how life was meant to be lived, under his Father’s rule in a Kingdom of peace and love.

Like Hayley ... we're looking for help in all kinds of places ... in love from a partner, popularity, in a successful career, from self-help techniques. But it doesn't fix the problem. When Hayley stepped out and truly listened to what Jesus was about, and trusted His unconditional love ... well, her life was changed. God was now at the centre, a loving Father to guide her steps. Self-harm gave way to self-love. Regret gave way to love for Reilly and direction for the future.

You see, Jesus calls us to switch scripts, and align with God's form to be forgiven and free. As the perfect character, Jesus stood in for our failures. He took the blame, and absorbed evil in love, crucified to cover our sin. He was scarred and shed His blood so we don't need to punish ourselves and others. He took the worst the world could throw at him, but after it all, rose from the dead—a real historical event worth checking out. This demonstrated that death was defeated, and the story would go on. ...

e. SENT TO HEAL ... WHAT BROKENNESS AM I PASSIONATE TO HEAL?



The heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart. When we admit our failure to God, turning from our way to trust the Director's solution in Jesus, then a new act begins. God starts the process of healing us from the inside out—revealing the part only I can play—so we can go together in the

power of His Spirit to help heal a hurting world.

Like Hayley ... as Jesus healed her, she discovered a passion to hang out with youth, with kids who were lost like she was, looking for love. She found a new identity and a real family, real community, with others who were being changed by Jesus from the inside out. The church cops such a flogging in the media, and to be sure there is hypocrisy, and we all fail. This isn't a performance studio of Oscar-winning actors. No! It's remedial. It's more like a hospital for recovering sinners, learning how to retrain their muscles and walk like Jesus did. But it's a place of grace, and of love, and of transformation. It's a place where natural enemies become brothers and sisters and share meals together. Where we learn to look beyond ourselves and serve others. It's the place we become free.

So, we partner with God to restore relationships and a broken planet. No waiting until the story's happy ending, we have a mission right now to give the world a preview of the play's final scene. Until we exit the stage, our role is to follow Jesus by absorbing evil in love, and reconnecting everyone with a good God who designed us to be free.

f. SET EVERYTHING RIGHT ... FOR WHAT DO I ULTIMATELY HOPE?



For all our best efforts, we're still broken. By ourselves, the world will never fully heal. The Director is patient, and wants everyone to freely choose the role for which we were made. But, the day is coming when Jesus will return, judge the world, and set everything right. We've all fallen short, so we need

God's mercy. As the curtain closes, every actor is brought back to give account for their actions. If you've accepted God's forgiveness, your real story is just starting: a restored earth with no hate, pollution, poverty, or war. God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—will be the centre of it all, and we'll be free in this love.

Like Hayley ... her life is like a preview, the trailer, of God's feature movie—what He will do with the whole universe. New life is birthed. New hope is birthed. Tears and regrets are wiped away, and even the worst memories become untrue, like waking from a dream ... the scars become marks of character, and pain is redeemed. And with Reilly they've had a foretaste of the cake God's cooking for the biggest birthday party you've ever seen, where everyone's welcome. The question is whether we'll respond to the invitation. Do we sense our need? Are we drawn to the host of the party, Jesus? Will we trust that the invite is real, and it's worth attending?

But what should God do with those of us who reject Him? To force His affections on us makes God a cosmic abuser. Yet, everything good, true, and beautiful comes from God, so apart from Him, all that's left is Hell. Hell is when we exclude ourselves from the Director's plans for a do-over.

g. WHICH CIRCLE AM I?

"The Gospels contain a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of other stories. But this story has entered history and the primary world.

This story is supreme. This story is true."

-J. R. R. Tolkien,
author of *Lord of the Rings*



So, that's the big story. It's the Director's take on what all our lives are about. But it's not a mythical tale to take or leave. As J. R. R. Tolkien said,

"The gospels contain a story of a larger kind which embraces all the essence of other stories. But this story has entered history and the

primary world. This story is supreme. This story is true."

Looking back over this story, which circle represents you?

- ❖ Do you think life is perfect, and everything's as it should be?
- ❖ Or do you sense how you're broken and you break, that your life is damaged by evil with no hope of change?
- ❖ Have you responded to Jesus, and asked for God's forgiveness, following His lead as the Director?
- ❖ Are you filled with God's Spirit, and not just sitting around waiting for Heaven—rather, are you living by God's script and helping heal the world?
- ❖ Do you know where you're going when you die, and are you sure that you'll be with God when He sets everything right and the party rolls on?



Maybe you're thinking, *Look, I'm not perfect, but who is? I know I'm broken, and that I'm part of the problem. But why do I have to go through Jesus? I mean, why can't I just heal the world in my own effort?* And that's a fair question. There are lots of amazing people trying to make a difference who *don't* follow Jesus.

Still, I can see two major problems in this. First, unless we're fixed—unless we are changed to desire rightly, and are forgiven for our own wrongs—we're going to project our issues onto those we try and help. Like a dysfunctional parent who tries to fix their kids, often the greatest damage to this world is

done by people with good intentions who haven't dealt with their baggage. Besides which, any good you do is really a credit to God. Where did you get the abilities, and resources, and body, and mind, to make a difference? Everything you have, and everything you are, is a gift from God. So you're being generous with God's resources. No one can truly be good apart from God.

Second, though, we've all fallen short of God's standards. We might look pretty good compared to our neighbour. But God judges our motives, our heart. Like when you think you look good in the morning, until you turn on the fluorescent light above the bathroom mirror. "Good God, what is that thing?" you wonder, looking at your nose. Under God's light, *our selfishness is exposed*. When we do good things so people will think we're good. When we lie to people, or lust after a person we're not with, or hate someone showing we have the same heart as a murderer—just we've got more restraint to not act on it. ... If God's brings this corruption into His New Creation, then we're back to circle two again: *damaged by evil*. You won't drink a glass of water with even a drop of salmonella in it. And God won't let our contagion spoil the living water He's serving. God is loving, but it wouldn't be loving for my sin ruin it for everyone else. And God is just, so our wrongs must be paid for.

So, in short, only with Jesus' forgiveness and a new heart will we heal the world the way God intends, and be with Him when He sets everything right.

V. FOUND: FAITHFULLY IMPROVISING IN GOD'S EPIC

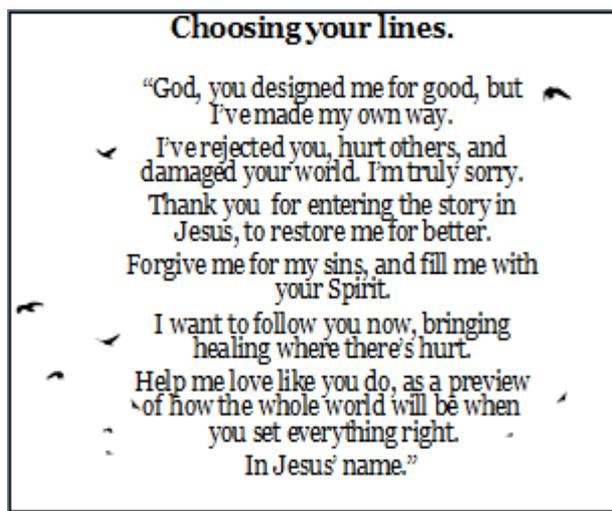


Summing up, you are an actor in an epic story. But the Director has given you unprecedented freedom to choose your own adventure. All our stories, however, hinge on the lead role. So how will you respond to Jesus?

I'm really not into a hard sell. Jesus freely offers to forgive our sin and transform our lives ... and we either want it or we don't. If I could talk you into it, then someone else could just as easily talk you out of it. If you commit on a whim, then you'll just as easily walk away when the going gets tough.

Following Jesus is even more serious than saying the wedding vows: for richer, for poorer, in sickness, and in health, till death do we part. He asks us to count the cost. I don't think it's good to rush to the altar. It takes time to get to know your partner and see if this is what you really want. But just like how any romance unfolds, there are ways to build the relationship. Start by reading over the notes for this talk, inside the bulletin you received when you came in. Bridgeman also has **gift packs** for anyone wanting to search this out. Just come up after the service and we'd love to help you on this journey. And you can sign up for an Alpha course, or something like "Seriously" (on Tuesday August 20 and 27, 7-9pm, here) to explore whether there are good reasons to take Jesus and His way of life *seriously*.

Perhaps, though, you've been searching this out for some time. Like Hayley you've started to connect with this community here, and you can see that following Jesus has made a real difference in people's lives. You've heard the invitation before, and you know right now that God's calling you to RSVP. You recognise your sin, and you want to be forgiven and discover the role God wrote for you to play in his big story.



If you see your story in this script, and God has grabbed your heart, then tell Him. Life can begin again right now. Look over these words, and for any person here who can truly say this to God—whether for the first, or the five-hundredth time, then would you pray out loud with me, to affirm God's commitment to you, and your commitment to God.

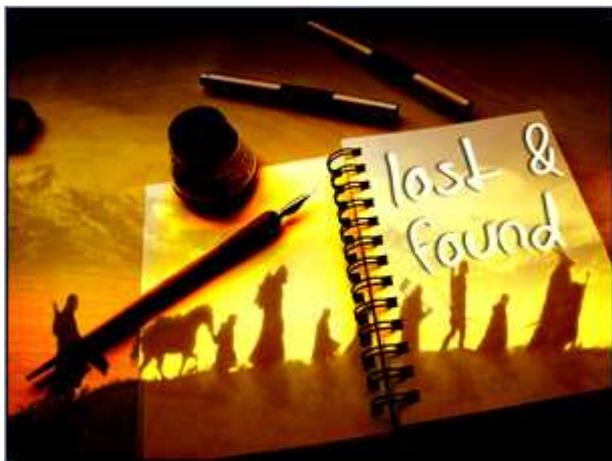
"God, you designed me for good, but I've made my own way.
I've rejected you, hurt others, and damaged your world. I'm truly sorry.
Thanks for entering the story in Jesus, to restore me for better.
Forgive me for my sins, and fill me with your Spirit.
I want to follow you now, bringing healing where there's hurt.
Help me love like you do, as a preview of how the whole world will be when you set everything right.
In Jesus' name, Amen."



If you've prayed that for the first time, then I have a third reason to extend a *warm welcome*. You are now my brother, or my sister, brought into God's family by Jesus. This is **the best** decision you've ever made. Please, tell us about this, so we can party with you!

However you've responded, my prayer is that the lost would be found, located on God's map. May you make sense of your life within the pages of the Bible. For this is your story. It's my story. It's God's epic story. God bless, and do come and speak with the team here at the front afterwards if you want to take a next step with Jesus.

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Frodo: I can't do this, Sam.

Sam: I know. It's all wrong. By rights we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness and danger, they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy? How

could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened? But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant something, even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going. Because they were holding on to something.

Frodo: What are we holding onto, Sam?

Sam: That there's some good in this world, Mr. Frodo... and it's worth fighting for.

Hayley Roessen – Testimony

Hi, I'm Hayley. I'd love to share some of the story of how God's love rescued me.....

I was born in the western suburbs of Sydney into a loving home, and grew up attending church on Sunday, going to Sunday school and attending youth groups. I knew about God but never had a personal relationship with him or wanted one, it would be safe to say that going to church was more a social event than a commitment or desire to grow in Him.

My teenage years were the first time I remember becoming very aware of a void in my life and understood that there was something missing, but never thought of or wanted God to fill it.

Throughout school I was popular, but although always being surrounded by people I could still feel totally alone. I battled with self-worth and my identity, which took me down the path of self-harm.

Not long after, around the age of 15 I stopped attending church altogether and focused my attention into all other aspects of my life.

Self-harm was something that I struggled with on and off with for a few years.

In late 2007 my family made the move to Queensland, losing my friends and everything that I'd ever known completely threw me. I went from being popular and extremely sociable to knowing no one. Again I found myself searching and trying to understand this life in a completely new place.

I dabbled in church again as my family started attending a new church up here in Brisbane, but it didn't last very long.

Life continued with God taking the back seat, I wanted to make all my own decisions. I found myself in a relationship with someone who also had no interest in God, and in 2009 I fell pregnant.

As an 18year old this came as a huge shock and a big challenge that I then had to face. Not long after, we split and I found myself caring for a young baby by myself. This wouldn't have been possible without the immense help of my parents.

Life continued for another 3 years with my son Reilly, friends and my social life being my focus. Looking back I can see God's hands trying to work in and through my life, although I was never open or willing to let him do this.

In August 2012 I was lead to Bridgey. I walked in one Sunday night and I remember thinking "I've never seen so many young people!" And then the music started and I was completely blown away.

I was sitting by myself, but I'd never felt so connected and part of something. I can't describe the way my heart felt that night, I wanted to burst into tears, it was like God had found me, He was ready, and this time, I was ready too. I knew I was home.

I kept coming along, every week meeting new people that I'd never seen there before, but being told that all these young adults are regulars. Even now I still meet people I've never seen before. It blows my mind. Sunday is now my new favourite day of the week.

I started attending a connect group on Wednesday nights and my faith just took off. Being with friends and learning about the relationship I could have with God because of Jesus saving work on the cross for me... I couldn't think of anything better.

Suddenly I wasn't searching anymore, I wasn't battling with myself to look or be a certain way. God had taken control, He'd given me this peace within myself, something I'd never felt or experienced before.

It was in that moment of realizing that I could never earn Gods love through any work or thing I did, I had to rely on His grace and love, and once I had understood that I didn't need to work for it, It was the most freeing moment in my life.

Since experiencing Gods salvation, he has blessed me and used me in ways I couldn't have imagined. He has given me a heart for the youth and He's blessed me with the incredible opportunity to serve here at Bridgeman on Friday nights with the high schoolers.

Looking back, I see Gods hand on my life. Although my back was turned on him for 22 years, he never stopped loving me or gave up on me. He has blessed me beyond measure, one of these being the birth of my son, which back then was such a challenge, but the greatest gift God has given me.

When I was lost Jesus Christ came and found me. ... He has rescued me and become the rock of my life. I love him and want to serve and worship him all my days.

