

BETTER THAN SUCCESS

Discovering God's Plan

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BETTER THAN SUCCESS: DISCOVERING GOD'S PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

Is there more to living than success? Whether you're struggling to reach it or have already attained it, do you sometimes wonder, Why am I here? Where am I going? Have I truly succeeded? What's next?

With this study, grasp the big picture of life and what really matters. God didn't leave us to figure it out on our own. He communicated with us. He tells us about His wonderful design for you and me. The Creator of the universe also cares about us—so much that He made a way we could be rescued from our greatest problem, at a painful cost to Himself. And He truly wants to bless us in ways that are beyond our natural, human ways of thinking.

When we grasp what God planned for us, it changes everything. We then can follow what shakes the status quo—something even better than success—by knowing God and His plan.

LESSON 1

GOD SPEAKS TO US

Genesis 1:1–31; Psalm 19:1–14

IS YOUR SMARTPHONE a first resort for staying in touch with your family, friends, and work, as it is for many people? The smartphone is no longer seen as a luxury in our world—it’s a necessity. Many of us have felt panic wash over us when we realize we’ve left our phone at home!

The smartphone is a relatively recent development in the process of communication. Our world has experienced wave after wave of innovation and technology advancements, which over time have dramatically changed how we communicate with each other.

In ancient times, people communicated with each other through means like clay tablets, smoke signals, and murals, and then eventually through more sophisticated means such as scrolls, books, and letters—and eventually newspapers. Then technology brought in one groundbreaking means of communication after another—telegraphs, telephones, radio, television, fax machines, pagers, and eventually the internet. Today we use smartphones to send emails and text messages, participate in video conference calls, and interact with people through social media. It’s astounding to think that many of our communications are transmitted through satellites in outer space!

1. What kind of communication devices did your family use when you were a child?
2. What is your favorite way to communicate with other people and why?

We put much effort into communication and into developing tools and platforms for exchanging information. After all, communication is vital to building healthy relationships, forming meaningful plans, enjoying a purposeful life, and influencing our world.

3. Who do you communicate with the most and why?
4. What would our world be like if people were unable to communicate?

God Wants to Communicate with You

Just as you have a strong desire to communicate with other people, God has an even stronger desire to communicate with you. Yet, since God is invisible and we don't see Him with our eyes or hear His voice with our ears, you may wonder how this could even be possible. You may ask, How can God communicate with me? That's a great question!

God communicates with people today in two primary ways. The first is visual; the second is verbal. In a *visual* way, He communicates with us through the vast and magnificent material world that we can see with our eyes and experience with our other senses. In a *verbal* way, He communicates with us through the specific and written words that He has given in the Bible.

5. What's so special about what the natural, material world tells us about God?
6. What is some evidence that shows we can trust the Bible?

God communicates with us through the natural world

A parent who enters an elementary school for a parent-teacher conference is greeted by math worksheets, hand-drawn pictures, and other creative art projects hanging on the walls. These posted papers and artistic creations offer clear evidence that children

go to that school. They also reveal something about each student's educational progress and unique personality and skills.

This illustration helps us understand what God did when He made the world. On a canvas the size of the universe, He painted a magnificent display of beauty, diversity, and grandeur. As such, the natural world serves as the easel upon which God has communicated to us about Himself. Through the natural world, He has communicated very clearly that He exists and that we should worship Him.

7. According to Psalm 19:1–6, what does the natural world tell us about God?

8. According to Romans 1:19 and 20, what does the natural world tell us about God?

9. Romans 1:20 says that God's creation makes people "without excuse." Why?

We know God communicates with us through the natural world by the way He made the world in the first place. Not only did He create the world, but He did so by *speaking* it into existence: "By faith we understand that the worlds were *framed by the word of God*, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible" (Hebrews 11:3, italics added).

God didn't create the world and the universe through manual labor or through some drawn-out process of evolutionary events. He created all the features of the universe by speaking them into existence *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing.") In this way, His creation of the world was a special act of divine communication.

10. Consider this statement: faith is necessary for any belief about the origin of the universe, whether creationism or evolutionism. Do you agree or disagree?

No matter what you believe is the better explanation for how the universe came into existence, you must choose that explanation by faith. Since the universe came into existence from nothing, we are unable to observe, examine, or reproduce that

phenomenon today. For this reason, we must choose to believe about the universe either that it came into existence through some sort of chance occurrence or that it was spoken into existence by a personal, powerful God.

11. Why does it make more sense to believe that God created the world?

According to Genesis 1, God created the world over a period of six days, then He rested on the seventh day. On each day of Creation, He added new features to the natural world, and in each case He *spoke*. The opening description of each day doesn't say, "Then God made," but, "Then God said . . ."

- On day 1, He created the Earth, covered in water, and light (Genesis 1:3–5).
- On day 2, He created Earth's atmosphere and outer space (Genesis 1:6–8).
- On day 3, He created dry land and plant life (Genesis 1:9–13).
- On day 4, He created the sun, moon, and stars (Genesis 1:14–19).
- On day 5, He created sea creatures and flying creatures (Genesis 1:20–23).
- On day 6, He created land creatures and human beings (Genesis 1:24–31).

On each of the six days, God's acts of creation were also acts of communication. He was not only creating, but He was also revealing more about Himself. And on day 7, God rested.

12. What are three specific truths about God that we can learn from the things He created?

13. How should we respond to God based upon what we see of His creation?

God communicates with us through His written Word, the Bible

People who admire the view overlooking the Yosemite Valley or the colors of birds and butterflies know that God's world is a work of art. When someone analyzes masterpieces by influential artists like Rembrandt, Picasso, and Cassatt, they often try to gain insight into how the artist thought and felt, and why. Though this is an enriching and stimulating task that deepens one's appreciation for an artist's skill, it also leaves many unanswered questions. For instance, no one can know for sure what Rembrandt thought about a painting unless he left a letter or note to explain his thoughts in his own words.

14. Have you ever tried to analyze a work of art? What was that experience like for you?

We should do the same with God's creation of the material world, observing it carefully to gain a greater appreciation for His supreme wisdom and power. But as effective as our observation of the universe may be at revealing the existence of an all-powerful and all-wonderful God, Creation as a mode of divine communication falls short in one important way.

Just as a masterwork painting is unable to communicate a detailed, specific message, the natural world cannot communicate a clear and specific message. While it communicates God's greatness, it cannot articulate God's great plan for us. That's why we need both visual and verbal communication from God.

15. Skim through Psalm 19. What change do you find in the middle of this psalm? How do verses 7-14 differ from verses 1-6?

As Psalm 19 shows us, God not only reveals Himself through the wonders of the natural world, but He also reveals His plan for us through the written words of Scripture, which we call the Bible or the Word of God. In this way, the Bible takes the next step in God's communication to us, helping us to understand our place and purpose in His creation.

16. How much of the Bible have you read for yourself? You don't have to share your answers for questions 16 and 17 with the group unless you want to.

17. Do you find it easy or difficult to understand?

Have you ever driven on a country road without your headlights turned on, walked through a building with the lights turned off, or hiked through a forest with no flashlight at night? If so, you will understand this Bible verse about the importance of God's Word in our lives: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). What does it mean to let God's written Word be a light to your path?

18. Can you name a specific way that God's Word influences what you believe and how you live?

The Bible has an extraordinary Source: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). *Given by inspiration of God* means "God-breathed," which tells us that the words of Scripture are the very words of God. Or to put it another way, they tell us what the Creator of the universe thinks and says! Isn't that amazing?

Is profitable in 2 Timothy 3:16 means that what Scripture tells us is beneficial and useful. But how is that so? God's written words are beneficial for us in at least four ways:

- "For doctrine"—to show us what to believe and do;
- "For reproof"—to show us what not to believe and do;
- "For correction"—to help us be restored when we've gone wrong; and
- "For instruction in righteousness"—to help us know how to do right.

God Wants You to Have Joy from Believing and Following His Word

Can you see how God's verbal revelation in the Bible shows you His great plan for

your life? Throughout the rest of the lessons in this Bible study, we will unfold more of God's great plan for you from His Word, the Bible. He made this magnificent universe to reveal much about Himself to you, and He has given you His Word so you can know how to respond to Him and fulfill His purpose for you. How should you respond to what we discover in God's Word? Romans 10:17 give the answer: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17).

19. What is faith?

20. What makes faith possible according to this statement in Romans 10?

Just as God is able to speak our entire universe into existence, He is able to speak through His written Word and bring about faith in your heart toward Him. Such faith in His Word is the key to discovering and fulfilling His great plan for you in this amazing universe He made and to having a personal, never-ending relationship with Him.

Memorize: Hebrews 11:1, 3

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for creating such an amazing universe and placing me in it. Thank You for revealing Your greatness and goodness to me through this world that You have made through the power of Your Word. Through the rest of this study, please help me to understand the great plan that You've revealed to me in Your written Word, the Bible, and how to have a personal relationship with You forever. Amen.

