

## In The Moment

On Sunday, as our children wrapped up Vacation Bible School, we sampled their lesson for the day, which was about God's master plan for the cosmos and how each of us fits into that plan.

1. Warm-up question: Sunday's sermon began with a video in which Ellen Degeneres and Steve Carell did an improv skit about a job interview. Ellen was the interviewer and Steve the interviewee. Although we all knew what job Steve was applying for, he didn't. He had to wing it. Tell us about a time in your life when everyone around you seemed to know what was going on, but you didn't and had to wing it.
2. In life, we often feel like Steve Carell in that improv skit. People say, "God has a master plan and you're part of it. God has a plan for your life." And we think, "If there is a plan for my life, I wish somebody would tell me what it is!" So we looked to the Bible for guidance. Read II Corinthians 5:16-20.
  - a. What might verse 16 mean?
  - b. What might verse 17 mean?
  - c. On Sunday we focused on verse 18, which tells us that God's master plan is all about reconciling the world to Godself, and that the decisive act in that plan has already occurred – the death of Jesus on the cross. What do you think that means? As best you understand, why was Christ's death pivotal to reconciling us to God?
  - d. Although the decisive act in God's reconciliation plan has already occurred, the world is still catching up to what God has already done. That's where we come in. Each of us has been called to "the ministry of reconciliation." When you hear that phrase – "ministry of reconciliation" – what does it mean to you? What's the "job description" of someone called to a "ministry of reconciliation"?
  - e. Verse 20 says "God is making God's appeal through us." What does that mean? How can/does God make an appeal through us?
3. The passage of scripture we've just discussed tells us, at a broad level, what God's master plan is and where we fit into that plan, but still leaves us wondering, "What is my unique role in God's plan to reconcile the world? What form should my 'ministry of reconciliation' take? Where do I find the instructions that tell me first to do this, then this, then this?" Jeff challenged us to stop imagining God's plan for our lives as being like a scripted play where everything we're supposed to say and do is predetermined. Instead, he challenged us to picture God's plan as improvisational theater where the actors are given some basic instructions and parameters, but then allowed to create the story in real time, riffing off of each other. How do you feel

- about Jeff’s suggestion? What resonates with you? What challenges you? What do you like – and dislike – about this way of seeing things?
4. According to a CNN documentary on “The History of Comedy,” two of the key rules for being an effective improv actor are: (1) You have to be in the moment, don’t think too much, and trust your gut; and (2) You have to embrace what happened right before you act or speak and make the most of it, rather than resisting it; otherwise you will destroy all the momentum of the skit. Those two rules echo the wisdom of Ecclesiastes 9:10, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do with all your might. . . .”
    - a. Tell us about a time in your life when you either practiced Improv Rule 1 or violated it. What happened, and how did it feel?
    - b. Tell us about a time in your life when you either practice Improve Rule 2 or violated it. What happened, and how did it feel?
    - c. Generally speaking, do you think these two improv rules are wise to live by? Why or why not?
  
  5. Another key improv rule is to . . . stay in character! To fulfill God’s plan for our lives, it’s imperative that we respond to the situations we encounter as “ministers of reconciliation.” In other words, to live into God’s plan for our lives, we have to trust our gut and respond to unexpected events in ways that are consistent with our role as ministers of reconciliation. Paul’s life gives us a great example of what it looks like when we do all this faithfully. At the end of the book of Acts, Paul’s missionary journeys were suddenly interrupted by an unexpected twist – an arrest and long period of imprisonment. Instead of resisting and resenting, Paul embraced what happened and seized the opportunities presented in the moment. While in prison he preached to influential Roman officials who heard his case, and he also had time to write hugely influential portions of the New Testament. Because of how he reacted, Paul accomplished more in prison than if he had been out. Lesson: Live in the moment, be open, be available, stay in character, and you will be able to live fully into your destiny.
    - a. When in your life has an unexpected turn of events channeled you in a direction that, in the end, proved to be far better than you probably would have chosen if you could write the script?
    - b. Psalm 139:16 says, “In your book were written all the days that were formed for me when none of them yet existed.” If you were God and you were writing in your book a plan for each person you created, what would that plan look like? Would you write detailed scripts predetermining the exact words and actions you wanted your people to take or would you act more like an improv director by writing out a general framework and some guidelines, but otherwise giving your

people freedom to be creative in the moment? If you were God, which choice would you make and why?

- c. Given all that we've explored together, has the way you think about God's plan for your life shifted any? If so, how?