

"THE GOD – SHAPED HOLE"

Preached by Grant Nuss on 28 December 2008 at Protea Valley Family Church, Cape Town, South Africa

(The song 'I still haven't found what I'm looking for' – U2 was played to the congregation.)

That song was recorded by the band U2 and speaks of searching for, and understanding one's spiritual beliefs, and the meaning of life. The question it asks is whether we've found the true meaning, are still searching for it, and whether this life is all there is?

To me the song helps us grasp the meaning of the text, and the message. So here's my spin (excuse the pun)! So what are we truly chasing after? Is it for an understanding of the essence of life, believing that there's just got to be more to it? Or, are we still trying to find the missing piece of the puzzle?

If that's us, do we find ourselves searching for fulfillment in the form of experiences and possessions, hoping to find the solution there? Bono has 'climbed the highest mountain, and has run through the fields'. He has searched for fulfillment through many things.

He has searched for fulfillment in love, both physical, and emotional: He has "kissed honey lips; Felt the healing finger tips." As pleasant as that might be, it also does not meet his ultimate need for meaning. He has explored the spiritual realm. He says;" I have spoke with the tongue of angels/ I have held the hand of the devil/ it was warm in the night/ I was cold as a stone."

Bono has investigated other religions, even the occult, but rendered as 'cold as a stone' in the process, still not having found what he was looking for, and still searching for the missing piece of the puzzle.

These thoughts are echoed through the writings of Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes where we see the world through the eyes of a wise man who tries to find meaning in temporary, human things. He explores worldly pleasure. But none give him a sense of meaning. Vanity, and meaningless, are the words he uses to describe them.

Reading: Ecclesiastes 2:1 – 11; (ESV) The Vanity of Self-Indulgence:

Phew! We see a little (or a lot) of most of us in there don't we? Solomon sought pleasure, self – indulgence, lust of material things, and, most definitely women. The three second rule was not part of his vocabulary – he simply saw, wanted, and conquered! He pursued wealth believing that it was the key to making him feel better about himself, his life, and his assumed status.

Now, some of us believe that God doesn't want us to have nice things, and for there to be pleasure in our lives. Well, He does! If He didn't He would not have given us our senses, including our sexual senses which are to be enjoyed. He does, however, stipulate how they should be used - as a faithful spouse in marriage alone.

Let's expand on this statement. Pornography, promises delight but brings despair and guilt. It is fantasy, and not called the "dirty little secret" for nothing. By viewing it are we being a faithful spouse?

Those of us who either lust after other people, or are involved in extra-marital affairs in the belief that they are what is missing in our lives, whether you're a believer or not – do not be foolish - it is wrong! Does it bring us closer to the meaning? What it does do is bring us grief and sorrow. It is only in a pure marriage where we will find the greatest delights. Let us turn from anything that it is contrary to that.

Ecclesiastes 9:9 says it so well; "Enjoy life with the woman whom you love all the days of your fleeting life which He has given to you under the sun; for this is your reward in life."

So, let us not continue to be betrayed by our eyes. Let Solomon be a lesson to us. May we never compromise God's plan being for one woman per man which was laid down for a very good reason. The key is for us to 'repent – and turn away from sin – for good!' Difficult – but necessary! The reality is that God can cure us of anything and the beauty of it all is - that He does!

Titus 3:3 says; "For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures". Are we slaves?

Let us not be foolish any longer, let us rid ourselves of any addiction that has become our bondage. It is a temporary high with long – term consequences. It is not the missing piece to the puzzle. Be free of it!

In the world we believe that education, knowledge, career, money, material things, and, ultimately, pleasure, are the essential ingredients required for happiness. Unfortunately some of these ingredients, especially pleasure, are short- term. Does it fill the hole in our hearts? Or does it simply leave us emptier than we were before?

Do people find what they are searching for in the greater church? Unfortunately some are filled with gossip, politics, hypocrisy, pride, and pretense, all in the name of truth. Likewise, if we had to honestly look at our own lives we would see something similar. We'd see pride, ego, selfishness, lust, and sin, so we surely do not find what we are looking for there either!

Some of us may still be convinced that we are able to find meaning in life through other avenues. So let's consider a few of these; We read of possessions in chapter 2 verse 7; some of us believe that we are what we own and that without it we cannot be happy. Solomon had slaves and flocks and said; "I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem", but was he happy?

In chapter 2 verse 8 he speaks of luxury which was only for the upper class in Solomon's time. Luxuries are now available to all, should you wish to stretch your credit card – there's always a price tag attached! Is this ultimately what we are looking for? Is this the missing piece of our puzzle? Does this fill what is missing in our lives?

Chapter 2 verse 9 speaks of fame with links to pride. Like Solomon we love to be recognised, respected, and considered good at what we do. Solomon says;" I became great and increased more than all who preceded me." More than a touch of

pride there! We tend to believe that if others think we've made it, then we'll really feel important. Solomon calls it a sham, but only realizes this when it was too late.

When we honestly take stock of our lives, we will notice that all of these things are shallow searches for meaning. Perhaps, like Solomon, we will call them vanity, empty, and meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 2:11 helped me understand this a whole lot better.

Solomon says it's like trying to catch the wind. Futile. Meaningless. It does not fill the hole in his heart. Then he sees the light, and finds out that hope comes from 'above the sun' where there is no evil. Some of us believe in the 'me, myself, I syndrome' where it's all about us! To you *Carpe Deum* means 'seize the day - in whatever way satisfies me'!

Those of us who think this way live without respect to what God might want for our lives. Those of us who think this way believe that we don't in fact have anything missing in our lives. We live our lives to the max. We strive hard to have a good life, however we interpret that. You and I live in a world where everything is on tap. We are taught to throw money at the problem if we feel that something is missing in our lives and make it go away. But there's got to be more to life!

Within each one of us, irrespective of our achievements, irrespective of our wealth, there is something that drives us to search for meaning, but we just cannot seem to put our finger on it. The more we look to the world for help, the longer it seems to elude us. We find that we are still left searching for something.

From the 21st century now let's hop into our time machine and picture ourselves back in the first century after the fall of man.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 refers to God's placing of "eternity in man's heart." God made man for His eternal purpose, and nothing in post-Fall time can bring us complete satisfaction.

Augustine, who lived between 354-430 AD had this to say;" What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace?"

He then tries in vain to fill this with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there, the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself."

Does this sound any different to what man experiences today in the 21st century?

Bono discovers that true meaning can only be found in God, and that this meaning can only be found in our restored relationship with Him through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ! The song says, "I believe in the kingdom come/Then all the colours will bleed into one/ You broke the bonds and you loosed the chains/ Carried the cross of my shame/ You know I believe it."

The line "you broke the bonds and you loosed the chains" is a biblical reality which indicates that you and I are enslaved to sin.

But it also firmly states that Jesus' substitutional death on the cross at Calvary has broken the bonds, and has set us free from this enslavement! Christ carried the cross of our shame in our place.

Romans 6:6 says; " We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. "

Your and my rebellion against God is the chains in which we are bound and in which we will eventually die if we continue this way. So, why is it that we repeatedly do what we know is wrong instead of doing what we know is right? I battle to understand that one!

In the book "Bono in Conversation", Bono, who does not pretend to be a theologian but loves Jesus Christ as we do, says; "The point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world, so that what we put out did not come back to us, and that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death. That's the point. It should keep us humbled. It's not our own good works that get us through the gates of Heaven."

The French philosopher **Blaise Pascal** (1623 – 1662), made an unbelievable statement when he stated that; "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which only Jesus Christ can fill." He stated that this hole is the innate longing of the human heart for something outside itself, something transcendent something "other."

So, if Pascal is right, then there can surely be no meaning without God. He says that the hole in our hearts is God – shaped and that God is the missing piece of the puzzle! The reflection of God's image in our lives is the ingredient that is missing. It is the missing piece of the puzzle, and it is the God-shaped hole in our hearts!

Solomon states that, for all the vanities in his life, the answer is Christ. Each disappointment and vanity has its remedy in Christ, the wisdom of God and the only true meaning to be found in life, is Jesus. This helps us understand the emptiness that those who do not know God as we do grapple with. With Christ, life is a shadow of the glories to come in a heaven which is only accessible through Christ alone.

This goes back to the sermon on our race of life as Christians. Paul makes it clear that although he has 'fully obtained' his relationship with Christ, he cannot merely sit back and rest on his laurels. He understands that he still has to put in the 'hard yards' here on earth, knowing that the glories are in heaven, and that he, and we, need to persevere to the end, striving toward that goal! What we are all striving toward is an ever closer relationship with God, for spiritual perfection, which will only be fully realised in heaven. The cross has changed your life, and it has changed mine.

So, we agree that there is still so much more for us to do, and even more for us to look forward to. Thankfully the power of sin has been broken and all this through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those of us who do not know Christ plug this God shaped hole with everything else - but Jesus.

If we agree that the God-shaped hole does exist in the hearts of man, then we need to respond by faith in Jesus Christ. When that happens, the God-shaped hole will be filled forever.

Let us not be like the poet who realized this fact too late and wrote;

"First I was dying to finish high school and start college.
 And then I was dying to finish college and start working.
 And then I was dying to marry and have children.
 And then I was dying for my children to grow old enough so I could return to work.
 And then I was dying to retire.
 And now, I am dying.... and suddenly realise - *I forgot to live*".

To rectify this we need to have a restored relationship with God, and accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. Jesus then fills this hole with love, faith, trust, goodness, righteousness, and hope. If you now realise that you need to take the first step to filling the hole in your heart, I will give you an opportunity to invite Jesus into your life, and the privilege of getting to know Him, in a moment.

God created us to serve Him and others, and, only when we live according to His design, and change our focus from pleasing ourselves to pleasing Him, do we find fulfillment and joy.

This means that we need to be;

- turning from sin, and turning to holiness
- turning from the world, and turning to heaven
- And turning from self, and turning to Jesus

With all the great things that He did here on earth, Jesus got the most pleasure in the way He pleased His Father in heaven. Solomon, and, in a 21st century context, Bono, accept that faith in God is the only way to find personal meaning. That life is worthless without God, and focus on Him instead of on temporary pleasure.

May we too realise that, without God, there is no truth or meaning to life, and, that without Jesus life is ultimately worthless? He alone is the source of true passion for all you do in life! For those of you who've realised that you need a restored relationship with God, get ready for a great adventure as you commit your life to Christ this morning.

And, for those of you who once had a committed relationship with Him and wish to recommit your life to Christ, this is your opportunity. Allow Him to fill that hole in your heart with faith, trust, hope, and love.

Whilst I first met Jesus at the age of eight, I recommitted my life to Him at the age of forty – four. Besides giving me a new way of life and rekindling the fire in my heart, He has transformed me, a sinner, from the inside out. One night in 2004 the three of us in our cell group in Nigeria, laid hands on each other and cried out to Jesus to use us in a mighty way, never imagining that He would use us as He has!

One of us pastors the church we planted in Lagos which, by the grace of God, now funds mission in Nigeria to the extent of \$60,000 per annum. The other is in his final year studying Theology in JHB and being used mightily there, and I go into the second year of my degree in Theology!

So, as you pray this prayer, I ask you to get **really** serious about God, and He will get **really** serious about you. Ask Him to use you mightily in His kingdom, cry out to Him, saying; "Here I am Lord, send me!" And He will.

God will motivate you by revealing your purpose to you, and. living your purpose will produce a passion and an energy within you that you never, ever thought possible. That is the truth!

The "Sinner's Prayer", and we are all sinners, are the words spoken by a person who has recognized their sin, and their need for a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

You can either choose to pray this aloud with me or into your heart;

"Father, I know that I have broken Your laws and my sins have separated me from You. I am truly sorry, and now I want to turn away from my past sinful life toward You.

Please forgive me, and help me avoid sinning again. I believe that Your Son, Jesus Christ died for my sins, was resurrected from the dead, is alive, and hears my prayer.

I now invite Jesus to become the Lord of my life, to rule and reign in my heart from this day forward. Please send Your Holy Spirit to help me obey You, and to do Your will for the rest of my life.

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen."

If you decided to repent of your sins and receive Christ today, welcome to God's family. We are all really excited for you! To grow closer to Him, the Bible tells us to now follow up on our commitment.

- Tell someone else about your new faith in Christ.
- Spend time with Him each day. Develop the daily habit of praying to Him and reading His Word. Ask God to increase your faith and your understanding of the Bible.
- Seek fellowship with other followers of Jesus. Develop a group of believing friends to answer your questions and support you.
- Find a church, I can recommend a great one – here, where you can worship God.

Let's pray; Heavenly Father, we thank You for giving us a new life in You. We thank You for paying our sin debt in full on the cross. We thank You for those who have accepted You, Jesus, as their Lord and Saviour today.

Holy Spirit it is my prayer that You now guide and shape these new lives. Give them wisdom, give them faith, give them discernment, give them love, give them passion, and give them energy to be used as Your hands, Your feet, and Your voice to a broken world.

Jesus, it is my prayer too that, those of us who may have been Christians for some time, but, have never felt the urge to get serious about Your will for their lives, will today cry out; "Here I am Lord, send me! This we pray in Your name Jesus, Amen!