

# MORPH: BE THE BODY



## DAZED

Dazed. That's the best way to describe it. Dazed, stunned, and spinning.

His mind traveled quickly through the previous nine years. Nine years ago he'd stepped away from a secure and stable income. Two options were before him. Like a fork in the road, he could go left or he could go right. He carefully considered the two options, but not too carefully. Never one to overanalyze, he made his choice and got on with it. Nine years had passed since that decision—long enough to know if he'd made the best choice.

Years one and two were exciting. They were filled with vision and hope. He incorporated; drafted a vision, mission, and strategy; secured investors; and hired his first employees. Yes, it was frightening but in an exhilarating sort of way. He was doing what he'd always wanted to do, and he knew how to do it. He had his plan, and he worked his plan, and although he knew anything was possible, he was confident he could pull it off.

Year three was frustrating, but he still had hope. Things didn't go quite as he'd planned. They secured three major clients, but two of them lasted mere months. The one that remained seemed decent enough but wouldn't be enough to keep things going. He worked like he'd never worked before, and to a certain degree, it helped. Another client signed on, and things were looking good enough.

Year four was tough, very tough. His star employee—the one he'd put his greatest confidence in—left the company, went to his toughest competitor, and along with taking the experience he'd gained, took two nearly-signed new clients. A month later, his very first client—the one he'd put the most into—dropped off the radar. Three weeks after that, bitterness swept over him when he discovered that the missing client was now being serviced by his competitor by none other than his former employee. Money was one thing, but this was betrayal, and it hurt.

Year five was exasperating.

Year six, almost to the day, was the end.

It took two years to find a decent job. How he made it through those two years is almost mysterious, but the debt he incurred reveals plenty. The job he finally secured wasn't great, but it was a job, and for the first few months he was just grateful to have it. In time, the gratitude didn't shift, he welcomed the steady paycheck, but reality settled in. This wasn't what he'd wanted. It was okay, but that was the problem, he didn't want "okay." He wasn't the kind to be satisfied with mediocre or good enough. He wanted to soar, and now he was stuck.

Most days he got through it all right, but on this day, something happened.

He'd taken a break from work to check the latest news, and there it was. Nine years before he'd had a choice. He'd stood at that fork in the road where he could have gone left or gone right. He'd made his choice, and it was to go it alone. He liked the team he'd been asked to partner with, the other option, but he just couldn't get peace about dividing the pie. He didn't just want to be on some winning team. He wanted to be the sole victor, the one they'd all admire, the envy of the industry. But there they were, front and center on the screen, with a graph to the right showing their meteoric growth over the last nine years. The story tracked their humble beginnings to the latest breaking news. Not only had they established market dominance in their industry, but they just took the company public, and the original owners were now flush with staggering amounts of stock. He recognized their faces. There was no mistaking it. They were the ones who had pleaded with him to go with them, to be one of the team, to work together and collaborate on what they thought would be an amazing opportunity. He'd passed, and as much as he wanted to say that he didn't have any regrets, he couldn't help but grit his teeth and wish for a do-over.

## CRITICAL MOMENTS

Life has its critical moments. Those are the times when we can go left or go right and a choice must be made. *Which school should I attend? Which job should I take? Should I marry this person or move on?* Often, we know when we're facing these critical moments, but not always. It's interesting to look back and find them. *Where would I be had I not gone to that dinner?* The dinner might have been an afterthought, a late or minor decision, but crazy things can happen because of a dinner. Maybe a conversation turns into a job opportunity. Maybe a new friendship turns into the love of your life. Maybe that evening away from home protects you from danger. Comb our personal histories, and we find them—critical moments when everything changed.

Scripture records such moments. One wonders how Peter, Andrew, James, and John might have looked back on a critical moment, a decision that would change the trajectory of their lives...

*As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him.*

*Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. (Matthew 4:18-22)*

The fact that we have this moment recorded reveals the reflection these men must have given it. It was this very moment, that day when they laid down their nets, that that they engaged a movement that would capture their attention for the rest of their lives. Why did they go? What motivated their action? Why would they be willing to sacrifice their livelihood to follow the man standing on the shore?

No doubt we don't get the full story. It's unlikely Jesus was a stranger to them. There's no mistaking Jesus' pitch, however. He wanted them to follow, and if they would, they would no longer live for the immediacy of the moment. For the rest of their days, by simply laying down their nets and following the man on the shore, they would participate in a movement that would transform lives. There's something powerful and important in this. It's easily missed. Consider Christ's description of true followers.

## TRUE DEPTH

There is a dangerous misperception about what it means to be an authentic follower of Christ. To be sure, maturity in Christ will display itself in a multitude of ways. That person will have increased fruit of the Spirit, he or she will have greater depth of understanding, there will be increased ability to explain and teach the faith. With that said, consider again how Christ described the result of following him. If they followed him, he would train them, empower them, and equip them to be “*fishers of men.*”

If depth for the authentic follower of Christ is accompanied by lesser involvement in people’s lives, then that depth is a sham. Depth of faith and depth of impact are nearly synonymous in Scripture. It is an unfortunate reality that many equate spiritual maturity solely with theological precision. The danger here is not the unimportance of theology. Theological depth and accuracy are absolutely critical, but there is a deadly misperception that God’s sole concern is a person’s intellectual ascent. The Pharisees were notorious for this. Their lives were consumed with rote memory of Scripture’s finest details coupled with rigorous application of the many legalities. Jesus described, though, what happened when a person followed a Pharisee. In speaking to the Pharisees, he said:

*You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. (Matthew 23:15)*

Yes, the result of the Pharisees’ labors was an impact on people, but according to Christ, it made people worse, not better. Truly following Christ, true depth, true maturity will be seen in the lives of those who engage the lives around them for the greatest of good.

How do we do this? How do we get out of ourselves and into the lives of those around us? The world abounds with suffering. We would like to make a difference in the midst of the abounding needs, but how do we genuinely do this? How do we not miss the opportunity before us and invest our lives in other things? It’s easy to say, “Yes, I’ll follow Christ. I’ll participate in making a difference in this world.” But then there’s reality. Life abounds with demanding jobs, deadlines at school, diapers that need changing, and bills that need paying. How do we discern the voice of God in our own lives, and follow him into a life of impacting the world for good?

This module is designed to help us answer these questions. As we engage this experience, there is an essential concept we must carry with us.

## GOD THROUGH US

The concept may sound odd at first—a bit contrarian—but let the thought simmer. This thought will be woven through and expressed in every week that comes. Miss this, and you miss everything. Embrace this, and you will discover liberation and empowerment.

Consider this:

We do not influence the world for God. Rather, we allow God to influence the world through us.

Or put another way:

We don’t go at it alone.

If we attempt to impress God, to do this work for God, to approach the suffering in this world with our own plan and our own agenda, we will be intensely frustrated. Scripture states that God “*is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all humanity life and breath and everything else*” (Acts 17:25). God is not hoping we do work for him, work by our own strength, work

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that would impress him. Rather, God is looking to do work through us. He is interested in allowing us to be his hands and feet, his body, in a world seemingly determined to reject him. This leads to what may be the most freeing, and simultaneously frustrating, aspects of participating in the work of God.

The way God works, the method he has chosen to bring hope and healing to the world around us, is not through individuals working as individuals, but through individuals working as a team, a community, or in Scripture's language, a body. This group of people, the body of Christ, is more than just a collection of people. This is a group of people, indwelt with the presence of God, who collectively represent Christ in this world. Which underscores this concept that we don't influence the world for God; rather, we allow God to influence the world through us. In speaking of his own life, Christ himself said, "*the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does, the Son also does*" (John 5:19). If this was true for the body of Christ that walked the planet two thousand years ago, it continues to be true for the body of Christ that walks the planet today in and through his followers. We are not here to come up with our own solution to what humanity needs. We are here to participate in God's solution and to enjoy the stunning gift of being instruments in his hands. This is an opportunity of upmost significance. This *Morph* experience, however, is susceptible to a potential fatal flaw.

## POTENTIAL FATAL FLAW

Spiritual exercises, like *Morph*, are susceptible to a fatal flaw. It's the "*learn a lot but do nothing with it*" flaw. Or you might call it the "*I'm really excited about this and then forget about it*" flaw. It's relatively easy to read, reflect, and discuss. It's more challenging to take lasting action. Confirmation that this *Morph* experience is worth your effort will not be determined in the immediate moment but by what's happening in and through your life weeks, months, and years after this experience is over.

This particular *Morph* module, *Be the Body*, is designed to motivate and equip participants to change the world by passionately participating in the body of Christ. To facilitate lasting impact, and to protect against the "*do nothing*" flaw, over the eight weeks of this module, you will be asked to engage four critical elements.

- Reading
- Morph Me
- Conversations with God
- Conversations with People

By now, these categories are familiar to those for whom this is not your first *Morph* experience. Increased clarity on two of the elements, though—the Conversations with God and the Morph Me exercises—is critical to protection against the "*learn a lot but do nothing with it*" flaw.

## CONVERSATIONS WITH GOD

To truly morph, to truly experience transformation from the inside to the outside, this entire experience must be a conversation and an encounter with God. To facilitate this, you are asked to engage the voice of God through Luke and Acts. The choice of these two portions of Scripture is highly intentional. Luke shows the body of Christ when Christ himself walked this earth. Acts shows the body of Christ when Christ transitioned to making his presence known through his earliest followers. As you read these, you're encouraged to not just read, but to listen. Listen for the voice of God standing on the side of the sea. Peter, Andrew, James, and John heard the voice of God, and their lives, along with our lives, were impacted by their choice. Who will be impacted by the choice you make? What will happen a year from now, ten years from now, a thousand years from now because of

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the choice you make? God still beckons, still calls, still invites us to participate. It's the hope and prayer of this experience that you will hear his voice and follow with great boldness and passion.

## MORPH ME

To facilitate lasting impact, and to protect against the “do nothing” flaw, over the eight weeks of this module, you will be asked to build what we call *My Portfolio*. *My Portfolio* is a personalized assessment of how you can best impact the world in and through the body of Christ. A deep conviction of this experience is that every individual has a unique contribution to make, and this unique contribution is best expressed in and through community—through the body of Christ. This personalized assessment, *My Portfolio*, will be done from eight vantage points:

My World  
My Opportunities  
My Self  
My Weaknesses

My Gifts  
My Resources  
My Network  
My Plan

## PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

A few important practical suggestions:

### *To the Newcomers*

*Morph: Be the Body* works very much like *Morph: Love God*. If you did not complete *Morph: Love God* before engaging this experience, you will want to complete the *Love God Primer*, downloadable at [www.morphonline.org](http://www.morphonline.org) under the *Get Materials* tab. This primer gives the essentials for this experience, and is important to orientate you to what you will experience in this module. Yes, it will take added investment of time and energy, but make the investment. It's important to this experience.

### *Daily Rhythm*

*Morph: Be the Body* is both a daily and a weekly experience. On a daily basis, the above-mentioned Conversations with God are encouraged. To complement the reading of Luke and Acts, each week you will be asked to memorize two brief passages of Scripture. Although this may sound like a tangential exercise, it isn't. Associated with each of the four *Morph* modules are twenty-five selected passages for memory and meditation. By engaging these passages, and by truly memorizing them, you will carry one hundred passages of Scripture with you from completing the four *Morph* modules. The specifics of the readings and exercises will be forgotten in time, but if you continue to hear God's voice through these passages in the coming years, this *Morph* experience will continue to bring transformation. To complete all twenty-five passages, the memory effort will go beyond the eight weeks of this module. You're encouraged to make this a high priority. It's worth the effort.

As a practical suggestion, consider identifying a time each day when you will engage these Conversations with God and the associated memory and mediation. You may want to identify a specific time for the readings (first thing in the morning, before going to bed, etc.), and then a second brief time in the day to review the Scripture memory passages. Yes, this will take energy and effort, but there is no more important voice to consistently and intentionally engage than the voice of God. If you're new to *Morph*, or if it's been a while, you'll want to read the Week Two section of the *Love God Primer* to better understand the Read-Memorize-Meditate format encouraged in this experience. You can find this at [www.morphonline.org](http://www.morphonline.org) under the *Get Materials* tab.

### *Weekly Rhythm*

There are three aspects of the weekly rhythm. There is a brief online video, a reading, and a Morph Me exercise to apply the reading. As a practical suggestion, like the just mentioned Conversations with

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God, consider identifying a standing time during the week when you'll individually engage the *Morph* materials. Depending upon how much time and energy you invest, you'll want to allow one to two hours.

#### *Running Partners and Small Groups*

*Morph* is an experience that cannot be completed alone but must be done in community. If you're reading this on your own, simply recruit a friend or two, and go through this module together. As with other *Morph* modules, you're encouraged to meet each week; but with groups of five or more, you're encouraged to meet every other week as Running Partners (two to four people), and every other week as a Small Group (five or more people). If your group is four or fewer people, simply meet as a group every week. The conversation guides at the end of each week reflect this rhythm.

#### *Adding New People to Your Group*

Because *Morph* is a four-module experience, it's natural to think newcomers can't join your group until all four modules are complete. Such thinking, though, can damage your group. Newcomers are encouraged and can be assimilated in a number of ways. If the number of people you're assimilating is small compared to the number of people in the existing group, simply have them read the *Love God Primer* and jump in. If you're assimilating a group of people that is comparable to the number of people already in the group, consider subgrouping during your group meeting times. If you do so, subgroups can be in the same or different *Morph* modules; it doesn't matter. If they're in different modules, simply bring the group together for times of prayer and community, but have different people facilitate the multiple conversations.

## **THIS CRITICAL MOMENT**

Life has its critical moments—those moments we can go left or go right and a choice must be made. This module is a fork in the road. It's a moment—an experience—where you can thoughtfully consider what's truly involved in participating in the body of Christ. As you engage this experience, you will discover that this fork in the road—this critical moment—is not a plea to add a little volunteerism to your life, and it is not a plea to do a good deed every now and then. Participants in the body of Christ are revolutionaries—they are freedom fighters, they are healers of our deepest wounds, they are those who put it all on the line for the greatest of good. Such opportunities are not to be taken lightly. This is not an experience where you're encouraged to nod your heads and check the boxes. You're encouraged to wrestle, to object, to struggle with what you're hearing. Quick agreement is commonly followed by passing commitment. If you do this, if you truly and passionately engage, this experience will not be an end in and of itself, but it will be an experience you step through into the adventure of greater impact and influence for the greatest of good.