



GOSPEL BASICS

FOLLOWING JESUS
FOR ALL OF LIFE

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people,¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you."

(Titus 2:11-15)

Gospel Formed Life, Spokane WA 99212

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preface

an **Introduction** to the **Basics**

Gospel Basics is the result of 20+ years of church-based disciple-making mission. It was birthed among a group of local churches as a resource for helping individuals, groups, and churches have a common language for all that Jesus has accomplished for us, how faith in Jesus changes us, and how Jesus intends to continue his mission through us in all of life.

While many things are important, only one thing can be our Primary Aim. We say it like this: **to form whole-hearted disciples of Jesus in life-shaping relationship for everyday disciple-making mission.** That's the charge Jesus gave his disciples 2000 years ago, and this resource is designed to help accomplish that purpose.

Unfortunately, many disciples, groups, and churches have prioritized a hundred other things, all with varying degrees of importance. From Sunday gatherings with solid, biblical, Christ-honoring preaching and worship to life-giving small groups with Bible study, prayer, and evangelism, there's no shortage of good things we can be doing as leaders. And we should do the best things!

But in our experience, the main thing — our Primary Aim! — is often missing from our churches. We may have good priorities and healthy structures, but we don't have clarity on what we are all aiming to see happen in our lives and the lives of the people we're called to serve. And in the rare occasion that we do have this clarity, we lack an intentional, systematic, and ongoing way to move people toward that aim.

Gospel Basics is designed to both clarify our aim and create a simple, reproducible process for forming disciples in the way of Jesus.

Section 1 begins with the Importance of the Gospel, attempting to clarify the centrality, power, and significance of the good news — the very thing Jesus says is at the heart of the Bible (Luke 24) and Paul says is “of first importance” (1 Cor. 15). What is the gospel? What do we mean when we use that word? And why does it matter?

Over the next 3 Sections, we look at the Power of the Gospel, unpacking all God has accomplished for us in the life and death, resurrection and ascension, and the soon and coming return of Jesus. Through Jesus, we are saved from the penalty of sin (Past: Section 2), are being saved from the power of sin (Present: Section 3), and will be saved from the presence of sin (Future: Section 4).

Section 5 is an invitation to Living the Gospel-Formed Life, offering a model of self-reflective, heart-level repentance and Jesus-focused rejoicing in all we have in the gospel. Our aim here is that the gospel moves from good news to great power, enabling effective and fruitful discipleship. In light of all we have in Jesus, we aim to become whole-hearted disciples.

Sections 6-8 explore our Gospel Identity, considering how our baptism initiates us into a new set of life-shaping relationships. In the Great Commission, we’re instructed to baptize new believers “into the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,” fully identifying ourselves with the Triune God. In the Father, we are Family (Section 6); in the Son, we are Servants (Section 7); in the Spirit, we are Missionaries (Section 8). The church is all those things: a Family of Servants and Missionaries, sent by Jesus to make disciples who make disciples. This is the kind of life-shaping relationship that Jesus intends his church to embody.

Sections 9-10 move us into Gospel Purpose, equipping us to join Jesus in everyday disciple-making mission. The gospel is not just news about how we can be reconciled to God; it is also the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God and the promise of a new world coming! In Section 9, we explore the Grand Narrative of the Bible and what it looks like for us to find our lives in that Story. In Section 10, we pull all the threads of Gospel Basics together, encouraging every disciple to live from the power of the gospel for the purpose of the gospel. Together, we’ll learn to orient our lives around everyday disciple-making mission.

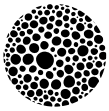
Again, Gospel Basics has this Primary Aim: To form whole-hearted disciples of Jesus in life-shaping relationships for everyday disciple-making mission.

If you’re eager to have a deeper grasp of all that is yours in the gospel, hungry to be changed by grace and the power of the Spirit, and longing to get yourself wrapped up in the work of Jesus in the world, this is the resource you’ve been looking for.

How to Use this Resource:

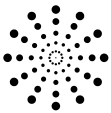
This resource has been used by individuals, communities, and whole churches. It has been used in rural and urban settings and in settings as diverse as the jungles of Nicaragua and the war-torn cities of Ukraine. While you can do it alone, it is best done in smaller communities, though larger classes could be facilitated using the content.

The flow of each Section is really simple and is designed to move from self-reflection and reading to discussion and learning in the community.



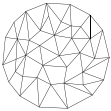
The Big Picture.

Each Section begins with The Big Picture, which summarizes the Section's content and invites initial reflection.



The Reading.

In The Reading, you'll get the main content: a mix of short teachings, biblical studies, memorable quotes, and comprehension questions.



The Discussion.

All of that will prepare you for The Discussion, a series of summary questions that ask you to come to your group ready to share what you're learning. Use the blank pages to take additional notes during your group discussion time.



The Application.

After your discussion time, The Application invites you to reflect on the whole Section and design specific action steps in light of what you're learning.

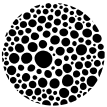
When you come together as a group, come prepared to share openly and honestly and to cultivate trusting relationships by listening well, encouraging one another abundantly, asking sincere and open-ended questions, and pointing one another to Jesus.

Most participants find it helpful to complete "The Big Picture," "The Reading," and "The Discussion" in preparation for the group or classroom setting, and to complete "The Application" section after the group discussion.

In addition, a series of videos accompany each Section and help to clarify and apply the content. You can find all those videos at www.somaspokane.org/gospelbasics

section 1

the Importance of the Gospel



The Big Picture.

What's the point?

Key Question: What is the main message of Biblical Christianity?

Key Answer: It's about Jesus. All about Jesus.

If you spend much time around the church, you'll find we use the word "gospel" a lot, and that word means a lot. Part of the goal of this course is unpack all that is meant by the word "gospel" so that by the end of it, when you hear someone say "the gospel," you can immediately call to mind all that is meant by that one word. The gospel is the story of everything that Jesus has done for us in his life and death and resurrection. The gospel is the good news about God's action in the world to save us from sin, death, and separation from God. The gospel is an announcement about all that Jesus has accomplished for us and the promise of a new world coming where we can enjoy God forever! The gospel is the message about the riches of God's grace to us through Jesus – in the past, present, and future! So that word – gospel – is a shorthand way of speaking about something really, really big!

One way to think about it is like the solar system: What is the thing at the very center, which everything else in the Christian life orbits around? It's not church attendance, Bible study or prayer, or doing good in the world, as important as those things are.

The entire Bible, from start to finish, points to the answer: Jesus, and His life, death, and resurrection. The gospel is the central message of Christianity and everything else orbits around it. According to Jesus, understanding the gospel is absolutely central. It is of utmost importance. It is the primary message of the Bible.

The gospel is the good news of what God has done for humanity through Jesus – His sacrifice, the forgiveness of sins, and the offer of eternal life – so that humanity can worship and enjoy God forever. The gospel is not about what we do for God but about what God has already done for us, and what is now possible for us through what God has done.

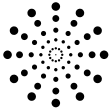
And as we'll see in this study, the gospel is not merely the diving board off of which we jump into the pool of Christianity, but the pool itself – we grow as Christians not by going beyond the gospel, but by going deeper into it, enjoying all God has won for us in Jesus. Ultimately, the gospel is the good news that God has done everything necessary for us to enjoy God forever!

Preliminary Questions

What would you say is the primary message of Christianity? What would you say Christianity is all about?

Who or what has most shaped your view of Christianity? How did you first learn about the Christian faith?

1 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOSPEL



The Reading.

What does the Bible say about this?

The heart of Christianity is the Gospel. Gospel means “good news” and was a word used by Jesus and the early church to describe the core content of Christianity. When people think about Christianity many things come to mind, but the message of the Gospel is often not the first thing. If there is one thing about Christianity that is important to understand, either for Christians or people exploring Christianity, it is the message of the Gospel.

The Gospel is Primary: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures...”(1 Corinthians 15:3)

The Gospel is Powerful: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” (Romans 1:16)

The Gospel is Profound: “It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.” (1 Peter 1:12)

NOTABLE QUOTE

If there's anything in life that we should be passionate about, it's the gospel. And I don't mean passionate only about sharing it with others. I mean passionate about thinking about it, dwelling on it, rejoicing in it, allowing it to color the way we look at the world. Only one thing can be of first importance to each of us. And only the gospel ought to be.

C. J. MAHANEY

The Origins of the Word ‘Gospel’

In the Roman world, “gospel”—meaning “good news”—was a term applied to any historical event of such significance that it actually changed the course of history for those to whom it was proclaimed. For example, the birth of Caesar Augustus was “gospel” because his birth

promised a new era of prosperity and the blessing of the gods for the whole Roman world. The early Christians used the word to sum up the central message about Jesus.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, a British preacher from the early 20th century, explains that when a king went to war and lost, he would immediately send generals throughout the cities and villages to prepare the common people for war. Because the battle had been lost, the enemy would advance to take the people captive, and if anyone wanted to live they would need to fight for their lives. Their livelihood, their hope, and their future was, essentially, in their own hands.

On the other hand, Lloyd-Jones says, when the king won a great victory on the front lines, he would send messengers to proclaim the good news throughout the cities and villages of the Empire. These men were not generals telling the people to prepare for battle; rather, they were messengers (evangelists!) carrying the good news message (gospel!) that the livelihood, hope, and future of the people had been secured on their behalf by the king, though they themselves had not lifted a finger!

Let's assume you know nothing about the content of the gospel in Christianity. Based solely on the historical use of the word, what are some assumptions you can make about what the gospel is and what it is not?

Lloyd-Jones goes on to say that the difference between sending generals and sending messengers is the difference between religion and the gospel message.

The Gospel	Religion
News about what Jesus has done for us	Instructions about what we must do for God
Elicits joy and gratitude	Elicits fear and stress
Sends messengers who spread the good news that our lives are now safe because of King Jesus' victory	Sends commanders who tell people they must fight for themselves if they want to save their lives

Good News from God's Word

To understand the message of the gospel, the best place to begin is the Bible itself. Below each of the following scriptures, write down 2-3 key points that summarize that passage. Don't be surprised if the same key points continue to emerge.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3:16-17)

“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified [made right with God] freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3:23)

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Ephesians 2:8-10)

When I was a new Christian, I was enamored with the story of David and Goliath. If you know the story, God's chosen people are terrified because they're fighting the Philistines, who are represented on the battlefield by the giant Goliath. So God chooses young David to represent his people on the battlefield, and he defeats the giant with only a sling and five smooth stones.

In my young mind, this story was an inspiration, a Christian fable that proved that if I could just find the right "five smooth stones" in my own life, that I could overcome my own giants and live victoriously. I even heard preachers talk about this from the pulpit, reducing the story to little more than a Christian pep talk.

But later in my life, a mature believer helped me to see that I had been misunderstanding that story the whole time. He patiently explained to me that if I should identify with anyone in the story, it wasn't the protagonist David. I should identify with the other Israelites: the ones who were quaking in fear, too weak and feeble to save themselves. And if I could read it that way, I could see the "Gospel" reflected in that story: that the True King volunteered to fight the battle for God's people, and vanquished their enemy for them so that they could claim His victory as their own. To my delight, the story of David and Goliath wasn't a moralistic fable giving me more religious things to do, but rather a real-life metaphor intended to show me the beauty of trusting in my True King.

And the David and Goliath story is only one example of this sort of good news hidden in plain sight in the Bible. When you start reading through the lens of the true gospel, all the rest of scripture starts to make more sense - not as a list of things to do, but as a story in which the True King is creating a New Kingdom, and you and I are mercifully invited into it.

Good News for Everyday Life

The specific claims of the gospel makes Christianity unique among all religions. Some people say that all religions basically teach the same thing, but often those people have never studied religions closely. While there are many similarities among religions, the message of the Gospel makes Christianity fundamentally different. Anyone whose life is shaped by the truth of the gospel and all Jesus has done on our behalf will experience a profound shift in their motives, relationships, and behaviors.

But what has Jesus done on my behalf? And how does that make Gospel Christianity different?

Jesus is the Son of God who died as a perfect substitute, taking the penalty for my sin.

Because humans have failed to live according to God's ways, we have made ourselves God's enemies and brought upon ourselves God's just judgment. On the cross, Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath against me and my sin to the very last drop; there is

none left for me when I place my faith in Him. I recognize that my sin put Jesus on the cross, and that humbles me, but I also recognize that He freely chose to go to the cross for me. That reality energizes me to live faithfully before Him. This is why Paul, in Romans 8.1 says: “There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!” We are no longer guilty before God. We have been “justified” or made right with Him and we have peace with Him. Our moral failure does not hinder our relationship with God.

Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God, and gives me his record.

In every way, He was perfectly pleasing to God, absolutely faithful, and entirely obedient, doing what none of us could do ourselves. When I put faith in Him, I’m asking God to deal with me not according to my performance in life but according to Jesus’ performance on my behalf. We are fundamentally shifting our sense of worth and identity from ourselves and our life record to Him and His life record. When that happens, God no longer considers me a rebel against Him but treats me as a “dearly beloved son.” Our experience of this incredible truth leads to a deep, humble gratitude, and a zealous desire to flee from sin because it is incompatible with who we are now.

Jesus rose from the dead and defeated sin, death, and hell, and will return to restore the world so we can live in it with Him forever.

Jesus is alive today and promises to take control of my heart and life, actually living in me by His Spirit. When Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, He sent the Holy Spirit to live in us, empowering us for growth in character, gifting us for ministry in the world, and leading us into all truth. By faith in Him I can walk in consistent victory over my sin, the patterns of sin in the world, and Satan’s work. One day, Jesus will return to re-make the world as He intended it to be in the beginning. He will set all things right and bring me to be with Him forever.

Christians, then, are not primarily a group of people who all believe the same things and perform certain rituals and religious observances. The radical claim of the New Testament—and of Jesus Himself—is that Christians are new people, a new humanity, created in and through the work of Jesus Christ. Our sin has been forgiven because of Jesus. God treats us as beloved children because of Jesus. The Spirit of God comes to take up residence in our hearts and we have a secure future. We are not who we used to be—rather, we are “in Christ”. All that belongs to Jesus is ours now, and our future is life in God’s kingdom with God forever! There is simply no other religion or faith that offers grace—the unmerited delight of God, given as a gift through faith in Jesus Christ.

The gospel is the dynamic power of the Christian life, leading to delight in God and heart-level obedience to His ways. Consider the following contrasts between Religion and the Gospel (adapted from Dr. Timothy Keller):

	Religion	Gospel
Primary Message	Salvation is <i>earned</i> based on what you do for God.	Salvation is a <i>free</i> gift based on what God has done for you.
Obedience	I <i>begrudgingly</i> obey God because I have to earn his acceptance. I <i>resent</i> God.	I <i>gladly</i> obey God because I have freely received his acceptance. I <i>delight</i> in honoring God.
Relationship with God	I am always uncertain about my right standing before God because I never know if I have done enough to please God. The result is <i>anxiety</i> and <i>insecurity</i> . I fear God.	I am always certain of my right standing before God because Jesus has already done enough for God to be pleased with me. The result is <i>peace</i> and <i>security</i> . I love God.
View of Self	My self-view is constantly changing because it is based on how well I do at any given moment. When I do poorly I am <i>despondent</i> . When I do well I am <i>prideful</i> .	My self-view stays grounded in the fact that my value is based on what Jesus has already done for me. When I do poorly I am <i>humbled</i> because I'm reminded of my need for a savior, but I am not despondent because I have an all-sufficient savior. When I do well I am <i>grateful</i> because God is at work in my life, but I am not prideful because it is more God's work than my work.
View of Others	Since my identity is based on what I accomplish and how moral I am, I <i>judge</i> people who are 'worse' than me and I am <i>jealous</i> of people who are 'better' than me.	Since my identity is based on what Jesus accomplished for me and how moral he was, I <i>sympathize</i> with people who are 'worse' than me because I need a savior just as much as they do, and I <i>celebrate</i> those who are 'better' than me because their lives honor the savior I love.

Fig. 1a

In Religion, we obey in order to be accepted by God, fearing what he might do if we're disobedient. The Gospel motivates us to obedient Christian living by telling us that because of Jesus we are already accepted, that the judgment against our sin has fallen on Jesus, and that there is no guilt or condemnation left for us.

In Religion, I obey in order to get things from God, often making promises about what I will do or how I will change. The Gospel tells me what God has done for me, and his grace teaches me to obey out of joyful gratitude for all that he has already given me. I obey to enjoy God.

In Religion, my identity and self-worth are based on what I can accomplish, on how hard I work, or on how moral I am. Therefore, I look down on others who aren't as moral or obedient as me. But in the Gospel, my identity and self-worth are based on God's love for me in Jesus, even while I was his enemy, unable to accomplish or earn his love by my actions. Therefore, I can't look down on someone different than me because I am no better than they are – and probably worse.

DR. TIMOTHY KELLER

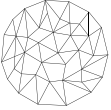
The Gospel Changes Everything!

The gospel separates Christianity from any and every other religion. On the one hand, the gospel teaches us that we are so bad Jesus had to die for us. It absolutely humbles us because it teaches that our sin is offensive to a holy and just God – and our sin is worse than we know or would ever dare admit. On the other hand, the gospel lifts us up and causes us to rejoice because it says that we are so loved by God that Jesus delighted to die for us. It was God's plan to rescue us by sacrificing His own Son, and in doing so God brings us great joy and Himself great glory.

As Christians, we want to remember, rejoice in, and live out of what God has done for us in Jesus. This means both a growing awareness of our sinfulness (leading to deeper humility) and a growing awareness of how good and gracious God is toward us (leading to greater confidence).

Here's the point: We don't ever move past the gospel. Where we begin is where we stay. True Christianity always springs from growing gospel-centeredness in our lives. We grow in grace each day, to more fully work the reality of what God has done for us into the everyday parts of our lives. **Christianity is fundamentally about learning how to live as a new person in Christ, where our hearts are set on Jesus Christ and our lives are the overflow of our joy in God.**

1 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOSPEL



The Discussion.

Write your answers here to prepare for group discussion.

Look back at your answers to the preliminary questions in the **Big Picture** section of this chapter. In light of the content in this section, has your initial answer changed? What would you say is the primary message of Christianity? What would you say Christianity is all about?

Having read through the chart in Fig. 1a, what 'religious' characteristics do you see in yourself? (Note: you don't have to ascribe to any religion to have these characteristics. Most people, religious or not, base their identity on what they do).

What characteristics of a gospel-shaped life are most appealing to you?

Reflection: If being a Christian is about not just believing in Jesus but about rejoicing in His work; not just about going to church but about finding your identity in being a beloved child of God; and not just about doing the right things but about living from the overflow of joy in Jesus; **would you say that you are a Christian?** Why or why not?

If you are ready to respond to the good news of the gospel, there are 2 simple (but meaningful) things you must do. First, we must agree with God about our need for Jesus' saving work, be honest about our sinful state, and receive his forgiveness. Second, we must surrender our lives to the empowering leadership of Jesus, asking him to live in us and through us by His Spirit.

You could pray something like this: *"Father God, thank you for sending Jesus to live for me and die for me. I need your forgiveness. And I give you my life. Please fill me with your Spirit and lead me. Thank you Father for receiving me as your beloved child."* If you've taken this step, let someone in your group know today!

discussion notes

1 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOSPEL

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1 THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOSPEL



The Application.

Practically, how does this change your life?

It's one thing to know the Gospel is important, but for most people, it takes a lifetime of intentional reflection and application for the gospel to make its way down deep into our hearts. That long, slow process is the journey we are all on as followers of Jesus.

We have to be committed to applying these profound spiritual truths into our lives, and begin to learn to live in light of what we are coming to know. Each Section of Gospel Basics will end with a handful of questions to help you apply what you're learning.

As we wrap up this Section on the Importance of the Gospel, consider these summaries of the gospel message. What stands out to you?

NOTABLE QUOTES

Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God fully accomplishes salvation for us, rescuing us from judgment for sin into fellowship with him, and then restores the creation in which we can enjoy our new life together with him forever.

DR. TIMOTHY KELLER

The gospel is the royal announcement that the crucified and risen Jesus, who died for our sins and rose again, has been enthroned as the true Lord of the world.

N.T. WRIGHT

The Gospel is the news that Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, died for our sins and rose again, eternally triumphant over all his enemies, so that there is now no condemnation for those who believe, but only everlasting joy.

JOHN PIPER

The gospel is the announcement that God has reconciled us to Himself by sending His Son Jesus to die as a substitute for our sins, and that all who repent and believe have eternal life in Him.

J.D. GREAR

Based on the key points from the Scriptures, readings, and discussion this week, write down several summary statements that capture the message of the Gospel.

Now in 1-3 sentences, using your own words, answer the question: What is the Gospel message? And as I come to deeply believe that message, what changes will I begin to see in my life?

Because the gospel is an announcement of good news, it is meant to be shared. Who in your life might benefit from hearing what you're learning about the gospel? What might you want to share with them? And why might it be good news to them?

Gospel Power: Salvation in Three Tenses.

In Romans 1:16, the Apostle Paul says the gospel “is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” The announcement about all that Jesus has accomplished for us in history is not just a set of interesting ideas to ponder, though they are! Paul doesn’t just say the gospel is wonderful or amazing, though it certainly is! He says the gospel is the power of God! Through Jesus — his life and death, resurrection and ascension, and his soon and coming return — God is accomplishing salvation for us. The gospel is God’s power for salvation — all we must do is believe it!

Over the next three sections we will examine the message of the gospel in greater detail, as well as search out some of its implications for everyday life. Throughout the Bible, salvation is spoken of as an accomplished event (past tense), an ongoing experience (present tense), and a coming reality (future tense). We can summarize the saving power of the gospel in three statements:

We have **been** saved from the **penalty** of sin
because of Jesus’ life and death. (Past)

We are **being** saved from the **power** of sin
because of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. (Present)

We **will be** saved from the **presence** of sin
because of Jesus’ return. (Future)

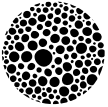
What is common among each of the statements above? What is different?

The Gospel is the message or “good news” about what has been accomplished on our behalf, though we’ve done nothing to earn or merit it. Rather, through faith in Jesus Christ — by trusting our lives to His work on our behalf — we receive all the benefits of his work!

Over the next 3 Sections we’ll look in depth at salvation in each of the three tenses.

section **2**

Formed by the Gospel [past]



The Big Picture.

What's the point?

Key Question: What has been accomplished for us, in the past, by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Key Answer: We have been saved from the penalty of sin because of Jesus' life and death.

Every human being knows the feeling of guilt. Whether we've done what we know we shouldn't, or we've not done what we know we should, we know we're not who we ought to be! Our sense of guilt drives us to hiding (concealing the ugly parts) or to performing (pretending we're better than we are). In both cases, we're "justifying ourselves" – trying to defend our weaknesses and bolster our strengths in order to be acceptable to others, to ourselves – and even to God.

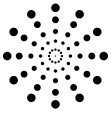
The bad news is that we can never truly justify ourselves before God – he sees and knows everything, and our guilt before him is real, not just a feeling. He knows every twisted thing about us, and he's not impressed with our pretending and hiding!

But the really good news is that, in the life and death of Jesus, God forgives our sin, removes our guilt, and frees us from the need to hide or pretend!

Preliminary Questions

What are a few ways you define yourself? What are a few things you look to for a sense of worth or significance?

What happens if/when those things are threatened or lost?



The Reading.

What does the Bible say about this?

Most of us have been to job interviews. When you go to a job interview you bring your resume. Your resume lists all the reasons the company should hire you. It is a list of your accomplishments and qualifications. If your resume is good enough, you may get the job. If not, you won't get the job. Of course, a company not only looks at your resume, they also look at your rap sheet. They do a background check with the police, but may also look for red flags by contacting references and previous employers. If your rap sheet is clear enough you may get hired.

One day we will each have an interview with God. We will hand Him a resume and rap sheet. In biblical terms, the word for our resume and rap sheet is our "righteousness." Our righteousness is our standing before Him based on the quality of our life. Imagine all of your accomplishments and qualities written out on a resume. Imagine a separate sheet, listing all the ways you have fallen short of God's perfect standard on our rap sheet. Together they are your righteousness.

Good News from God's Word

To understand what the Bible says about our righteousness, let's look at a few verses from Romans 3.

"All, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: None is righteous, no not one . . . ²⁰For by works of the law no human being will be declared righteous in God's sight . . ." (Romans 3:9-10, 20)

According to these verses, what is the bad news about the resume that you have been developing—the one based on 'works of the law' or your obedience to God?

²¹But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known . . . ²²
This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,²⁴ and all are declared righteous freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.” (Romans 3:21-25)

According to verse 23, is anyone’s personal resume good enough? Why? What is the standard?

What is the good news according to verse 24?

According to verses 22 and 25, how do you get this perfect resume that is now available?

When you have a bad rap sheet, you pay a penalty with prison time and financial restitution. Romans 6:23 says the penalty for our sin is death: “The wages of sin is death.” According to 3:24-25, how was our penalty paid off?

Your Resume, Your Righteousness

Adolf Eichman was the mastermind of the “final solution,” the Nazi plan to exterminate the Jews. He committed horrifying crimes against humanity. Yet his captor, Peter Malkin, and the journalists who observed his trial, were shocked by two things. Firstly, they were surprised by how ordinary he seemed. They expected a monster. But he looked like every other man. Secondly, they were amazed by his capacity to justify his behavior. He easily excused his murderous life. In his own eyes, he was a decent man, and probably would not have ranked himself low on the scale of good and bad people.

Adolf Eichman’s story illustrates an important truth about humanity: even the worst people can justify themselves to themselves. But there is another important truth about humanity, which may be even more important to our understanding of the Gospel: even the best people cannot justify themselves to God.

Our lives are not graded on a curve, and the scale on which our righteousness is measured does not have Mother Theresa at the top. God is at the top. His perfect resume and perfect rap sheet is at the top. And that throws the curve.

For instance, we could look at the prophet named Isaiah, who was God’s spokesperson in Israel. He was the kind of guy whose holiness was off the charts. Mother Theresa would have put him at the top of her chart. If you were in a waiting room with Isaiah and all of your friends, and someone had to be selected to go before God, everyone would have chosen Isaiah, including you. He was off the charts when it came to holiness.

And yet, when Isaiah went before God, his holiness didn’t come close to God’s. In Isaiah 6, he records a vision in which he is taken to the throne room of God and he is so overwhelmed by the immense holiness of God that his response is, “Woe is me! I am undone!” In other words, he was so overcome by the contrast between God and him that he called down a curse on himself. He doesn’t even bother to wait for God to do it. He says, “Woe to me!” Why? He explains, “I am a man of unclean lips who lives among a people of unclean lips.” Unclean lips? He was God’s chosen mouthpiece! But in the presence of God the contrast was overwhelming.

Not even Isaiah could stand before God with his rap sheet and resume expecting anything other than death. If Isaiah couldn’t, what about you?

Even the worst people can justify themselves to themselves. But even the best people cannot justify themselves to God.

If you have to stand before God with your resume and rap sheet, you don’t stand a chance. Your righteousness is not sufficient. That is the clear message of the Bible.

But there is another message that is good news: there is a perfect righteousness you have not earned that God will freely give to you. He will allow you to trade in your insufficient resume and rap sheet, and receive a perfect resume and rap sheet - the one that belongs to Jesus. You can either stand before God with yours or with His. You can either put your faith in what you have done, or you can put your faith in what He has done.

The good news, the Gospel, is that our standing with God no longer needs to be based on what we have done, but can be based on what Jesus has done. That means that salvation - this right standing with God - is freely available to all. We only need to stop trusting in our own righteousness for our standing with God, and start trusting in Jesus' righteousness.

The bad news is that your resume simply isn't good enough to earn a right standing with God. You have no hope of being saved based on what you have done. Whether your resume is full of obvious sins, or you would categorize yourself as "pretty good", the reality is that all your best efforts are like chasing after the wind. But herein lies the good news: God loves you so much that He sent his Son, Jesus, to live the perfect life you don't live, then pay the penalty for your sin. By trusting in Jesus rather than yourself, you can receive salvation as a free gift! God offers you this gift because He loves you and wants you to be in relationship with Him now and forever. Because of Jesus' perfect performance you can be unconditionally accepted by God. You

NOTABLE QUOTE

You see, at the center of all religions is the idea of Karma. You know, what you put out comes back to you: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, or in physics; in physical laws every action is met by an equal or an opposite one. It's clear to me that Karma is at the very heart of the universe. I'm absolutely sure of it. And yet, along comes this idea called Grace to upend all that "as you reap, so you will sow" stuff. Grace defies reason and logic. Love interrupts, if you like, the consequences of your actions, which in my case is very good news indeed, because I've done a lot of stupid stuff. I'd be in big trouble if Karma was going to finally be my judge. It doesn't excuse my mistakes, but I'm holding out for Grace. I'm holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the Cross, because I know who I am, and I hope I don't have to depend on my own religiosity.

BONO

The Good News of Jesus' Life

Jesus always did what was good, right and perfect. He honored God and loved people with every thought, word, and deed. He was impeccable. He had the perfect resume! He lived a perfect life, and by faith in Him we can be "credited" His perfection. God will treat us based on His perfect life and not on our failure.

So as you trust in Christ, you're still not perfect and spotless, but when God looks at you, he sees the perfect and spotless resume of Jesus.

Romans 4:4 says, "To the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due." In other words, if you want to work hard to try to prove your righteousness, you can. If you want to play the righteousness game, God will let you. He'll show you his perfect standard and say "good luck." But in the very next verse, it continues: "And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness." In other words, to the one who gives up trying to be righteous but instead trusts in Jesus, God will see that person as righteous.

Our God loves to justify the wicked! He takes people who are in rebellion against him and declares them righteous when they give up trying to BE righteous! Its actually at the moment when we're most frustrated with our inability to do it ourselves that we're at the point at which God wants to meet us. He meets you at the bottom, when you're spiritually poor and naked - when you give up on yourself and trust in Jesus instead. In that place he meets you and "clothes" you with the righteousness of Jesus. Christians are people who have given up trying to prove their worth or earn their way, no longer trying to save themselves.

The Good News of Jesus' Death

As perfect as Jesus was, He died on the cross. The penalty for sin is death, but Jesus never sinned! So why did He die?

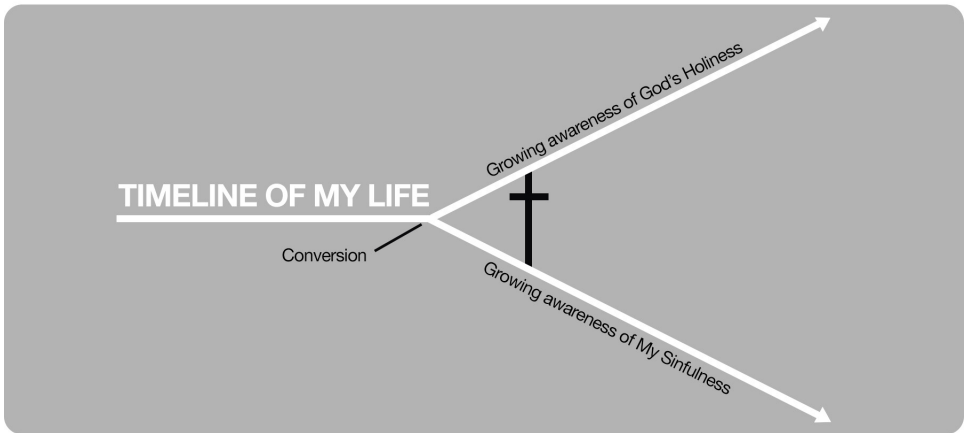
The Bible tells us that He was paying the penalty for our rap sheet. He was willingly taking our punishment for us. And when we put our trust, not in ourselves and what we have done, but in what Jesus has done for us, our rap sheet is cleared and His resume becomes ours. An exchange takes place.

"For our sake, God made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

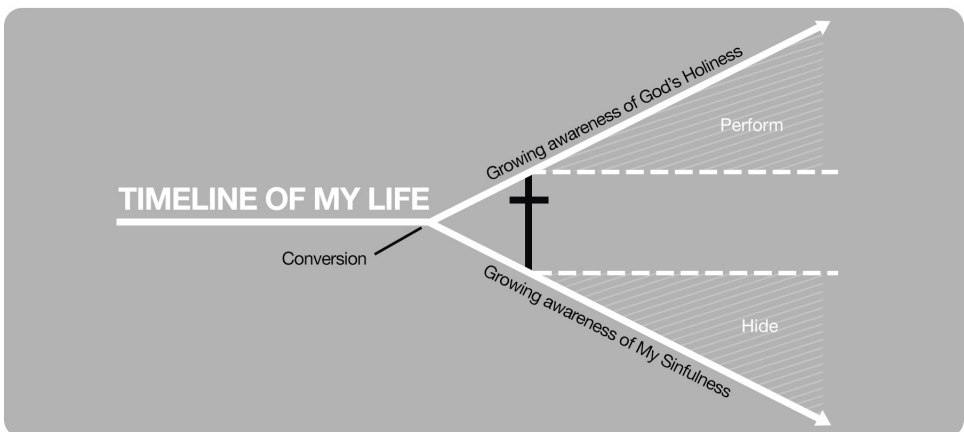
According to 2 Corinthians 5:21 what is the exchange that takes place? What does that mean for you?

Good News for Everyday Life

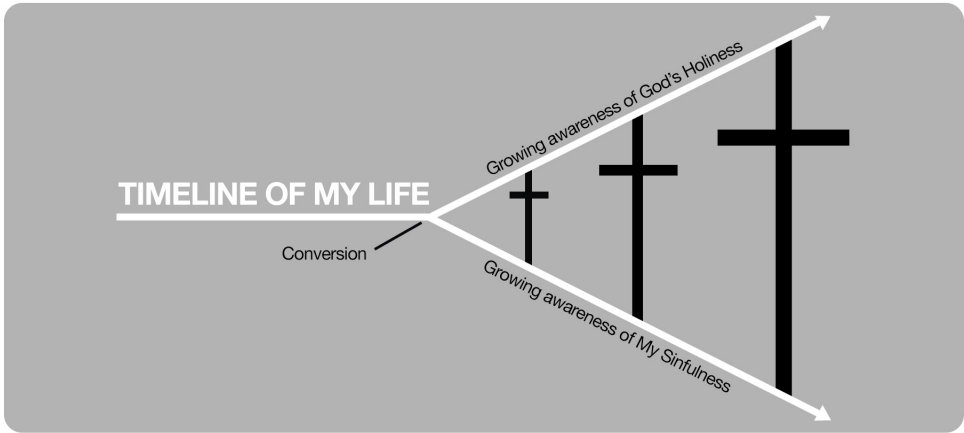
In the Gospel-Centered Life, Bob Thune and Will Walker use a really simple diagram to illustrate what is ours through faith in Jesus' perfect life and his death in our place. Imagine the horizontal line as a timeline of your life. At some point you realize there is a gap between God's holy standards and the ways you have lived. You realize your righteousness isn't enough, and your rap sheet is long. And at that very point, the gospel becomes really good news: Jesus' life and death (illustrated by the cross) covers the gap, and you are not only forgiven of your sin but also given the perfection of Jesus! You experience the relief and release of salvation!



Unfortunately, as we continue on in our lives, we quickly realize that our sin is deeper than we first imagined, and God's standards even higher than we first knew. As we read the Bible, hear biblical teaching, connect in community, and try to follow Jesus with our lives, we feel as though the gap between us and God is widening. Technically, it isn't widening, but in our lived experience it sure seems to be! Our default at this point is to start hiding our sin (on one hand) and trying to prove ourselves (on the other hand). The wider we feel the gap becoming, the more energy we put into these religious gymnastics. And notice how small the cross stays: Even though we still believe in Jesus' perfect life and death in our place, we no longer see the cross as big enough to cover us:



Thankfully, the good news of the gospel is that God already knows how deep our sin goes, and he paid for it completely — every bit of it! — in the death of Jesus. There is no sin in you that has not already been covered by the death of Jesus. And Jesus’ perfect righteousness has been credited to you and has secured your standing with God, independent of your attempts to measure up to his standards. The true path of the Christian life is a growing awareness of the sufficiency of Jesus’ life and death. The cross looms larger and larger in your life, freeing us from hiding and performing, and reminding us again and again of the great exchange!



NOTABLE QUOTE

There is unspeakable comfort, the sort of comfort that energizes, in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me for my good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that his love to me is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me so that no discovery now can disillusion him about me - in the way I am so often disillusioned with myself - and quench his determination to bless me. There is certainly great cause for humility in the thought that he sees all the twisted things about me that my fellow men do not see, and that he sees more twisted corruption in me than I see in myself.

There is however equally great incentive to worship and love God in the thought that for some unfathomable reason he wants me as his friend and desires to be my friend and has given his Son to die for me in order to realize this purpose.

J. I. PACKER

Ways I Perform*

Read through the list below and identify the ways that you try to prove yourself in order to earn the acceptance of others, God, or even yourself.

Work

I work harder than others so I am better than them. I talk about how busy I am so that others will realize that I am important. When work is slow, I am laid off, or even when I have a day off, I look down on myself.

Parenting

When my children don't succeed or when they misbehave I am embarrassed. I suspect that they feel an unhealthy amount of pressure from me.

Intelligence

In conversation, I try to demonstrate my knowledge on a broad array of topics and drop hints about how well read I am. If possible, I reference my academic record. I like to be right when there is a disagreement about the facts. As a result, others perceive me as arrogant.

Appearance

I am often tempted to buy brand name fashion because it makes me feel more valuable. I don't exercise and eat well just to be healthy, but to be admired by others. I live with a sense of never being beautiful or handsome enough.

Wealth

I subtly show off my latest purchase and feel pride when I have a new luxury item. I feel the need to be perceived as financially secure, even wealthy. As a result, I am not nearly as generous as I could be. And when I am struggling financially, I try to hide it.

Behavior

"I don't drink, cuss, chew, or go with people who do." On the one hand, I judge others when they don't measure up. On the other hand, I condemn myself when I slip up. It is a constant comparison game that hurts me and others.

Talent

I try to excel in as many activities as possible because I feel the need to show others and myself that I am gifted and talented. I hate losing and consider second-best to be failure. It is hard for me to have fun because I am so concerned with performing.

Ways I Hide*

Hiding is really the flip side of proving ourselves. Life feels like a job interview and we need to hide our weaknesses. Read through the list below and identify ways that you sometimes pretend in order to make your “resume” appear better than it actually is.

Defending

I am defensive when I feel criticized. When confronted, my tendency is to explain things away or justify my actions. As a result, people are hesitant to approach me with concerns, and it is hard for me to change.

Faking

I try to keep up appearances so people think the best of me. Being with others can often be exhausting because I am working so hard to say and to the right things. Very few people know the real me.

Concealing

I do my best to hide anything that would make others think less of me. I am afraid that if people knew the real me, they wouldn't accept me.

Exaggerating

I tend to exaggerate both good and bad events in order to draw attention to myself. If there is something good that I have done, I highlight it for others & stretch the truth.

Blaming

I am quick to blame others for sin or circumstances. I have a difficult time owning my contribution to sin or conflict. My pride leads me to assume I am not at fault and my fear leads me to cover up my fault.

Downplaying

I tend to downplay and dismiss the significance of my sin and mistakes. Rather than seeking forgiveness from God and others, they build up and cause even more damage.

Fig.2b

**Adapted from "The Gospel Centered-Life" by Thune and Walker [1]*

Because of the Gospel, it's safe to be honest about our sin in the church: it's the very message that we've all gathered to celebrate! If this is what we actually believe, then we're safe to come in and say, "this is what my sin looked like this week," which is always scary, but always so fruitful. And when this sort of confession starts to happen, community can become a real thing, because we can all come as the forgiven sinners that we really are!

The message of Christianity is that we are more sinful than we ever realized, but we are more loved and accepted than we ever could have imagined, thanks to what Jesus has done for us.

DR. TIMOTHY KELLER

Have you ever over-drafted your bank account? Imagine a scenario wherein you have no money, and the bank hits you with an overdraft fee. Before you can pay the fee, you overdraft again, and are hit with another charge, and then another.

Imagine that this happens over and over and over again. You're in severe debt, with no real way to solve your problem. Now, imagine someone who is very wealthy and very generous comes to you and says, "I heard about your situation, and I want to pay your debt for you. In fact, I already have." What would well up in you? Thankfulness and gratitude! If the amount was a couple hundred dollars, you'd be thankful. If it was a couple million dollars, you might fall on your face in gratitude.

That's like how Jesus paid your debt.

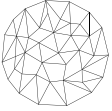
Continue on in this theoretical situation. Now, all you have is a zeroed account, and most people would get out there and find a job, or a way to earn more. Otherwise, you will incur more fees and fall back into debt. So for most, the mindset would be, "thank you Jesus for the help, but I gotta get to work. I know Jesus has forgiven me, but now it's up to me."

A lot of Christians live their life like that. They think, "Yes I know Jesus has forgiven me, but now in the day-in-day-out of my life, it's up to me. I'll do all the right things so that I'm never in debt again."

But here's the truth: if the perfect life of Jesus has also been credited to us, it would actually be more like the wealthy and generous person saying "not only have I paid your debt and cleared your account, but I've also linked it to mine. Now you can't get back into debt because there's no amount that you could spend that would exceed my riches."

Does that sound too good to be true? Paul says in Ephesians 1:3 that "God has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing." From the very moment you put faith in Jesus, you have complete access to everything that God has. He withholds nothing from you, because when He looks at you, He doesn't see your debt, but Christ's riches.

2 FORMED BY THE GOSPEL [past]



The Discussion.

Write your answers here to prepare for group discussion.

Look back at Fig.2a. What are some of the negative consequences you have experienced by feeling the need to perform?

What difference would it make in your life if you were absolutely convinced that God accepted you just as you are? How would it impact your ability to love others?

Look back at Fig.2b. Which area of hiding do you struggle with the most? How does it negatively affect your life and relationships?

How could this area of struggle be altered if you deeply believed you were set free from the penalty of sin through the life and death of Jesus?

discussion notes

2 FORMED BY
THE GOSPEL
[past]
GOSPEL BASICS 43



The Application.

Practically, how does this change your life?

Our own resume of righteousness is insufficient to stand before God. Even the best people cannot justify themselves to God. However, the good news is that God offers a perfect righteousness through Jesus – he lived the life I should have lived and died the death I deserved to die! – and by putting our faith in Him, we receive salvation as a free gift. Therefore, the Gospel sets us free from the need to perform or hide, because God accepts us as we are in Jesus.

We have to be committed to applying these profound spiritual truths into our lives, and begin to learn to live in light of what we are coming to know. Each Section of Gospel Basics will end with a handful of questions to help you apply what you're learning.

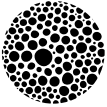
Look back at your answers to the preliminary questions in the **Big Picture** section of this chapter. In light of the content in this section, has your initial answer changed? What difference does it make to define yourself in light of the perfect life Jesus lived for you and the death he died in your place?

Based on the key points from the Scriptures, readings, and discussion this week, write down several summary statements that will help you to remember that you have been saved from the penalty of sin because of Jesus' life and death.

Reflection: This week look for a moment when you are responding by Performing or Hiding. What are you forgetting about the Gospel? Or, about what God has done for you in Jesus? Turn to the truth of the Gospel that you studied today—that your identity is based on how perfect Jesus is, not on how perfect you are. Thank God for loving you and being gracious to you. Ask Him to help you respond differently in that moment. Write out some reminders here, and report back to your group next week!

section **3**

Formed by the Gospel [present]



The Big Picture.

What's the point?

Key Question: What is being accomplished for us, in the present, by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Key Answer: We are being saved from the power of sin because of Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

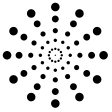
Change is hard. If you've ever tried to pick up a new exercise habit or get used to a new roommate, you probably know that difficulty first-hand. Sure, most people have enough self-discipline to try something new for a few days or a few weeks. But real, transformative, long-lasting change? That usually requires something stronger than self-discipline.

Thankfully, the Gospel is not only the story of Jesus taking away the penalty of our sins and giving us his perfect resume. It's also an ongoing story in which we are being saved from sin's dominion over our lives, and this ongoing change is done by the presence and power of Jesus. His Spirit will, over the course of time, reveal our sin to us and make it powerless over us.

In other words, the Gospel tells us that we will be changed—but that it won't be accomplished by our own power, will, or self-discipline. Instead, bit by bit and day by day, the power of the Gospel will change us from the inside out.

Preliminary Questions

Describe a time when you tried to change: perhaps trying to end a bad habit or start a good habit. What was your motivation to change in that circumstance? How did it work out?



The Reading.

What does the Bible say about this?

3 FORMED BY THE GOSPEL [present]

The Power of the Gospel to Change Us

In the last lesson we learned that Jesus lived a perfect life and died to pay the penalty for our sin. He was perfectly righteous then died for our unrighteousness. But Jesus did not stay dead. He rose from the grave and ascended into heaven. Not only is Jesus' life and death good news for us, but so is His resurrection and ascension.

In this lesson we will look at this truth: Despite the Good News that we have been forgiven of sin and given Jesus' perfect righteousness, the fact remains that we are still sinners. Despite our best efforts, sin is insidious, and bubbles up to the surface of our lives. Even though we've been saved from the penalty of sin, we still have a sin problem. GK Chesterton famously once said "The fact that we are sinners is as practical as potatoes... [sin] is the only part of Christian theology which can truly be proved... you can see it in the streets."

According to the two statements below, what has been fully accomplished for those with faith in Jesus, and what is still in the process of being accomplished?

I. We have been saved from the penalty of sin because of Jesus' life and death.

II. We are being set free from the power of sin because of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

The Gospel is not just what we preach to unbelievers in order to get them 'saved' from the penalty of sin. The Gospel is much more than that! The Good News is that Christ not only saves us from sin's guilt but also delivers us from its slavery. The Gospel is the principal energizing and driving force for living the whole Christian life. The Gospel is not just for non-Christians. It is also for Christians.

JOHN FONVILLE

We never "get beyond the gospel" in our Christian life to something more "advanced." The Gospel is not the first "step" in a "stairway" of truths; rather, it is more like the "hub" in a "wheel" of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C's of Christianity, but it is the A to Z of Christianity. The Gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make all progress in the kingdom.

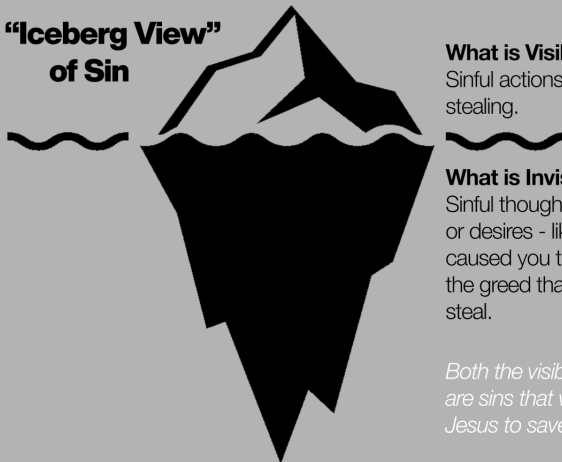
We are not justified by the Gospel and then sanctified by our obedience; rather, the Gospel is the way we grow (Galatians 3:1-3) and are regularly renewed (Colossians 1:6). It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier (Romans 1:16-17).

DR. TIMOTHY KELLER

Understanding Sin

Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, endorsed an "iceberg" understanding of our sin: most of it lurks under the surface, completely unseen. Sin isn't just what is obvious and visible above the water line, but the strange mix of selfish desires, deceitful lies, and fear and pride lurking below the water line. While we may see and be aware of our sinful behaviors, we are probably less aware of our sinful motivations, and yet Jesus says that is where our problem truly lies. Jesus is just as concerned about our inner, invisible sin as he is about our outward, visible sins.

An "Iceberg View" of Sin



What is Visible:

Sinful actions like lying or stealing.

What is Invisible:

Sinful thoughts, motivations, or desires - like the pride that caused you to tell that lie, or the greed that caused you to steal.

Both the visible and the invisible are sins that we must trust Jesus to save us from.

Consider what Paul says in Ephesians 2:

“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.” (Ephesians 2:1-3)

How does he describe what is going on under the surface and behind the scenes — below the water line?

What might this tell us about growth and change in the Christian life? Will change be quick and easy? Hard and slow? What should we expect?

Being in community, studying the Bible, and listening to solid teaching is intended to “lower the waterline” so that more of our sin is visible. And in the beautiful community of Jesus — when you're already confident God has saved you from sin and given you Jesus' perfect resume — you start to welcome that process, knowing that as your sin comes to light you can be forgiven, healed, and made new!

Good News from God's Word

The gospel is good news for the past: We have been saved, forgiven and given a perfect record, because of Jesus life and death! But the gospel is also good news for the present: We are being saved, increasingly set free from the power of sin because of Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

The resurrection of Jesus means he went through death, conquering it, and emerged victorious over it, never to die again. The ascension of Jesus means he returned to his Father in heaven, and is seated at his Father's right hand, the place of honor and favor. Together, the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit to guide, grow, and empower disciples today.

Read through the passages below and consider the value of Jesus' resurrection and ascension for us today.

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:4-10)

What has God done for us? Where does Paul say we are right now?

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. ⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸ which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹ making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.” (Eph 1:3-10)

What is true about us now, by faith in Jesus? What have we been given?

“For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Colossians 3:3-4)

What happened to our old life? What is true about our new life in Jesus?

In light of these texts (and many more like them!), Christians have been given 2 incredible resources in the process of growth and change. While sin remains strong in us, and we continue to find ourselves doing what we don't want to do, we have not been left to our own devices. Through the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, we've been given a new motivation for change (grace!) and a new power for change (the Holy Spirit!)

Grace: A New Motivation to Change

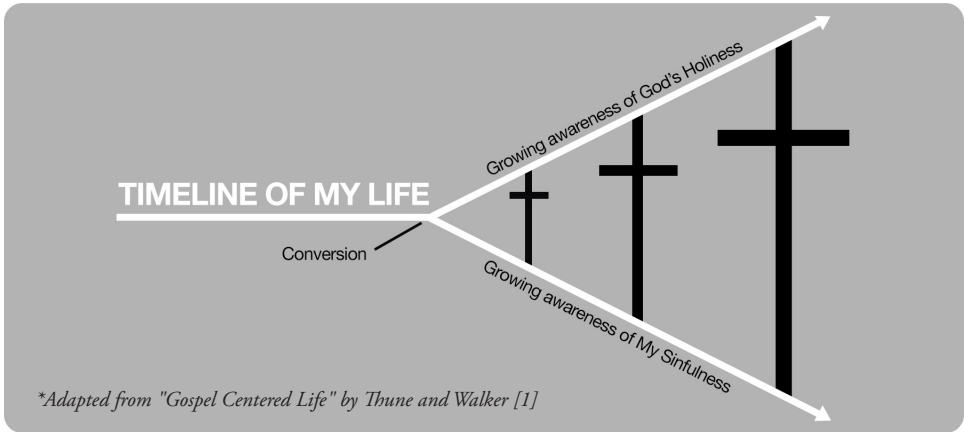
The Gospel gives us a new motivation to change. Oftentimes we want to change so that we will look better in our own eyes, others' eyes, or God's eyes - we are motivated by pride. Other times we want to change in order to avoid the guilt and shame we experience when we sin - we are motivated by guilt. Even other times we want to change out of fear of the consequences of our sin in this life or the next - we are motivated by fear.

But notice this: All those motives — pride, guilt, and fear — are the very reasons we sin in the first place! Why do I exaggerate my accomplishments? To bolster my reputation (pride). Why do I work so hard to hide my failures? To avoid embarrassment (fear). Why do I avoid honest conversations? To not be found out (guilt). When we rely on these motives to avoid sin, we're actually fueling the very engine of sin. Thankfully, God has given us a better option!

“As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” (Col 2:6-7)

What ought to motivate us to walk (live) like Jesus?

As we saw in the previous section, the chart below illustrates how a growing understanding of the Gospel leads to a transformed life. As we mature in the Christian life we become more aware of God’s holiness and our sinfulness. But this growing awareness of the gap between God’s holiness and our sinfulness does not lead to fear or despair. Instead, it shows us just how gracious He is. The growing cross in the chart represents a growing understanding of the immensity of God’s grace - of all that is ours in the Gospel. As our understanding of God’s grace grows, so does something else: our gratitude to God. We are filled with gratitude and love for God as we realize just how much He has done for us.



To summarize, the gospel gives us a new motivation for change, namely awe, gratitude, and love for the God who saved us. In the gospel, we change and grow because we are loved, saved, and secure in God’s grace. And God makes a promise to bring to completion the work he has begun in us, forming us into the image of Jesus.

NOTABLE QUOTE

Christian growth, in other words, does not happen first by behaving better, but by believing better—believing in bigger, deeper, brighter ways what Christ has already secured for sinners.

TULLIAN TCHVIDIAN

The Holy Spirit: A New Power To Change

Not only are we “seated with Christ in the heavenly places” and have our “lives hidden with Christ in God,” God also gives us the gift of his Holy Spirit. All who trust in Jesus receive the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit who empowered the life of Jesus! Consider what Jesus said to his disciples about the Spirit:

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14:15-18)

“Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.” (John 16:7)

What does Jesus promise to all who desire to obey and follow him? Why is it good news for us that Jesus ascended to the Father?

We each experience conflicting desires. We want to be kind, humble, and generous; but often we end up being rude, arrogant, and stingy. We want to do what is best for our family; but in the moment, we end up doing what is best for ourselves. It is a struggle. We are all under the influence of the power of sin.

The good news is that the power of the Holy Spirit is far stronger than the power of sin in our lives. Through trust in Jesus we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who gives us a new ability to change.

“You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.” (Rom 8:9-11)

“...for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” (2 Tim 1:7)

How does Paul describe the Spirit who lives in us? What is the Spirit doing?

To summarize, the gospel gives us a new power to change, namely the Holy Spirit! In the gospel, not only are we motivated by grace to change, we are also empowered in that change by the presence of the Spirit. Every believer in Jesus has the Spirit living inside them, and His desires are stronger than the sinful desires in you!

NOTABLE QUOTE

A man and his little child are walking down the road and they are walking hand in hand, and the child knows that he is the child of his father, and he knows that his father loves him, and he rejoices in that, and he is happy in it. There is no uncertainty about it all. But suddenly the father, moved by some impulse, takes hold of the child and picks him up, holds him in his arms, kisses him, embraces him, showers his love upon him, and then he puts him down again and they go on walking together. That is it! The child knew before that his father loved him, and he knew that he was his child. But oh! The loving embrace, this extra outpouring of love, this unusual manifestation of it — that is the kind of thing. The Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES

The Gospel and Transformation

Often we mistakenly believe that the way to change is simply to try harder. There is no doubt that effort is required in order to change; but true, lasting change does not begin by working harder. It begins by believing better. We are saved and we are changed by the same essential process: faith in the Gospel. We are saved when we turn to the truth of the Gospel and believe it. We are changed as we continually turn to the truth of the Gospel and believe it. And the Holy Spirit empowers both!

The reason that many Christians remain stuck in patterns of sin is because they focus on behavior without addressing the underlying unbelief. They try really hard to change, but all of their effort goes into behaving better rather than believing better.

What is our sin rooted in? When we're rude, arrogant, stingy, or selfish, can we identify what we have forgotten about who God is and all he's done for us in the gospel?

Behind every sin is a lie about God. It has been that way since the Garden of Eden. As long as Adam and Eve trusted that God was good, they obeyed His warning not to eat from the tree that would kill them (Gen. 2:17). The way that the serpent got them to disobey God was by getting them to believe a lie about God rather than the truth. The serpent came to Eve and said, "You will not die. For God surely knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen 2:4-5). The serpent convinces Eve that God is not really good. He is keeping her from what is good. As soon as Eve believes the lie about God, rather than the truth, her desires shift. Rather than wanting to avoid the tree, she desires it and she eats from it: "when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate" (Gen 2:6). They didn't believe God so they disobeyed, and the result was death.

The key to transformation is to turn from the lies and remember and rejoice in the truth about God in the Gospel.

The process can be remembered with three "R's": first comes **recognizing**, which is identifying the lies and idols at the root of our sinful behaviors and negative emotions. Next comes **repenting**, which is confessing these root lies and idols, recognizing them as ultimately unsatisfying, and turning away from them. Finally we can spend time **rejoicing**, which is remembering the beautiful truth about God's radical love for you which is revealed in the Gospel, and praising him for it.

Pastor Ray Ortlund, Jr., gives us a simple formula for real change: Gospel + Safety + Time = Transformation. In other words, if you consistently practice the "Three R's" as you apply the full message of the Gospel to your heart, in a safe and supportive community of faith where you can confess and repent without fear, and you repeat this process regularly over the course of time, your heart will be slowly transformed. The more time you give it, the more noticeable the transformation will be as Jesus delivers you from the power of sin.

Gospel + Safety + Time = Transformation

One of the important roles of the Holy Spirit is to reveal to us the truth about God. Jesus calls Him the Spirit of Truth (Jn 15:15), and promises that He will remind us of the truth (Jn 15:25). The Holy Spirit's job is to point us to the truth and our job is to turn to that truth and

trust it. This is called repentance and faith. Repentance is turning from the lies about God and the sin that results from them. Faith is turning to the truth about God and the godly behavior that results from believing that truth. So we are saved by our initial repentance and faith in the Gospel, and we are changed by our continual repentance and faith in the Gospel.

The Four G's

Let's consider four truths about God, all beginning with the letter 'G' that we can turn to when we are tempted: **God is Gracious, Good, Great, and Glorious.**

If I don't believe the truth that God is Gracious, then I will believe that I need to prove myself to God, others, and myself. The result will be many of the sinful behaviors we looked at last week: blaming, faking, criticizing, judging, demeaning. But if, in the moment of temptation, I turn to the truth that I am saved by grace, I won't feel the need to prove myself to others in sinful ways. Believing that God is Gracious is essential for transformation, and we see His grace most clearly in the Gospel, as God freely restores us to a right relationship with Himself through Jesus.

If I don't believe the truth that God is Good, then I will insatiably search for what is good in things that will never satisfy: food, sex, entertainment, relationships. But if I believe that God is Good, I will find my satisfaction in Him and enjoy His material gifts without obsessively pursuing them. Believing that God is Good is essential for transformation, and we see His goodness most clearly in the Gospel, as God sought our good even at the cost of Jesus' own life.

If I don't believe that God is Great, I will be filled with anxiety when life seems out of control. When I am anxious and worried, it is difficult to love others well because I am consumed with my own struggles. I may even try to take control of people and situations through manipulation or intimidation. But when I believe that God is Great, I can be at peace in all situations and care for others well because I know my Father in heaven is caring for me. Believing that God is Great is essential for transformation, and we see his greatness most clearly in the Gospel, as he triumphed over the enemies of sin, death, and Satan through Jesus' resurrection.

When I don't believe that God is Glorious and the One whose opinions are weightier than anyone else's, I will end up listening to others and following their advice. I will give into peer pressure and live a life that looks just like everyone else's in the culture. But if I believe that God is Glorious, I will listen to Him and walk in His ways. Believing God is glorious is essential for transformation, and we see His glory most clearly in the Gospel, as Jesus is Lord over all and worthy of our love and devotion.

As you can see, the Gospel is for both salvation and transformation. Therefore, it is essential that someone who wants to experience increasing freedom from the power of sin be immersed continually in the good news of the Gospel through time in God's Word and through a vital

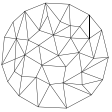
connection with a community that will lovingly remind them of the truth each time they struggle with unbelief.

The Gospel is good news for our everyday struggles with sin. Believing the Gospel is how we experience increasing freedom from sins like anger, lust, greed, jealousy, and selfishness. Consider how believing these four truths would make a difference in your everyday life.

NOTABLE QUOTE

Most of us have never really understood that Christianity is not a self-help religion meant to enable moral people to become more moral. We don't need a self-help book; we need a Savior. We don't need to get our collective act together; we need death and resurrection and the life-transforming truths of the gospel. And we don't need them just once, at the beginning of our Christian life; we need them every moment of every day.

ELYSE FITZPATRICK



The Discussion.

Write your answers here to prepare for group discussion.

Consider the quote below, from theologian Richard Lovelace. What is he telling us about our sin problem?

The structure of sin in the human personality is far more complicated than the isolated acts and thoughts of deliberate disobedience... In its biblical definition, sin cannot be limited to isolated instances or patterns of wrongdoing; it is something much more akin to the psychological term complex: an organic network of compulsive attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors deeply rooted in alienation from God. Sin originated in the darkening of the human mind and heart as man turned from the truth about God to embrace a lie about him and consequently a whole universe of lies about his creation. Sinful thoughts, words and deeds flow forth from this darkened heart automatically and compulsively, as water from a polluted fountain.

RICHARD LOVELACE

How does a robust, biblical view of sin affect the way we think about growth and change?

In the gospel, God has given us 2 incredible resources for growth and change. What are they?
How does this change how and why we grow?

Consider the 4 G statements listed below. What might show up in your life if you more deeply believed each of the statements? What happens when you forget them?

God is **Gracious** >> So we don't need to prove ourselves.

God is **Good** >> So we don't need to look elsewhere.

God is **Great** >> So we don't need to be in control.

God is **Glorious** >> So we don't need to fear others.

Which of "the Four G's" is the most important for you to be reminded of on a regular basis? There is often one lie that is most attractive to our souls and it is at the root of most of our sinful patterns and negative emotions. Are you driven to prove yourself? Do you avoid difficulty and run to comfort? Do you feel the need to always be in control? Are you needy of people's approval?

discussion notes



3 FORMED BY
THE GOSPEL
[present]

GOSPEL BASICS 63



The Application.

Practically, how does this change your life?

The Gospel is for both salvation and transformation. Therefore, it is essential that someone who wants to experience increasing freedom from the power of sin be immersed continually in the good news of the Gospel through time in God's Word and through a vital connection with a community that will lovingly remind them of the truth each time they struggle with unbelief.

We have to be committed to applying these profound spiritual truths into our lives, and begin to learn to live in light of what we are coming to know. Each Section of Gospel Basics will end with a handful of questions to help you apply what you're learning.

Look back at your answers to the preliminary question in the Big Picture section of this chapter. In light of the content in this section, how might you approach that same desire to change? What difference does the gospel present tense – we are being saved from the power of sin – make for your struggle?

Reflection: Look again at the 4 Gs, and your answers to the questions in The Discussion section. What truth do you most need to remember? What are some ways that you could keep that truth in your mind and heart? Consider finding a few Bible verses that speak to that truth, and ask your community to help remind you regularly.

The Holy Spirit's role in growth and change can sometimes seem intangible. One way to make dependence on the Spirit more accessible is a practice called "Spiritual Breathing." Essentially, it is a way to train your mind to stay focused on what is true – and to rely on the Spirit in the process. As you go through your day, whenever you notice your mind wandering from what is true, or whenever you feel sin rising up, take a few minutes to pause and breath.

First, you exhale, confessing the sin, lies, or twisted desires you're experiencing. Second, you inhale, remembering and rejoicing in what is true about God, his grace in the gospel, and who he has made you to be. And then you move forward, trusting the Spirit will empower you, and returning to the practice as often as needed.

section **4**

Formed by the Gospel [future]



The Big Picture.

What's the point?

Key Question: What will be accomplished for us, in the future, by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Key Answer: We will be saved from the presence of sin because of Jesus' return.

Many people assume the whole point of salvation in Christianity is for people to go to “heaven” after they die. It is assumed that God’s goal in salvation is to gather a bunch of disembodied souls into his realm, which is usually envisioned vaguely as “a better place,” perhaps with shining angels, harps, and clouds. Wherever these ideas have come from, they’re definitely not from the pages of the New Testament. The end goal of God’s salvation is so much better than that!

After Jesus returns, people don’t go up to heaven for an immaterial existence. Quite the opposite. Heaven comes down and transforms the material world. And it isn’t just humans who are healed and restored—the whole of creation is healed and restored.

Ultimately, salvation is not about being teleported out of our everyday existence. It is about our everyday existence being transformed. It is about ordinary life being renewed by the healing power of Jesus.

That's because ordinary life is not our problem. When you think about it, ordinary life is quite wonderful. A BBQ with friends on a hot summer evening; building sand castles with your kids at the beach; laughing until your eyes water and your tummy hurts; breathing deeply as winter slowly turns to spring and trees push out white blossoms. Ordinary life—in the absence of pain and suffering—can be quite wonderful.

God created our ordinary lives, and he cares about our everyday lives and this world, so His plan is to redeem it, not replace it. His plan is to heal what is diseased, fix what is broken, and right what is wrong. That is God's plan of salvation according to the Bible!

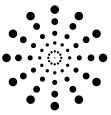
In this lesson, we examine the good news that through faith, we will be saved from the presence of sin — and all its ravaging effects — because of Jesus' return. A day is coming when the struggle with sin will be over and everything that is wrong in this world will be made right.

Preliminary Questions

What is one struggle, sin, or hardship in your life from which you would love to finally, fully be released?

What is one area of brokenness or injustice in the world that you would love to see healed and set to rights?

4 FORMED BY THE GOSPEL [future]



The Reading.

What does the Bible say about this?

Good News from God's Word

In Romans 8, the Apostle Paul speaks about how we who have had a taste of God's saving work in the gospel "groan" as we long for God to bring that work to completion. There is a day of glory coming, a day in which we will be made completely new and the world made completely whole.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." (Rom 8:18-25)

Paul says there is a future glory coming that will swallow up the sufferings of our present life. He is envisioning a future-tense salvation, when the work God has begun in us and the world today will one day come to completion. Those who have tasted salvation past tense (have saved from the penalty of sin!) and who are experiencing salvation in the present tense (are being saved from the power of sin!) live in hope because of the promise of salvation in the future tense (will be saved from the presence of sin!).

Paul is looking forward to the completion of the Story, when the same Jesus who was crucified, who was raised from the dead, and who ascended to the Father returns to this world. Having a clear and compelling vision of that day leads Paul to say, “the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed.” He’s not minimizing our suffering; he simply knows that Jesus’ return will make all the sad things come untrue, and we’ll enjoy God forever as his beloved sons and daughters. On that day, the depth of joy we’ll know before the face of Jesus will make every sorrow, suffering, and grief fade into distant memory.

And notice that Paul says the “whole creation has been groaning together.” The end of the Story is not an escape from the physical, created world, but the renewal and restoration of the broken world in which we live. When Jesus returns he’ll not only set us free from sin’s presence, he’ll eradicate sin, suffering, and sorrow from the whole world. Justice will roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream. The nations will be healed, and wars will cease. Creation will flourish once again in full, unmitigated glory.

As we await that day — the day when we will be set free from sin, and all of creation will be set free from decay — our experience of life will often be “groaning.” Christians know what the world ought to be like, and we know what we want to be like, and that makes us deeply aware of the gap between what is and what will be someday. So we groan, longing for the coming day of Restoration.

Jesus’ Return is Good News for Us

Jesus loves you—specifically, you. He knows your name. He knows how many hairs are on your head, and how many days your life will last. He knows your hopes and dreams, your fears and insecurities, and your sinful patterns. And so the first part of his plan of restoration is to set you free from your “groaning”—you, and me, and all who believe. The Gospel promises us a personal hope of glory.

Read through the passages below and consider why Jesus’ return is good news for us.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (John 14:1-3)

According to this passage, why will Jesus return?

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” (1 John 3:2)

According to this passage, what is the benefit of Jesus’ return with regard to our own struggle with sin?

There is a day coming when all that most weighs you down — the sin you continue to struggle with, the shame that haunts you, the physical suffering that ails you — will be gone forever. That is the hope of glory, the good news of salvation in the future tense. You were made to fully reflect the glory of God, just as Jesus did, and he has promised to bring that work to completion. On the day you see Jesus face-to-face, you’ll be like him. What amazing good news!

Jesus’ Return is Good News for the World

Not only will those who put their faith in Jesus be made perfect when He returns, the whole world will be made new. Romans 8 says that not only are we "groaning", but in fact "the whole creation has been groaning" and that a day is coming when "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." God's plan is not only to make his people new, but to make the whole cosmos new, to rescue creation from decay and death, and to restore it all to its full glory.

The end of the Biblical Story is all of creation renewed. In Revelation 21, the Apostle John sees a vision of the end, and it is nothing like harps and clouds! We don't "go to heaven" and leave the world to fall apart; rather, God comes here, brings his realm and his reign to this earth, and dwells here with his people. He renews the world; he restores what's broken; he heals what's wrong; he brings perfect justice; he casts out wickedness and suffering and sorrow. He makes the world what he intended it to be from the beginning – and us with it! – so that we can enjoy him in a renewed world for all of eternity.

Read these two passages from John’s account of what will happen after Jesus returns.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with

man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. ⁵ And He who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."
(Revelation 21:1-5)

What does John see happening at the end of time? What does God do for his people?

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever." (Revelation 22:1-4)

What happens to the world when God returns? What is John telling us?

God's end goal in salvation is not "going to heaven when you die." It's being restored to God in a renewed world, where you can enjoy him forever. A physical world - this world - made as God intended it to be. What amazing good news!

The vision of Revelation, indeed, the whole story of the Bible, leads us to look forward in hope to a creation restored to wholeness. Every facet of it is to be brought back to what God has intended.

MICHAEL GOHEEN

Good News for Everyday Life

If God is going to come one day with His presence and power to transform everyday life, everyday life must be important to Him, even now. In fact, part of God's plan is to give people a taste, here and now, of what that future life will be like so that they will want to be there. That is one of the most important roles that Christians are to play in this world. As we learn to live, here and now, under the influence of God's transforming power, we give others a picture of the transformed life that will be enjoyed when Jesus returns.

Think of eternity as a movie. The movie isn't out yet, but it is coming to a world near you. Think of this life as the trailer to the movie. Trailers are helpful in determining if you want to see a movie. They weave together snippets of the movie, and, if done well, give the viewer a sense of what the movie will be like. Christians are to live their lives now in such a way that gives people a picture of what life will be like when Jesus returns, so others will want to be there. Christians are to imagine life as it will be after God heals and restores the world, and then live life now as a preview of that coming attraction.

What might that look like? What are some ways we can live as a preview of the new world that is coming? It means wiping away tears now, because one day God will wipe them all away. It means finding ways to ease people's pain now, because one day God will take away all pain. It means feeding the hungry and caring for the poor as a picture of the day when God puts an end to hunger, poverty, and suffering. It means foster care and adoption, because one day there will be no orphans.

Our task in the present...is to live as resurrection people in between Easter and the final day, with our Christian life, corporate and individual, in both worship and mission, as a sign of the first and a foretaste of the second.

N. T. WRIGHT

What difference does it make in our everyday lives to know that we're in the middle of this Great Story and that one day Jesus will return to make everything right, finally removing sin and sin's effects completely?

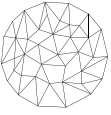
What areas of brokenness in the world most break your heart? In what ways can we be involved in those things as a sign and a foretaste of the new world coming?

NOTABLE QUOTE

Hope is one of the theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not, as some modern people think, a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The apostles who brought about, on foot, the conversion of the Roman Empire. The great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

C. S. LEWIS

4 FORMED BY THE GOSPEL [future]



The Discussion.

Write your answers here to prepare for group discussion.

How might a profound hope in the completion of this Story shape our lives today? What shows up in our lives when we don't believe this personally & deeply? What behaviors or emotions?

Look back at your answers to the preliminary questions in the Big Picture section of this chapter. In light of the content of this section, how has your initial answer changed? What is one struggle, sin, or hardship in your life from which you would love to finally, fully be released? What difference does having “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27) bring to your struggle?

What is one area of brokenness or injustice in the world that you would love to see healed and set to rights? What difference does knowing Jesus will "make all things new" (Revelation 21:5) make for how you respond to injustice in the world?

Salvation is not about "going to heaven when you die" but about ordinary life being renewed, healed. What will the future world be like? In what ways can we demonstrate that future world today?

discussion notes



4 FORMED BY THE GOSPEL [future]

4 FORMED BY THE GOSPEL [future]



The Application.

Practically, how does this change your life?

We have to be committed to applying these profound spiritual truths into our lives, and begin to learn to live in light of what we are coming to know. Each Section of Gospel Basics will end with a handful of questions to help you apply what you're learning.

Jesus' victory over our sin is complete and comprehensive, redeeming our past, present and future. Not only is he interested in saving the world, but he intends to restore it. It is critical that this truth, the heartbeat of the Christian life, work its way all throughout every nook and cranny of your heart and life.

What would be the evidence in our lives if the truth of the Gospel's future tense really came home to our hearts? How might we think and act differently?

Christians are not only called to tell people about the good news of Jesus, they are called to be good news to other people. Each Christian is to live their life, by the power of God, in such a way that gives people a preview of what life will be like after Jesus returns and the whole world is renewed.

So what does that look like, practically? Christians can ask themselves, “What would bring others the greatest good and God the greatest honor?”

For example, an engineer could consider how to be a Christian engineer by asking how he could do his job in a way that maximized human flourishing and magnified the creativity and beauty of God. A City Manager might ask herself how she would do her job in a way that brings the greatest services to the most people so the whole community can flourish. These practical thought experiments can help Christians begin to live their lives as a preview of what life will be like after Jesus returns.

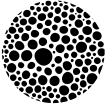
In one of your relational roles (spouse, parent, child, friend, etc.): What are some practical ways that you could bring others the greatest good and God the greatest honor as preview of life after Jesus returns?

In one of your functional roles (work, volunteer, coach, etc.): What are some practical ways that you could bring others the greatest good and God the greatest honor as preview of life after Jesus returns?

In the context of your community: Consider a need that exists among the people in your community. What are some practical ways that, together, you could bring others the greatest good and God the greatest honor as preview of life after Jesus returns?

section 5

Living the Gospel-Formed Life



The Big Picture.

What's the point?

Key Question: How does real growth actually happen?

Key Answer: Real growth and change isn't about trying harder to be better but about confessing more honestly, repenting more eagerly, and believing more fully in Jesus and all we have in him!

Over the last 3 Sections, we've unpacked all that is ours in Jesus Christ. The gospel really is the power of God for salvation for all who believe! We have been set free from sin's penalty, we are being set free from sin's power, and one day we will be set free from sin's presence. What good news!

Though we can all agree that the Gospel is really good news for us, we can also honestly confess that our lives reveal a gap between what we say we believe and how we live day to day. We hear the good news of the gospel and we desire it, but we often struggle to know how to connect the truth to our everyday lives. We want to look more like Jesus, but when we look in the mirror we don't see much similarity.

So how does real growth and change happen in the Christian life? How do we connect the resources of the gospel to our everyday struggles, challenges, and difficulties? And what does it take for a whole church community to be committed to real growth in a way that doesn't lead to judgment, hypocrisy, or more hiding and pretending? In this Section, we'll give you a framework for lasting change, and it is all about resting more fully and enjoying more deeply all that God has done for us in Jesus!

Preliminary Questions

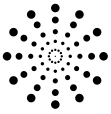
Reflect back on the previous 3 Sections. What aspect of the gospel has become really good news to you?

What are some areas of your life that need deeper growth and change? From what repeated patterns of sin would you most like to find freedom?

LIVING THE GOSPEL-FORMED LIFE **5**

***Editor's Note:** All of Gospel Basics is intended to be discussed in community, but this chapter in particular is best done in a group workshop setting, where participants can work through discussion questions together at length. You'll find that the Discussion and Application sections are much longer and more in-depth, as they are intended for that purpose.*

5 LIVING THE GOSPEL-FORMED LIFE



The Reading.

What does the Bible say about this?

Over the last few chapters we've looked at the centrality and transformational power of the Gospel. Discipleship to Jesus is personally coming to understand and be formed by the Power of the Gospel—past, present, and future—and learning to live everyday life in light of these truths. Disciple-making is the Spirit-empowered process of helping others apply the good news to every area of their life so they too, can learn to live under the empowering leadership of Jesus.

So what does that look like? And how do you do it?

We've realized that learning to apply the Gospel to all of life—both to ours and to others—is a lot like learning a new language and becoming fluent. How do you learn a new language? It takes a lot of practice, and begins slowly and awkwardly! Initially, you think in your own language, try to find the words of the other language and then attempt to speak. Over time, you more quickly move back and forth from your native language to the other language. Eventually you start to think in that new language. Fluency occurs when you can listen, think, and speak the new language, and no longer have to translate in your head. Our hope is that the Gospel becomes our “mother tongue”—shaping the way we think, process, believe, and live!

Like learning a new language, we don't believe this happens immediately. Rather, our goal is to take what we have learned in the last 4 weeks and work on putting it into practice, bringing the Gospel to bear on our lives together, and forming new Gospel habits that will carry us through the long haul. The Christian life is a marathon, not a sprint. We want to disciple one another in a safe context, learning to speak the good news into one another's lives, and encouraging one another to live into the newness of life given to us in Jesus.

In order to do that, we'll begin by digging a bit deeper into a biblical understanding of how people change, then moving into the practicalities.

Good News from God's Word

Carefully read Paul's prayer for the Ephesian church in Ephesians 3:

"For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be

strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love,¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen." (Ephesians 3:14-21)

Paul is writing to Christian believers, people who have come to faith in Jesus Christ and who know the Gospel. But do you notice that Paul does not pray for something beyond the Gospel? He prays that these believers, who know the Gospel, would come to know it more fully and more deeply! He is praying that the love of God to them in Christ would become a greater and greater dynamic power in their lives. He is praying that they'd go deeper into the rich resources of God, available to them through the Gospel. Paul prays for the Gospel to be power in their lives through the work of the Holy Spirit in their "inner being"—from the inside out!

Consider the implications: Paul doesn't want the Ephesian church to move past the Gospel. He doesn't pray that they'd come to know other things than the Gospel. He doesn't just want their spiritual growth to be built on top of a gospel foundation. He wants their growth to be "further up and further in," a deeper grasping and sensing on the heart than which they already know to be true in their heads. He wants the Gospel in deeper!

Paul prays this right before he gets into the practical lifestyle changes that he expects the Ephesian church to be evidencing in their daily lives. Paul is not unconcerned with growth in areas of character and Christlikeness; he knows that the root of true holiness is nothing less than the implanting of the Gospel's resources into the heart and motivation of the Christian, which grows into genuine transformation in everyday life.

Peter does the same thing in 2 Peter 1:3-9:

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge,⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness,⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁹ For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins." (2 Peter 1:3-9)

Peter begins by acknowledging that God has given to us believers all things that we need for living a godly life, and urges us to walk in those resources, growing in Christlike character. Having these qualities means we'll live effective and fruitful lives full of ministry. But notice carefully how he diagnosis the problem when these qualities are missing: For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. If we lack growth in any of these areas, the problem is that we've forgotten the profound truths of the Gospel, become blind to the reality of our present standing as forgiven sinners, and have lost touch with the fountain of gracious cleansing in Jesus.

Here's the point: any defect in actual growth in holiness, in genuine sanctification and in real-world obedience is first and foremost a failure to grasp and sense the full reality of the love of God to us in the Gospel. One day we will fully be like Jesus because, as John says, "we'll see Him as he is." Until that day, we become more and more like Him as we catch glimpses of Him—as we see by faith more and more of who He is and what He has done for us.

The Gospel Gap

In their book *How People Change*, Paul Tripp and Timothy Lane call this phenomenon "the Gospel Gap." The Gospel Gap is the huge space between what our lives actually look like and what we know they should look like. The problem is that we don't know how to connect the two: How do I get from bad fruit in my life (anger, gossip, lying etc) to good fruit (love, joy, peace, patience, etc)?

Imagine you have an obnoxious coworker. Maybe you actually have an obnoxious coworker, and this imagination exercise is really easy for you! Although you want to imitate Jesus in how you deal with this annoying person, you find yourself getting angry with them, being rude to them, and gossiping with others about them. You might be tempted to say that they make you angry, but the reality is that they aren't making you angry—your anger is coming from within. It's hard to admit that you're an angry person—it's easier to believe we're good inside and it's just the circumstance that is "making" you be angry.

If I really pay attention, I'll see a really hard reality: what is showing up in my life is a ME problem. My coworkers and my kids and my spouse and my job might be the circumstance or situation in which my heart is revealed, but they're not CAUSING the sin in my life. There are places in our hearts that are "unevangelized"—where the good news has not connected yet.

Jesus used the imagery of trees bearing fruit:

"For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, ⁴⁴ for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵ The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good,

and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. (Luke 6:43-45)

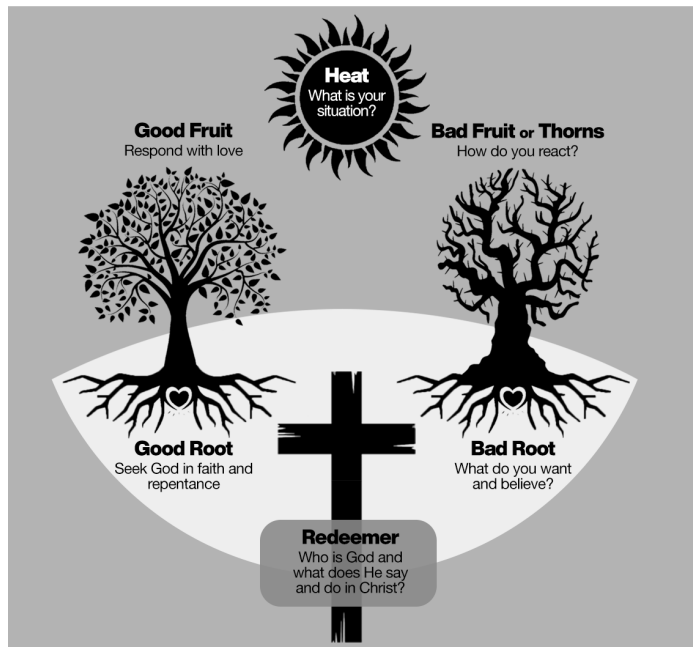
What does Jesus tell us about the bad fruit in our lives? What needs to change for good fruit to show up?

Look at the illustration below and consider what this looks like in your life. Each of us experience the heat of circumstances and situations (like an obnoxious coworker) that provoke a response in us. What Jesus is saying is that you might recognize the bad fruit growing there (like anger, gossip, and rudeness) but what you might not realize is that those bad fruits are coming from somewhere—namely, your heart.

Your heart is the engine of your life, propelling everything about you. And whatever is in your heart will be revealed in your life and actions and behaviors. Whatever the heart wants and believes and hopes has inescapable influence on how we think and speak and live—and what kind of “fruit” grows from our life.

Whatever is going on below the surface in your heart will ALWAYS show up above the surface in your actions and attitudes, and what is showing up in your attitudes and actions ALWAYS reveal what’s going on in your heart. In fact, your actions and attitudes have much more to do with the condition of your heart than with the situation that provoked the response in the first place.

The situations of life will always reveal what you most want. Maybe, in the



**Adapted from "How People Change" by Tripp and Lane [2]*

example of the obnoxious coworker, the thing that you most want is peace and quiet—and you think that if you could just get more peace and quiet in your life, everything would be better. Or maybe what you most want is for everyone to agree with your definition of what's good and what's annoying. Maybe you want everyone to go out of their way to seek your approval. You think that if everyone would just do things the same way you would, that everything would be better. In this “unevangelized” corner of your heart, you have found that you functionally believe that doing things your way will save you.

Most of the time, it's hard to trace the line from the situation (heat) to your specific response (fruit/thorns) to the corresponding heart problem. But if you want to uncover what is happening in your heart, just keep asking yourself “Why?” “Why does this person bother me? Why am I angry about this? Why am I reacting this way?” What you will find is that at the root of all your sin, there is some part of the Gospel that you are not fully believing.

The key to growth and change is to be able to identify what it is about the Jesus and his work that you are not functionally believing. You may confessionally believe all the right things, but when the thorns show up you can be sure that there's something other than Jesus and his grace that you are treasuring in that moment. In partnership with the Holy Spirit, in a safe community, and with our Bibles open, we're looking to uncover the lies, half-truths, or unbelief at the root of our everyday sinful responses and reactions.

As you recognize what is going on in your heart, you're ready to repent (turn from the false beliefs and misordered desires) and to rejoice again in what is true in the gospel. What specific gospel truth do you need to remember? What has God done for you? What is true about his heart toward you? What is true about who you are and what you have in Jesus? Name those things, and turn them to prayerful rejoicing! Give thanks to God for what he has done and what you have now in Jesus! You are free from sin's penalty and power, fully loved and accepted, and your Father delights in you! The Spirit is with you and is at work to make you whole in Jesus! Praise God.

As your heart begins to worship, what shows up in your life is going to be very different. As that hidden, functional unbelief in your heart is uncovered and replaced with the true message of the gospel, new fruit begins to bubble upward into your actions and attitudes. Even though the situation (heat) hasn't changed at all, you can produce good fruit, right there in the midst of it. Your clashes with the obnoxious coworker can become an area where your ongoing transformation is visible for all to see!

We've found this to be a helpful and meaningful tool in just about every context of making disciples, and believe that it would be a meaningful part of your weekly rhythm as well. You can practice this week, with 2-4 good friends who know you well.

Go in order clockwise around the diagram with a situation from your own life.

1. Heat

What is the circumstance that's bothering you?
Example: my friend was gossiping about me.



2. Bad Fruit or Thorns

What sin is coming to the surface in your life because of this circumstance?
Example: I'm getting really defensive and feel anxious about talking to her at all.



3. Bad Root

What is revealed about what you want the most? What lies, half-truths, or unbelief is happening in your heart?
Example: I feel like in order to fit in I have to be perfect. I feel like if I don't defend myself against accusations, no one will.



4. Gospel

What does the Gospel say about you?
Example: The Gospel says I am fully known and still loved - and that Jesus has already stood up for me against all accusations. He has said that I am worse than I think, but fully justified.



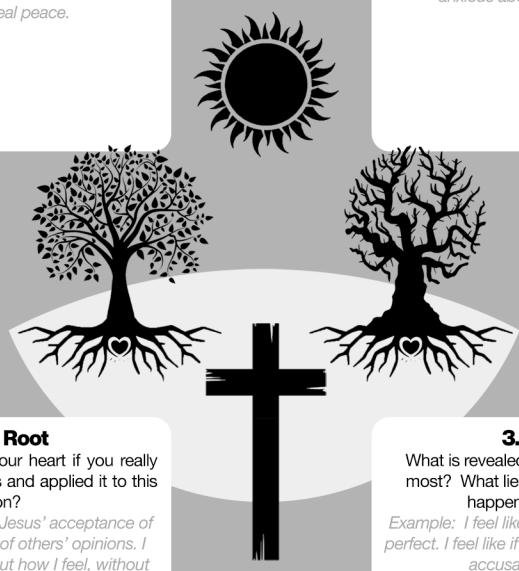
5. Good Root

What would change in your heart if you really believed that Good News and applied it to this situation?
Example: If I can trust in Jesus' acceptance of me, I can be less fearful of others' opinions. I can talk to my friend about how I feel, without worrying that I will mess up my status of "belonging" - because Jesus has already said I belong with him.



6. Good Fruit

What sort of attitudes and actions would start to show up on the surface?
Example: I could be more kind to her. I could be more bold to talk, face to face. I could find real peace.



If you want to replace your bad fruit with good fruit, you need to go under the surface. You may say “I can’t make this happen in my life...” but there is one who can!”

If you look back at the passage from 2 Peter 1:3-9, you’ll see that Peter concludes by saying “whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.” He doesn’t say that this is a problem of not trying hard enough, or anything like that.

It’s just blindness—you’re blind to the spiritual reality that you’ve been cleansed of your former sins. That bad fruit is a product of forgetting that you’ve been radically redeemed. When Peter says we’re blind:

We are blind to our identity. The reality is that as a Christian, you are a sinner-saint. You are worse than you think you are, and you are more loved and forgiven than you can even imagine. You are both of those realities at the same time. There are places in your heart that are really fruitful, where growth and change has happened. There are places in your heart that still produce thorns.

We are blind to the riches of God’s provision. God has already given us everything that we need for life and godliness. We have forgotten to make use of all that we have in Jesus.

We are blind to the process that God is after in our lives. Real change is a process. It doesn’t happen overnight. God is after the transformation of your heart, giving you new desires, so that you love kindness and truthfulness and self-control. His highest priority is making you more and more like Jesus, which means that we’re free to be the mess that we actually are. We can be honest about what’s going on in our hearts, because God already knows that this process is going to come over time, with one baby step after another. He is using the circumstances of our lives (the heat) to reveal what’s in our hearts, so that it can come to the surface and be dealt with.

Understanding Idolatry

The Biblical category for all this is called “idolatry”.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Claiming to be wise, they became fools,²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

²⁴Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Romans 1:18-25)

Why do our hearts become futile and darkened? (v. 21) Paul says our hearts become darkened for 2 reasons. First, we do not honor God, acting toward Him as if He is not important, great, supreme. Second, we do not give thanks to God, failing to act dependent on and indebted to Him. In other words, our hearts become futile and darkened for the very same reason that Adam and Eve ate the fruit of the tree in the Garden of Eden. We want to control our lives, we want to be in charge, and we want to be self-sufficient. We don't want God to be God, we want to be God.

What is the result? (v. 22-23) Because we were created as worshiping beings, when we reject God and deny Him, we don't cease to worship. Rather, we simply exchange the True God for a false god. While most of us don't have physical idols in our homes, we have god substitutes in our hearts. We look to someone or something to give us a sense of identity, worth, significance and purpose. There will always be something in our lives to which we'll say deep in our minds and hearts: In order to receive life with joy I must have this. That is idolatry. You only have 2 choices: worship the Creator or worship the created. Either worship God or worship idols!

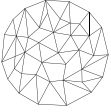
What is the result of this idolatry in our lives? (v. 24-25) The result of the exchanging the true God for false gods and idols is deception. In the absence of worshiping the true God, we create and live in a false belief system, setting our hopes and joys on those things we think will give us life. Something becomes our savior, righteousness and hope. The inevitable result is spiritual slavery: God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts. Idolatry makes us slaves to what we think we need for joyful life. What we want becomes what we must have; and that craving drives, motivates, and animates our lives. Then, because these idols ultimately can never give what they promise, and because inevitably they won't satisfy us deeply and truly, we are always driven to more in an endless cycle of pursuit and disappointment.

Almost anything can become an idol in our lives and often, these idols are good things in and of themselves. They become idols when we elevate them to the place of God in our lives. In other words, when our happiness, identity, and security are connected to having one of these good things, we are worshiping idols no matter how much we may say we love and trust in God.

So, when we are thinking about how to change, we must begin by identifying the root problem in all of our sin: the "default" mode of our heart is to function in our idolatry, even when we are doing morally good things. In other words, we break commandments 2-10 because we break the first one. We would not lie, steal, or kill (commands 2-10) unless we were first making

some other thing more of an ultimate hope and value to us than God (command 1). Underneath all sin is a failure to treasure Christ and His grace to us above everything else.

In the same way, if you are obeying the commandments without deep joy in your acceptance in Christ, you are not loving God with all your heart. You are not obeying God for God. You are being moral, so that you can put God in your debt, so He owes you a comfortable life. You are being moral so that you can feel secure in your uprightness. You are being moral in the service of self-salvation out of the fear and pride that arise without an identity built on Christ in the Gospel. This sneaky form of idolatry is what the Pharisees were guilty of and why Jesus reserved some of His strongest words of rebuke for them.



The Discussion.

Write your answers here to prepare for group discussion.

Freedom from Idolatry*

**Adapted from Church Planter by Darrin Patrick [3]*

We grow as we understand and repent from our idols, and place ever-deeper faith and joy in Jesus Christ as our Savior. This is the only way we will ever obey God—not to get something, simply to get God! But what does that look like? There are three simple postures or practices that are the heartbeat of grace-centered growth and change in our lives: **Recognize, Repent, and Rejoice.**

Recognize

First, we learn to recognize the specific idols or god substitutes in our lives in light of Scripture, the Spirit's conviction, and life in community. Consider the following list of possible idols, and mark any that feel significant in your own life.

I feel loved, important, joyful, or significant:

1. **Power:** If I have power and influence over others.
2. **Approval:** If I'm loved and respected by_____.
3. **Comfort:** If I have this kind of pleasure/experience.
4. **Control:** If I'm able to have mastery over this area of my life.
5. **Image:** If I have a certain look or body image.
6. **Helping:** If people are dependent on me and need me.
7. **Dependence:** If someone is there to keep me safe.
8. **Independence:** If I'm completely free of responsibility and obligation.
9. **Work:** If I'm highly productive and get a lot done.
10. **Achievement:** If I'm recognized for my accomplishments.
11. **Materialism:** If I've a certain level of wealth, finance, nice possessions.
12. **Religion:** If I'm adhering to my religion's codes and accomplished in its activities.
13. **Individual person:** If this one person is in my life and happy there.
14. **Irreligion:** If I am independent of organized religion & have a self-made morality.
15. **Racial/cultural:** If my race and culture are ascendant and recognized as superior.
16. **Inner ring:** If a particular social or professional group lets me in.
17. **Family:** If my children/parents are happy or happy with me.
18. **Suffering:** If I'm hurting or in a problem, only then do I feel noble, worthy of love.

We call this list “surface idols” because they are usually very apparent and easy to recognize. Remember, most of these things are good in and of themselves. The problem comes when our joy, satisfaction, and identity are connected to having them.

Which of these “surface idols” currently have an influence in your life? In what ways?

What events or relationships in your life may have contributed to you running to these idols?

The four most basic idols—what we call “source idols” because they are underneath other idols and therefore more difficult to see—are listed below. Under each are some potential issues that often accompany these idols.

Comfort: *I need to have this kind of pleasure or comfort; I want my freedom, space and time.*

Often Seek: privacy, lack of stress, freedom

Price Willing to Pay: reduced productivity (don’t give fully), isolation

Greatest Nightmare: stress, demands, responsibility

Others often Feel: hurt (because you’re not contributing fully), unloved

Problem Emotion: boredom (rarely risk, often hold back, safe)

Approval: *I need to feel like you care; people-pleasing; I need you to accept me.*

Often Seek: affirmation, love, relationship

Price Willing to Pay: less independence (don’t like to be alone), manipulated

Greatest Nightmare: rejection, criticism

Others often Feel: smothered or falsely coddled (b/c you’re needy)

Problem Emotion: cowardice (won’t tell the whole truth)

Control: *I need structure and certainty; I want to manage the situation.*

Often Seek: discipline, certainty, standards

Price Willing to Pay: lack of spontaneity

Greatest Nightmare: uncertainty, what you can't control

Others often Feel: condemned, judged

Problem Emotion: worry, anxiety (because you can't control everything)

Power: *I need to be respected, admired, and thought competent and important.*

Often Seek: success, winning, influence

Price Willing to Pay: burdened, responsible, it's all up to me

Greatest Nightmare: humiliation, lack of respect, incompetence

Others often Feel: used, unimportant

Problem Emotion: anger (because people get in the way)

When any of these “idols of the heart” are more important than Jesus, we give in to sin. The reality is, if we fully rested in the Gospel, we would stop sinning. As Dr. Tim Keller says, “the sin underneath all other sins is a lack of joy in Christ.” When Jesus is enough, when we are fully satisfied in Him, then we no longer go looking elsewhere for what only He can provide. In other words, when I repent of my idolatry and believe the truth that I already have God’s favor, love, delight, and joy, my internal need to sin is undermined. I can learn to obey God joyfully — in deep humility, courage, and gratitude.

Which of these “source idols” currently have an influence in your life? In what ways?

Where do you see the effect of these source idols in your life?

Repent

Once we are beginning to identify our heart idols, we can begin to repent with understanding and specificity. Repentance is the heart-felt sorrow that grows in our lives as we begin to see how worthless and powerless our idols actually are, and begin to turn from them to our true Savior, Jesus.

First, our idols are weak—they never actually give what they promise. Think about it: have any of these idols ever actually produced lasting joy and satisfaction? Have they ever really been a source of ongoing life for you? Do they really give you peace and delight? Of course, in the short run, they often do, but over the long haul of life, in the middle of difficulty and trial, through all the ups and downs of life, they cannot deliver on their promises. They won't save you!

Second, our idols are harmful. Do you see how you have used and abused those you love in service of your idols? Pursuing our joy in anything other than God and His grace means that we are using people for our own ends. We serve so that we feel O.K. about ourselves. We give a compliment in order to get one back. We extend care for someone in order to feel powerful. We set boundaries in order to be left alone. Our pursuit of idols is never life-giving to anyone, and we are often very destructive of anyone who would get between us and what we think we need for joy and life. Our sinful actions and words are always connected to someone getting in the way of our idols.

Lastly, and most importantly, our idolatry is grievous to God. On the one hand, when we come to see our idolatry, we begin to realize the depth of our depravity - we are breaking the first and most important command. We are not, despite what good or moral actions we may be doing, loving God with all our heart, mind, and strength. In fact, we're often doing little more than using God in service of our idols, praying that He'd bless our lives by giving us what we've determined we need.

But our idolatry does more than break God's law—it breaks His heart. God is not simply a judge who has given some rules we've chosen to transgress. God is our Maker and He loves this world so much that He gave His own Son for us. Jesus bled for us. God was willing to let His own Son be crushed in our place, yet by our idolatry we are essentially saying to Him, "We know you gave your Son, but it isn't enough for me. If I'm really going to have a full and satisfied life, I also need this idol."

Real repentance is not simply seeing the weakness and destructiveness of our idols. Seeing those things makes us sorry about the effects of our sin, even though we still do it. Only when we see that our idolatry is the rejection of God's love for us - the refusal of the gift of His Son—do we really begin to repent. Only then do we have true sorrow over our sin itself, and learn to hate the sin, not just the sin's consequences.

Rejoice

As we come to recognize our idolatry and begin to turn from it in deep, genuine, humble repentance, we can turn to the final practice—rejoicing. This final posture is faith, where we begin to look away from our sin to the all-satisfying riches of grace in Jesus Christ. In rejoicing we ask, “How does the Gospel undermine this idol? What does my idol promise me that only Jesus truly delivers? How does Jesus give this to me more fully, completely and graciously?”

Rejoicing is the process of remembering and savoring the goodness of God in Jesus Christ by embracing the truth of the Gospel afresh. The sin underneath all other sins is a lack of heart-satisfying joy in Christ, so only when we forsake our idols and turn to Jesus again and again, will we experience the present power of the Gospel in our lives.

In rejoicing, we come to God’s Word looking for the declarations regarding who God is and what God has done for us in Jesus. We focus on the abundant promises of God to those who look to Him in faith. We relish the sweet mercies that pour forth from Scripture, and we bring our hearts to sit under the fountain of His grace. Rejoicing is taking the truth of the Gospel, pondering it, turning it over in our minds and hearts, until it comes home anew in the power of the Spirit.

NOTABLE QUOTE

Therefore, be encouraged that God made you to rejoice in Him. Do not settle for any lesser joy...Fix your eyes on the all-satisfying treasure of Jesus Christ who loved us and gave his life as a ransom for our everlasting joy.

JOHN PIPER

There is a command in Piper’s words: fix your eyes. That is our job as we recognize, repent and rejoice in Christ, to fix our gaze on Jesus, to stare into the message of the cross, marveling over and over at all God has done for us in Jesus.

After recognizing your idols, how do you need to repent? And how can you rejoice in the completed work of the Gospel?

discussion notes



5 **LIVING THE
GOSPEL-FORMED
LIFE**

GOSPEL BASICS 97



The Application.

Practically, how does this change your life?

5

LIVING THE
GOSPEL-FORMED
LIFE

All of Life with Gospel Intentionality

The Christian life is fueled by the ongoing rediscovery and renewal of the Gospel's power in our lives. This grace of God has to be the engine of our souls. We are all distracted by many things, and all of these distractions have varying degrees of merit. But to be a Christian is, as Jesus said, to “lose everything for my sake and the Gospel.” It is to count anything and everything else as less than the all-consuming glory and grace of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. We can talk all day about practical tips for living the Christian life, but at the end of the day, everything that is “Christian” is the fruit of a people who are increasingly being gripped by grace. A life in community and on Jesus' mission is what happens when your life is captivated by God's gracious rescue.

Therefore, as we go from here, make “gospel partnership” the banner that flies over all your life. Fight to make the grace of God in Jesus become both the motivation and the mission of everything you do. Date your spouse for the sake of the Gospel, protect family night for the sake of the Gospel, work your job for the sake of the Gospel, coach your kids' sports teams for the sake of the Gospel, vacation for the sake of the Gospel, serve in your neighborhood for the sake of the Gospel, and on and on.

Practically, this will look like a regular rhythm of repentance and rejoicing in Jesus. As Paul Tripp has said, “You have nothing to prove but this: the Gospel of Jesus Christ is reliable and true and has the power to both free and transform you and me.” Anything other than this puts you on a pedestal, and while that may feel great for a time, it will all come crashing down and people will get hurt. It is best to be a person in the middle of his or her sanctification, and be content to say “I need Jesus; isn't He gracious and good?” And then do it again.

Along with regular, ongoing repentance and rejoicing—meaning you'll never be at a loss to talk about how Jesus is saving you today—we need to be people who trust in and listen to the Holy Spirit. You'll never disciple anyone, lead anyone to confession of sin or help anyone to see the sufficiency of Jesus apart from the work of the Spirit. In fact, if this has ever happened in your leading and serving, it is only because the Holy Spirit was faithfully doing His work. Purpose, therefore, to believe that He is at work in all things, pursuing the hearts of your neighbors and your community. Trust that He's got it all under control. Ask for Him to lead you, your family, and your community, and expect that He already is.

Gospel DNA

Practically, this will look like layers of DNA (Discover, Nurture, Act). DNA is our short-hand way of saying that we all need to be engaged in the work of the Great Commission, communicating Gospel truth in the context of relationships. We need people who have access to our lives, people we encourage to ask us hard questions, who probe our motivations, and keep us remembering the freedom we've been given in Jesus. While this happens naturally in many spheres of life, there are a few places that require a more intentional approach.

First, if you're married, practice DNA with your spouse, fighting to carve out time (like a weekly date night, or a 20 minute check-in before bed!) to shepherd one another to Jesus. Talk about the ways you've seen your need for Jesus this week, and how you've seen grace at work in one another. A few simple questions to regularly return to can be a great asset for your marriage.

Where are you experiencing Jesus' pursuit? What is He showing you about your sin and need of Him?

Have you experienced grace or judgment through me this week? In what ways?

How is our communication? Our sexual intimacy? Our parenting? Our missional community?

Second, practice DNA with your kids. This can happen in a variety of ways depending on the ages of your kids. Mostly, your job is to point them to Jesus who can save them. You'll generally be doing this by confessing your need for Jesus to save you. Do it regularly and specifically, both when your sin affects them directly and when it doesn't. Read the Bible with them, and take advantage of times to foster Gospel conversation, especially the bedtime routine. And when you pray for them or with them, pray the riches of the Gospel into their hearts and minds. Find what works for the ages of your kids and the rhythms of your life, and live in the freedom of not having to do it the way others (in books, blogs, or elsewhere) do it.

Third, practice DNA with a few brothers or sisters. You need this more than you might think, and you should invite others to do it with you weekly because you need it, not because you think they need it! Setting aside regular time with a few others from your community to talk about your sin and your Savior is a must. This regular meeting will help to ensure that all of your other “life together” activities have a solid foundation of Gospel intentionality.

A few simple practices to include when you meet together:

Discover: read something together, especially the Bible, and discuss what you’re seeing about Jesus.

Nurture: confess sin to one another, and help each other remember the truth about God and His grace.

Act: discuss what the Spirit is leading you to, set targets, and walk them out together in grace.

Before moving on, take a moment to consider: who will I do this with, and when will I do it? How will I make sure that this time is prioritized and intentional?

Personal Evangelism

As you are learning to do all this in your life, you’ll notice something else growing: a deep compassion and burden for those who don’t have these resources to approach life with! While you are gaining a fresh understanding of why you have been compelled toward certain destructive behaviors and finding freedom in Christ through repentance and faith, your neighbors are stuck in cycles of sin without the resources of the Gospel of grace. They don’t know about this freedom. They don’t know about being at rest in the love of the Savior. They don’t know that the work is finished and they can be forgiven and welcomed home!

How do we move into the lives of people around our tables and in our neighborhoods with the good news?

The good news is that the very thing we are learning to do for one another—pointing each other to the rich resources of the Gospel—is the very thing we can do in the lives of those who don't yet know Jesus. If the problem in our lives is a lack of deep joy in Christ, then certainly the problem in anyone's life is the same thing. And if the Savior's work is sufficient to save and transform us, then certainly He can do the same for anyone!

Who has God put in your life that doesn't know the abundance resources of the gospel? List a few names.

What needs to happen in your life in order to get regular time with these people?

What aspects of the work of Jesus might be really good news for them?

Growing In Gospel Fluency Together*

**Adapted from an article by Jeff Vanderstelt*

Here are some ideas on how to grow as a community in gospel fluency. Part of what you'll do together whenever you gather—in DNA groups, for dinners, to serve in the neighborhood—is to talk about how the Gospel is at work in your lives. The following practices can help you all grow together.

Apply the Gospel to Personal Stories

Give each person in your community the opportunity to share their personal story. Before they do so, encourage them to tell it in light of what they believe about Jesus and how the Gospel has affected all of life. Also, encourage the group to listen with “Gospel Ears” paying close attention to areas where the Gospel has redeemed and rightly informed their story as well as where the Gospel needs to be spoken into their story.

For example, if their story recounts a life without a father present or maybe a life with an abusive father, listen for where they came to see that they have a perfect Heavenly Father who was always present. If that doesn't come up, the group should ask them how they perceive the Father in Heaven and how knowing the truth about Him sending the Son to save us shapes how they see this part of their story.

Express Gospel Need and Fulfillment with Communion

Have the communion elements ready to celebrate our Lord's death. Then ask each person to particularly identify with one of the elements (the bread or the wine) and share how they are aware of their need for the Gospel in light of how the bread or wine speaks to them. This gives each person the opportunity to express the Gospel in light of their need and how the Gospel satisfies their need.

For example, someone might say, “I particularly identify with the bread this week because I am realizing that I have been trusting in my own works to make me righteous before God instead of trusting in the righteous life of Jesus lived on my behalf in human flesh.” Or, someone might say, “I am so grateful for the cup this week because I have been overcome with the reality of my sin this week and I need to be reminded that Christ's blood was poured out for me for the forgiveness of my sins.”

Before you begin this process, encourage each person to listen closely to the person on their right because they will be serving them the elements after everyone has shared, in light of the Gospel need they expressed. This gives each person the opportunity to listen for the Gospel need in others and then “preach” the Gospel into their situation.

It might sound like, “This bread is to remind you that Jesus’ righteous life, lived in His body that was given for you on the cross, is the righteousness of God exchanged for your sin. And His blood was poured out for you to forgive you of your sin, including trusting in your own righteousness.”

Throughout the experience the group gets to hear the Gospel need proclaimed several times, then observes several different Gospel proclamations specifically applied to a unique person and situation. At the end of the night, the group will have grown in their ability to express their Gospel need, listen for the Gospel need in another’s life, proclaim the Gospel contextually into that person’s life and situation AND listen to other people proclaim it as well.

Regularly ask, “How does the Gospel address this?” and “What about the Gospel are you not believing?”

Whenever life challenges or difficulties come up in the group’s conversation, instead of giving quick advice, ask, “How does the Gospel address this?” Regularly ask how ‘Who Jesus Is’ and ‘What He Has Done’ shapes how we handle the stuff of life. A couple of things will happen if you do this regularly: 1) You will teach the group that the Gospel really can and does address everything in life; 2) The group will become much more fluent in Gospel conversations the more they have them; and 3) You will learn over time if they are coming to know and believe the Gospel fully.

Slow Down to Identify Idols and Compare to Jesus

When your group gathers, listen closely to the conversations and the stories. Listen for what they are ultimately putting their trust in. Ask, “What idol/god are you putting your trust in?” Sometimes the best way to identify the idols of the heart is by calling people to ministry and mission. Idols become easiest to see when we are calling people to be faithful to Jesus’ mission. Listen for the excuses or reasons for not being willing or able to obey—fear, insecurities, selfishness, pride, approval of man issues, worship of children, family or work, etc...

Then, as you or the group becomes aware of the people or things that have become idols or “little gods,” take the time to compare them to Jesus, showing Jesus to be the resolution to what they are seeking, the opposite of what they are experiencing, or the deeper reality they seek.

SECTION **6-8** OVERVIEW

Gospel Identity: A Family of Servants and Missionaries

The good news of Jesus — all he has done on our behalf in his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and soon return — is the “power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). In Christianity, salvation isn’t something we attain but something we receive; we don’t contribute anything to our salvation except the sin that makes it necessary! Our role is to respond to what God has done for us in Jesus in repentance (turning from both sin and self-salvation efforts) and faith (turning toward God in trust and surrender). This is how we become Christians, and it is how we continue to grow as Christians, conforming our lives more and more to the wisdom and way of Jesus, until he comes again. We call this Gospel Power.

Over the next 3 Sections we’ll be looking at what we call Gospel Identity, exploring the new identity we’re given as a result of our trust in Jesus and all he has done. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 the Apostle Paul says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” In Galatians 2:20-21 Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” We see this kind of language across the New Testament, describing the end of our old life and the start of something new.

In fact, before Paul and the other NT writers tell us what to do as disciples of Jesus, they almost always remind us of who we are as disciples of Jesus. What we do always flows from who we are, and to understand how we are to live as Christians really requires us to understand who we are as Christians. And understanding who we are as Christians requires us knowing what God has done for us and who he is toward us!

We call this the **Gospel Flow**, and you see this pattern all across the Scriptures. Before we can know what we are to do, we have to know who we are. And to know who we are, we have to look to who God is and what he has done for us. You could chart it like this:



This is why it is so significant that Jesus commanded his first disciples to make more disciples, “baptizing them into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” To be “baptized into the name” was not only a water ritual designed to signify one’s faith in Jesus. It also signified a new integral connection or relationship to God — a new identity! — based on who God is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is God’s identity — one God in three distinct persons — and our new identity is rooted in our connection to God.

God the Father has adopted us, making us his Family. God the Son has set us free, making us his Servants. God the Holy Spirit has empowered us, making us his Missionaries.

Who is God?	What has God done?	Who are we?	What do we do?
Father	Adopted Us	Family	As Family, we love God and love one another.
Son	Set Us Free	Servants	As Servants, we serve King Jesus and serve others as a foretaste of the coming Kingdom.
Spirit	Empowered Us	Missionaries	As Missionaries, we follow the leading of the Spirit as we share and show the good news of Jesus.

Notice that the chart moves, left to right, from who God is and what He has done, to Who we are and how we live. Making disciples is the process of helping people connect who God is and what God has done to who we are now and what we are to do. Unless we know who He is, and what He’s done, we’ll never know who we are now or have the power for how we are to live. And if we make the mistake of trying to start with who we are and what we’re supposed to do, we’ll probably find ourselves completely missing the point of the Gospel.

Every disciple of Jesus has this new identity, and the Church is the community of people learning to live this new identity together. God has made us His people, a Family of Servants and Missionaries, sent to make more disciples.

In Section 6, we look at the rich biblical imagery of adoption, and unpack all that it means to be adopted by God the Father and to love one another as Family.

In Section 7, we look at the radical way Jesus redefined greatness, and explore what it means to be set free by God the Son and to engage the world as Servants.

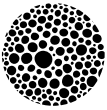
In Section 8, we look at the ongoing mission Jesus gave his church, and discover what it means to be empowered by the Holy Spirit and to live our everyday lives as Missionaries.

It is these 3 unique identities which form the basis of the Christian community called the Church. The Church is not primarily an event to attend (Sunday morning, small groups, ministry teams, etc.) or a task to accomplish (Bible study, accountability, prayer, etc.). Christian community is simply how we live our new identity in Christ. We don't go to church; we are the Church! Church is our new identity, who we are by faith in Christ. Everywhere we go and in everything we do, we are the Church: A Family of Servants and Missionaries.

section 6

We Are Family

[adopted by the Father]



The Big Picture.

What's the point?

Key Question: What is our new identity, now that we've been adopted by God the Father?

Key Answer: We are now Family who love God and love one another.

The central distinguishing mark of the life and ministry of Jesus was his intimate relationship with God. When God revealed himself to Moses, God told Moses to call him YHWH (Yahweh). This was God's unique name, the personal name by which he wanted Israel to address him. But by Jesus' day, faithful Jews hesitated to use God's name, and instead simply called him "Lord" out of reverence and fear of misusing his name. (That's why our Bible's translate YHWH as "LORD" in all capital letters.) But Jesus abandoned all formality and etiquette, and simply addressed God as "Father." In fact, he often went beyond that, calling God "Abba," the equivalent of "papa" or even "daddy." It was wildly irreverent, and generally regarded as blasphemous by the religious leaders — but such was Jesus' intimacy with God!

And when his disciples asked to learn how to pray, Jesus taught them to address God in the exact same way. For Jesus, knowing God as "Abba" was integral to being a disciple, and he expected his disciples to enjoy the same kind of nearness and intimacy with God that he himself enjoyed.

The Apostle Paul picks up this theme, and describes Christianity as the experience of adoption, where God brings us into his family and we share in all the closeness, intimacy, and vulnerability of being his beloved child, just as Jesus is.

The Christian doctrine of “adoption” is a profound truth, and one that is deeply significant for those who trust in Jesus Christ. Through faith in Jesus, we are each embraced by God’s grace and brought into his family as beloved children. As adopted children, Christians are invited to enter into an intimate relationship with their Heavenly Father, experiencing his unconditional love, guidance and provision.

This adoption becomes the foundation for the kind of relationships we are to have with one another. If God has adopted us, then not only do we belong to him — we belong to each other. The Church is God’s Family.

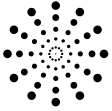
Preliminary Questions

What does the idea of family conjure up for you? Is it generally a positive or negative idea? How has your own family shaped those feelings?

What has your experience with the church been like? To what degree have you experienced the church as a family?

**WE ARE
FAMILY**
[adopted by
the Father]

6



The Reading.

What does the Bible say about this?

6 WE ARE FAMILY [adopted by the Father]

Romans 8 is considered by many to be the most significant chapter in the New Testament. The Apostle Paul unpacks the radical idea that every disciple of Jesus is an adopted child of God the Father, and has received the same Holy Spirit, same access to God, and same future destiny of Jesus, the True Son. Just as an adopted child has both the legal standing and relational affection of the parents, so all who are by faith “in Christ” are legally secure in the commitment of the Father and relationally secure in the affection of the Father.

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” (Romans 8:15-17)

What is the difference between a "spirit of slavery" and the "Spirit of adoption?"

What is an heir? What have we inherited? What privilege is ours now that we have received adoption? How does it change how we relate to God?

Why does Paul say we must we also suffer with Jesus in this life before the glory comes?

Abba's Child *Section adapted from Discipleship Essentials by Greg Ogden [4]*

Do you know who you are? Do you know who you were designed to be? Do you know the Father's intent for your life? You are meant to hear in your spirit the same thing Jesus heard when He came out of the waters of baptism at the beginning of His ministry: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11).

Romans 8:15-16 attests to the highest privilege of the Christian life and the deepest longing of our hearts: knowing God as our perfect Father. "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the spirit of sonship [adoption]. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

J.I. Packer puts it simply: "What is a Christian? The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God for his Father." In other words, we are designed to live in a family. Our highest privilege and deepest need is to experience the Holy God as our loving Father, to approach Him without fear and to be assured of His fatherly care and concern.

Our Dad

Scripture teaches that our Father can be the same one Jesus had. Paul tells us that the indwelling Holy Spirit causes us to cry out, "Abba, Father," words spoken by Jesus. In the garden of Gethsemane just hours before His crucifixion, Jesus poured out His soul to His Father. Mark tells us that Jesus threw Himself to the ground not far from his dozing disciples. In evident pain He cried out, "Abba, Father.... Take this cup from me [the cup of his sacrificial death]. Yet not what I will, but what you will" (Mark 14:36). What is unusual here is the way Jesus addresses God. Abba is an Aramaic word that expresses an intimate family relationship, a word used by a completely trusting and dependent child wholly secure in the loving arms of a father.

How did the Father feel about His Son? At the beginning of His public ministry Jesus presented Himself for baptism to John the Baptist. As Jesus came out of the water, a dove representing the Holy Spirit descended on Him, and a voice spoke from the heavens. Matthew records this as an announcement of God's pleasure with His Son: "This is my son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). Mark records the message as a more personal statement from Father to Son: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11).

Adopted Children of God

When the Holy Spirit takes up residence in our lives, we too can cry, "Abba, Father." The same Spirit that proceeds from the relationship between the Father and Son is implanted in us. The difference between us and Jesus is that He is the natural Son of the Father, whereas we are adopted into the family through His sacrifice.

We are all spiritual orphans. Our rebellious and sinful nature cut us off from God the Father. The Bible says quite clearly that we are not born children of God and therefore must go through an adoption process. The price of our adoption was the death of God's Son. C.S. Lewis wrote, "The Son of God became a man to enable men to become the sons of God."

The good news is that when we recognize that we are spiritual orphans in need of the Father, we can go through the Son. When we acknowledge that our sin has severed the relationship with the Father, that Jesus is the gracious payment for our sin and then accept the gift of forgiveness offered by inviting the Spirit of Jesus into our life, then we can cry, "Abba, Father." We are at home at last, welcomed into God's family.

As adopted children we can enjoy the same favor that Jesus has with the Father. We too, are the apple of God's eye, the pleasure of his love, the delight of His focus. And if we didn't get all that we wanted or needed in our human fathers, we are invited even more deeply into the pleasure that the Father of heaven and earth takes in His Son, and us. We have been included in the family and hear the Father say, "You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." We now have the Father we always needed and wanted.

Our Rich Inheritance

But that's not where the text ends. If we are full-fledged members of the family, there is an inheritance waiting for us. "If we are children, then we are heirs of God and coheirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17). We have been included in the will and stand to inherit such things as resurrection bodies that do not decay, and a new heaven and new earth, for starters. The will also mentions that we'll have a family to spend eternity with, in a life free of pain, crying, disease and death. But that's still not the best part! The best part is that we are heirs of God. The will reads: "I, God, bequeath myself to you for all eternity."

We are heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, and therefore we get in on all that Jesus inherits. When Jesus was in the upper room before going to the cross, He longed to return to the presence of His Father. He prayed in John 17:5, "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory that I had with you before the world began."

Jesus was looking forward to the joy on the other side of the cross. The writer of Hebrews says that "for the joy set before him [Jesus] endured the cross" (Hebrews 12:2). As coheirs with Jesus we get to share in the glory that the Father bestows on the Son. As Jesus prayed moments before His arrest, He made our inheritance with him plain: "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world" (John 17:24). Jesus wraps up his prayer by asking the Father to bestow on us the same love that He has for Jesus: "I have made you known to them...in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (v. 26).

We are drawn into the family circle and get to enjoy the spillover of the Father's love for the Son. As we bring this section on the message of Christ to a close, we end where we started. We began examining the meaning of being created in the image of God and discovered that this meant we were created for relationship. To be adopted into God's family is to be restored to paradise lost. God sent Jesus as the image of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15) to restore the image of God in us. We find our way home only when the Holy Spirit comes to take residence in us and we cry out, "Abba, Father." Welcome home!

Good News from God's Word

"And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked . . . and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved . . ." (Ephesians 2:1-5)

"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Ephesians 5:1-2)

According to the verses above, what were we apart from Christ's sacrifice and what do we become through faith in Christ's sacrifice?

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:4-7)

What did Jesus do to make us children of God?

Good News for Everyday Life

Read through these characteristics of people who view themselves as Orphans and people who view themselves as dearly loved Children of God. Under the Orphan column, put a check by those characteristics that describe you most. Under the Children of God column, underline those characteristics you most long for. When you've finished, take some time to reflect on the questions below.

Orphans*	Children of God*
Feels alone. Lacks a vital daily intimacy with God. Is full of self-concern.	Has a growing assurance that "God is really my loving heavenly Father."
Anxious over felt needs: relationships, money, health. "I'm all alone and nobody cares. I'm not a happy camper."	Trusts the Father and has a growing confidence in his loving care. Is being freed up from worry.
Feels condemned, guilty, and unworthy before God and others.	Feels loved, forgiven, and totally accepted because Christ's merit really clothes them.
Only uses "God" or "Lord" when praying. Going to God in prayer is a last resort.	Calls God "Father" or "Dad" in prayer. Turns to God in prayer first in times of need.
The Bible's promises of spiritual power and joy are empty.	God's transforming power and joy are regular experiences.
Avoids spending time with God.	Enjoys spending time with God.
Lacks passion to share the gospel. The Christian life isn't experienced as good news.	Loves talking about Jesus. The gospel is experienced as good news here and now.
Seeks satisfaction in physical pleasure.	Is satisfied in God's love.
Insecure in relationships. Concerned about being left out or neglected.	Content in relationships. Able to focus on others rather than self.
Always feels like "the sky is falling."	Trusts that God will provide for every need.
Have a hard time giving thanks or praising God.	Find numerous reasons to rejoice in God from a good meal to a sunny day.
Is often defensive when sensing criticism. Often goes into protection mode.	Doesn't fear criticism because well acquainted with both sin and grace. Knows that God is protector.

**Adapted from Sonship by SERGE [5]*

According to the chart, some of our biggest struggles in life come from not being convinced that we really are fully known and accepted by God through the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

For those characteristics that you struggle with the most, how would embracing your identity as a dearly loved child of God make a difference?

The Life of the Church Family

Just as God has made us family with him, he has also set us within the family of believers. In the church you are surrounded by brothers and sisters, who have all been adopted by the same Father. That new family comes with both privileges and responsibilities. Consider this description of the early church from Acts 2.

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³ And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. ⁴⁴ And all who believed were together and had all things in common. ⁴⁵ And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶ And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:42-47)

What were the people in the early church doing according to this passage? What activities were they engaged in?

Choose three adjectives to describe this community.

What is appealing to you about a community like this?

What is scary to you about being involved in a community like this? Why?

Family.

**We are dearly loved children adopted by the Father.
As Family, we love God and love one another.**

NOTABLE QUOTES

It is an item of faith that we are children of God; there is plenty of evidence in us against it. The faith that surmounts this evidence and that is able to warm itself at the fire of God's love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of holiness. . . . We are not saved by the love we exercise, but by the love we trust.

RICHARD LOVELACE

Adoption is not a change in nature, but a change in status. If we fail to see this truth, we will reject the power of our adoption... Adoption is a declaration God makes about us. It is irreversible, dependent entirely upon His gracious choice, in which He says: 'You are my son, today I have brought you into my family.'

SINCLAIR FERGUSON

If we really believed with all our heart, firmly and unflinchingly, that the eternal God, Creator and Ruler of the world, is our Father, with whom we have an everlasting abode as children and heirs, not of this transitory wicked world but of all God's imperishable, heavenly, and inexpressible treasures, then we would, indeed, concern ourselves but little with all that the world prizes so highly; much less would we covet it and strive after it.

MARTIN LUTHER

The Relationships of the Church Family

The phrase “one another” is used frequently in the New Testament. It captures the many ways in which Christians are called to relate to one another as a loving family. Read through the “one anothers” in the chart below and in the column on the right side write down the opposite of each “one another”. The left column represents what builds community. The right column represents that which will destroy community.

Builds Community ("One Another")	Destroys Community (The Opposite of the "One Another")
Be devoted to one another (Rom 12:10)	
Let us not judge one another (Rom 14:13)	
Accept one another (Rom 15:7)	
Instruct one another (Rom 15:14)	
Care for one another (1 Cor 12:25)	
Serve one another in love (Gal 5:13)	
Bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)	
Be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph 4:32)	
Forgive one another (Eph 4:32)	
Encourage one another (1 Thess 4:18)	
Stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24)	
Keep meeting together and encourage one another (Heb 10:25)	
Do not slander one another (James 4:11)	
Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16)	
Pray for one another (James 5:16)	
Be hospitable to one another (1 Pet 4:9)	
Love one another (Rom 13:8, 1 Pet 1:22, 1 Pet 4:8, 1 Jn 3:11, 3:23, 4:7, 4:11, 4:12)	

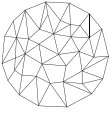
As you read through these passages and commands, take some time to consider how you'll rearrange your life in order to obey them.

What benefits do you see to living in this kind of other-focused community with one another?

What fears do you have about making a commitment to live as Family with others?

What truths about God and the gospel can you turn to in order to overcome your fears?

6 WE ARE FAMILY [adopted by the Father]



The Discussion.

Write your answers here to prepare for group discussion.

The emphasis we place on community is based on our new identity as Family in the Gospel. To live out and teach others to follow Jesus' command to love one another (and the myriad other "one anothers"), we need lots of life together. As children of God we love one another as brothers and sisters. Jesus said this is the way the world will know that we are his disciples—by our love for one another. The primary means by which we show the world what God is like and give tangible proof of the Gospel's power to save is through our love for one another.

Look back at the "Orphans vs Children of God" chart. Which orphan tendency most describes you? How would living in the reality of adoption change you?

What is one area of "Sonship" that you'd love to see grow up in your life? What gospel truth is at its root?

Look back at Galatians 4:7. What privileges are ours now that we are adopted? What responsibilities?

In light of being Family, how ought we view the church? What priorities and practices will most help us to love one another?



discussion notes

6 WE ARE FAMILY [adopted by the Father]

GOSPEL BASICS 125

6 WE ARE FAMILY [adopted by the Father]



The Application.

Practically, how does this change your life?

Learning to live as the family of God can be a difficult, fraught process—especially if your own family life has left a bitter taste. It's more crucial than ever to take practical application steps to make sure that this good news actually makes a change in your life.

Who is your gospel family, the people with whom you are committed to living the "one another" commands?

How will you help build loving community in light of your identity as Family? What habits or practices will help you to love one another?

What roles or responsibilities do you have in your community? How can you become a more active contributor with your time, talent, and treasure?

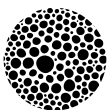
How can your community be a welcoming family, so others can experience the adopting love of the Father?

When you gather this week with your community:

One of the best ways to grow loving community is to lean in with confession. When your community gathers this week, take some time to talk about what you've learned about your orphan tendencies. Ask your community to help you remember the good news of your adoption!

We Are Servants

[set free by the Son]



The Big Picture.

What's the point?

Key Question: What is our new identity, now that we've been set free by the Son?

Key Answer: We are now Servants who serve King Jesus and serve others as a picture of His coming Kingdom.

Although the ministry of Jesus was multi-faceted — he preached, taught, healed, and did miracles — there was just one question at the heart of it all: “Who do you say that I am?” Interestingly, Jesus seemed to think what mattered more than anything was how his disciples answered that question. They needed to get his identity and his mission right, or nothing else would make sense. Answer that question wrong, and they'd miss the whole point.

At one point, the Apostle Peter says, “You are the Messiah.” Messiah means “Anointed King,” and takes us all the way back to the very beginning of the Bible. In Genesis 1-2, God creates a good and perfect world, and he places the first humans in a Garden in that world. Adam and Eve are God's representatives on earth, made in his image and likeness, and given the task of cultivating the world God has made. They were viceroys, a king and queen exercising authority underneath the Great and True King.

Tragically, they failed at their task. Genesis 3 records the intrusion of Evil into God's good world in the form of a serpent. The serpent deceived the humans, and they doubted God's goodness, rejected his authority, and rebelliously followed their own desires. It was a sad and terrible day, and the serpent's lies have sunk into every human heart since. From that day forward, we've all doubted God's goodness, rejected his authority, and rebelliously followed our own desires.

But God in his mercy refused to let Evil have the final word. Though the consequences of their decisions were real — they lost their home in the Garden, experienced the shame and guilt of sin, and allowed Evil to mar their relationship with God and one another — God did not abandon them. He promised to one day come to their rescue, send an Anointed King who would feel the sting of the serpent but ultimately crush the serpent, and restore all that had been lost through human rebellion.

The whole Old Testament could be summarized as the unfolding Promise of this Anointed King's arrival. God says again and again that the Promised One would come, and that he'd bring God's blessing back to the world. And God hints that this Anointed King — the Messiah — would come not in power but in weakness and would come to victory through suffering.

This is the backstory to Peter's answer, "You are the Messiah." But even Peter didn't see the full picture, because as soon as Jesus said "Yes — and I am going to suffer, die, and rise," Peter "took Jesus aside and started to rebuke him." Oh my. Peter got the name right — "Messiah" — but he missed the whole point! Peter wanted Jesus to be a Conquering King, not a Suffering Servant. Peter wanted a King he could follow into greatness, not a Servant who'd lay down his life in love.

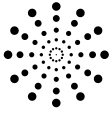
In this Section we look at what it means that Jesus has come to set us free by giving his life for us. Like our first parents, we are by nature enslaved: enchanted by the lies of the serpent (the devil or satan), caught up in a culture that rejects God and his authority, and in bondage to our own selfish wills. Jesus is God's Anointed King, and he wins by losing, comes to victory through defeat, and flips the world right-side up. And through his suffering, by his death in our place, and in his glorious resurrection, Jesus sets us free! We're no longer enslaved to the evil one, to the ways of this cultural moment, or our own selfish desires. We have a new Master, good and true, and in bringing our lives under his empowering Lordship we are truly free!

Preliminary Question

How would you define freedom? What does freedom feel like and look like for you?

**WE ARE
SERVANTS**
[set free by
the Son]

7



The Reading.

What does the Bible say about this?

7

**WE ARE
SERVANTS**
[set free by
the Son]

The Church as God's Servants

In the last lesson we explored the truth that the church is the *Family* of God. We learned about the identity of Christians as *Family*: we are dearly loved children adopted by the Father. As *Family*, we love God and love one another.

The Church is also the *Servant* people of God. In this lesson, we reflect on the Christian's new identity as a *Servant* and how we can faithfully live out that identity in our everyday lives. If we've been bought with a price by the work of Jesus, that should show up in the way that you walk through the world.

Just before Section 6, we looked the 4 "Gospel Flow" questions, showing how Biblical truth always moves from who God is and what he has done to who we are and how we live. Before we can talk about how we are to live, we have to remember who we are. And to know who we are we have to remember who God is and what he has done! Keeping the flow right helps us stay rooted in the gospel and ensures our obedience is flowing from gratitude for all God has done.

The same questions are also an extremely helpful tool for studying the Bible. In any text of Scripture, you can use the 4 Questions to gain insight to what is being taught. By moving through the Flow, you'll be able to mine any passage for all the riches God has put in it!

Who is God?

What does the text say about the character and nature of God? The Bible is God's story— Father, Son, Spirit—so we begin by asking about how His character and nature are revealed in what we're reading. The story is about Him! Look for specific references to His attributes: holy, eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, ever present, unchanging, compassionate, gracious, patient, loving, kind, good, gentle, etc. In the narrative portions, look for implied references to His attributes. What does the story reveal about His character and nature as Father, Son, and Spirit?

What has he done?

What does the text say about the work of God? God's work throughout all of human history is diverse and magnificent. All of it is worth proclaiming! However, the person and work of Jesus is revealed on every page of the Bible (Luke 24:27). He is the hero and the main character. The Spirit does not want us to miss Jesus! Look for references to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, either through foreshadowing (saving Noah in

the flood, redeeming Israel from slavery in Egypt, King David as a man after God's own heart), through prophecy (Psalm 22, Isaiah 53), or through the New Testament story of Jesus' earthly life and the establishment of his church. This ensures a uniquely Christian, Gospel-centered answer to this question.

Who are we in light of that?

What does the text say about our identity? God has always been working to save “a people for His own possession.” (1 Peter 2:9) Throughout the Bible, note the things that are true of God's people. This adds depth and richness to our understanding of who we are as New Covenant believers. For example, the Levitical priests were anointed and set apart for special service to God. Now, we are all anointed with God's Spirit (2 Cor. 1:21-22), and, because of Jesus, are all a part of God's “royal priesthood,” set apart for service to God.

How do we live?

In light of all of this, how does it change the way we live? Too often when reading the Bible we start with the question, “How does this apply to my life?” The Gospel Flow reminds us that rather than starting with this question, we should end with it. Gospel-centered action flows out of an understanding of who God is, what He's done, and who we are in light of God's character and work. The Gospel motivates and empowers us to live in an entirely new way. Consider what we are told to do in light of the text, and then do it!

Let's explore our Servant Identity by studying Mark 10:35-45 with the 4 Questions.

“And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ⁴³But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:35-45)

According to Mark 10:35-45: Who is God?	According to Mark 10:35-45: What has God done?	According to Mark 10:35-45: Who are we?	According to Mark 10:35-45: What do we do?

The Discipline of Serving *Adapted from "Spiritual Disciplines for Christian Life" by Donald Whitney [6]*

Much of the Christian life sounds more exciting than serving others. Meditation on Scripture appeals to our desire for spiritual depth. Fasting can strike us as a challenge to a rugged, self-denying discipleship. But serving? It sounds so mundane, even demeaning.

Enter Jesus and the Gospel. Jesus declared, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). God works through the Gospel of Jesus in part to make people like Jesus. As Jesus came, not to be served but with the heart of a servant, so those who believe the Gospel of Jesus are given Christlike hearts of servants.

The Gospel is a paradox: it has made us way more free, and it is also radically more costly. Because if He has given everything, then we owe Him everything. The mission of Jesus, which started over 2000 years ago, has moved forward because ordinary people were shaped in the Gospel and began to live as if they owed everything to Jesus, in a joyful and celebratory way. In Christ, service is worship—and it is a source of deep joy and satisfaction for those who feel a great gratitude to the King who came to save.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ transforms enemies of God into servants of God. The Holy Spirit still works through the Gospel to turn those who serve their idols (such as wealth, career, sports, sex, house, land, and so on) into servants of God, just as He did in the apostle Paul’s day, when the missionary wrote to some relatively new Christians: “You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9).

One way the Gospel turns sinners into servants is by humbling their pride. Through the Gospel, people see that God is holy and that each of us deserves His wrath for breaking His law an infinite number of times. The Gospel shows us what Christ did for sinners and how blessed we are to be received into His kingdom and family. As a result of understanding this incomparable message and experiencing God through it, people willingly serve Him and His gospel.

So, one of the clearest indications that a person has believed the Gospel of Jesus is that his selfish desire to be served begins to be overcome by a Christlike desire to serve. He starts looking for ways to do something for Christ’s church, especially in ways that will serve the Gospel.

The transformation in a person’s nature that God affects through the gospel also turns selfish people—interested only in serving themselves and being served by others—into people who, in the words of the apostle Peter, want to “serve one another” (1 Peter 4:10). The Gospel opens believers’ eyes to see needs they never saw before and changes their hearts to have a new compassion and willingness to meet those needs.

As the Holy Spirit permeates people’s character with the effects of the Gospel, they increasingly develop a mindset of serving in every part of life. They begin to consider their daily occupation in terms of how useful it should be in the service of others instead of simply how it enlarges their wealth or reputation. They give more thought to serving the members of their families. They want to know that their churches are stronger because of their service.

Good News from God’s Word

Jesus claimed to be a king, and not just any king. He claimed to be the One Anointed King, the King over all Kings. In fact, Jesus claimed to be God himself, in the flesh, come to rescue and set us free from the evil one, from the ways of our anti-God culture, and from our own selfish

desires. And the New Testament writers picked up this theme, marveling that in Jesus we have not only the Perfect Human but also the Full Revelation of God.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” (Colossians 1:15-20)

These are exalted views of Jesus, to be sure. And yet if we look at the way Jesus lived, and how he operated in the world, Jesus gives us an atypical picture of kingship. In fact, in John 13, Jesus models almost the exact opposite of what we might think a King would do.

“Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” (John 13:1-5)

What does John tell us Jesus knew about God, about himself, about the devil, and about his disciples?

What does Jesus do in light of what he knows? What is significant about his actions here?

“Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own,²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

According to 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, why is a Christian a servant of King Jesus?

What was the price that Jesus paid to bring us into his kingdom?

Following in His Footsteps

Before the launch of Jesus’ public ministry, his crazy cousin John (called “the Baptizer”) goes into the wilderness and begins calling God’s people to repent, be baptized, and change their ways, in anticipation of the coming of God’s Anointed King. John is like the prophets of the Old Testament, aware that God’s people worship him with their lips but not their whole lives, and he’s calling them to return to true worship and righteous living.

Luke tells us that John is fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 40:

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.’” (Luke 3.4-6, quoting Isaiah 40)

John picks up on Isaiah’s theme: God had an original blueprint for his creation, a way he intended it to all be. The original creation was like an expertly woven fabric, not a thread out of place, missing, or broken. It was what the Bible calls “Shalom” — universal flourishing. Human rebellion and sin has massively deviated from the original plan, and the creation fabric has unravelled and frayed. And John is saying the day of salvation — when the world gets set to rights and all things are restored — is on the doorstep in the coming of Lord Jesus.

Just a few verses later, as John baptizes Jesus in the Jordan River, the heavens open up and God says, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Those words are a snippet of a longer prophecy about the coming of God’s Anointed King, who will set the world to rights:

“Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. A bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.” (Isaiah 42)

In other words, at Jesus’ baptism God is saying, “This is the One! This is the Servant King who I’ve been promising. And he’s come in the power of the Spirit to bring mercy and justice to the nations. He’ll be merciful with the busted up, broken, and downtrodden, and he’ll bring justice to all the earth, restoring the world to my perfect blueprint!”

Jesus’ ministry was defined by mercy and justice. He moved toward the margins, lifting up the weak, embracing the poor, and protecting the vulnerable. He offered compassionate care to those beat up by the systems of the world, announced forgiveness to those enslaved by sin, and set free those demonized by evil spirits. Jesus came to reweave the fabric of creation, ultimately giving his life — being unravelled himself on the cross! — to restore what had been lost.

As servants of Jesus, we’re called to follow in his footsteps. A key sign we’ve come to believe the gospel of Jesus and are beginning to see ourselves as servants of Jesus is a lifestyle of mercy and justice. We move toward the margins. We look for the places where the fabric is still unravelled and frayed. We take what we’ve been given — the threads we’ve been entrusted with — and we go into the world to weave ourselves in, making things whole, restoring Shalom.

“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:16-21)

Jesus reads from Isaiah 61, and claims it as his mission statement: “Today this has been fulfilled in your hearing.” What is Jesus saying about himself and his mission?

As you consider the world, what brokenness breaks your heart? How might you move toward those margins and “weave yourself in?”

There are valid reasons why many become concerned when they hear Christians talk about "doing justice." Often that term is just a slogan being used to recruit listeners to jump on some political bandwagon. Nevertheless, if you are trying to live a life in accordance with the Bible, the concept and call to justice are inescapable. We do justice when we give all human beings their due as creations of God. Doing justice includes not only the righting of wrongs, but generosity and social concern, especially toward the poor and vulnerable.

TIMOTHY KELLER

Servants.

We are servants set free by the Son.

**As Servants, we serve King Jesus and serve others
as a picture of the coming Kingdom.**

Surrendering All Of Life

Following Jesus was never easy. On one particular occasion, Jesus' teaching was so hard that many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. The 12 remained, saying "Where else would we go? You have the words of eternal life" (see John 6:66-67). They recognized the hard words of Jesus — his most challenging teachings — were also the words that led to eternal life.

Nobody who encounters the real Jesus can remain unchanged, and all who do encounter him must reevaluate everything in light of who he is and what he has done. No area of our lives can remain outside his command, and everything must be brought under his empowering lordship. As servants of Jesus, we are learning to conform our lives to his, to live with his heart in his ways for all our days.

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30)

Notice that Jesus' invitation is both to "come and rest" and "take my yoke" — both rest and work are involved in following Jesus. Becoming a servant of Jesus involves coming under his leadership and letting him teach you what abundant life really looks like. It means finding joy

and satisfaction in his love, so you no longer have to seek those things elsewhere. It means you are saved from sin, so you no longer have to be a slave to sin. It means rejecting the lies of the enemy and the ways of our cultural moment, and letting the truth of Jesus set you free. We must learn to die to self leadership in order to rise to new life under the leadership of Jesus. You are no longer your own. You are bought with a price. You belong, body and soul, to Jesus, forever.

Consider how Jesus transforms these key aspects of everyday life.

Power: Jesus engaged those with great cultural power and those with no cultural power, offering welcome and relationship to all people. One's position of privilege or power within the current cultural system seemed to matter very little to him. Though drawn to the margins, he was comfortable sharing a meal with the political and religious elite. Within his movement, he did appoint leadership, giving them authority over evil and entrusting them to preach, teach, and heal in his name. At the same time, he upended their ideas of leadership, teaching that greatness was found in servanthood, washing feet, and empowering others.

Money: Jesus welcomed all regardless of their socioeconomic status, wealth, or resources. And he called his followers to faithful stewardship, toward a life of joyful generosity that sees wealth as a means of loving your neighbor, your church, and the local and global poor. As servants of Jesus, we want to move toward maturity in our finances, including learning to work a job, provide for one's needs, and be able to contribute. For those who have abundance, maturity in your finances includes learning how to joyfully steward resources toward generosity, being rich in good works and eager to share.

Ability: Jesus welcomed all regardless of their physical, mental, or emotional ability. All are invited to full participation in his family and mission. We come into this world with varying capacities and abilities, and believe every human is uniquely made in the image of God and deserving of full dignity, from conception to the grave. Disciples of Jesus have from the earliest days cared for the most vulnerable, particularly through adoption. As servants of Jesus, we lift up, protect, and honor those among us with disabilities, and work together toward holistic health — mind, body, and soul — for all. In addition, we see in Jesus an incredible range and depth of emotion, and therefore see emotional health as a key part of becoming more like him.

Sexuality: Jesus was never put off by, nor ever kept his distance from, those whose sexual lifestyle was outside the norm of his society — yet he taught his followers a more robust sexual ethic than was the norm of his society. As servants of Jesus, we extend a gracious welcome to all, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, or sexual history. And yet we affirm that Jesus calls us all to bring our sexuality under his empowering lordship, honoring our bodies and sexuality in pursuing his robust vision of sexual integrity. Our

sexuality is a powerful gift to be stewarded for the sake of creating intimacy in the life-long covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (two differently sexed people). We affirm the goodness of singleness — for a season or as a life-long calling — and celibacy outside of marriage, just as Jesus lived. As we come to Jesus with our sexual perversions, distortions, and brokenness, we receive his merciful forgiveness and lean toward wholeness together.

Race: Jesus welcomes all people of all nations, tribes, and tongues, and makes no distinctions based on race or ethnicity. And Jesus calls us to build our identity on a deeper and more lasting reality, namely that we are the body of Christ and one new humanity in him. We honor the diversity and beauty of our global humanity, believe every person to be a masterpiece made in the image of God, and believe a multi-ethnic church brings glory to the Creator. We want our local churches to reflect the diversity of God's world, and believe only the reconciliation accomplished by Christ can bring diverse people together in true harmony. As servants of Jesus, we commit ourselves to the work of reconciliation, living into the finished work of Christ, where people divided by race or ethnicity can be brought together.

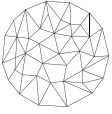
In light of the above areas, what might the church be known for if we all embraced our servant identity more fully?

Are there areas where you still feel resistance to surrendering to Jesus?

One of the clearest indications that a person has believed the gospel of Jesus is that his selfish desire to be served begins to be overcome by a Christlike desire to serve. He starts looking for ways to do something for Christ's church, especially in ways that will serve the gospel. As the Holy Spirit permeates people's character with the effects of the gospel, they increasingly develop a mindset of serving in every part of life. They begin to consider their daily occupation in terms of how useful it should be in the service of others instead of simply how it enlarges their wealth or reputation. They give more thought to serving the members of their families. They want to know that their churches are stronger because of their service.

DONALD WHITNEY

7 WE ARE SERVANTS [set free by the Son]



The Discussion.

Write your answers here to prepare for group discussion.

Look back at your answers to the preliminary question in the Big Picture section of this chapter. In light of the content of this section, how has your initial answer changed? Has this chapter shifted your thoughts regarding the nature of freedom?

If you are a Christian, you have been purchased by Jesus and are no longer a slave to the ways of this world, to your own sinful desires, or to the lies of the serpent, but a slave of Jesus. How is Jesus a better Master than all other options? What has Jesus done to show he is worthy of our whole-life devotion?

Tim Keller says there are four markers of a servant of Jesus - obeying, submitting, relying, and expecting. Consider each summary below, and respond honestly to each question.

Obeying: Am I willing to obey whatever Jesus says, no matter how I feel about it?

Submitting: Am I willing to thank Jesus for whatever happens, whether I understand it or not?

Relying: Am I depending on something more than I'm depending on Jesus for my hope and meaning?

Expecting: Am I living as though there are problems or limitations in my life that are too big for Jesus?

One of the ways to consider what it looks like to be a Servant of Jesus is stewardship. Stewardship is the idea that we own nothing but that all we have – **time, talent, and treasure** – have been entrusted to us by Jesus for his purposes. Which of these 3 is most challenging for you to give fully to Jesus?

How would your community look different if you more deeply believed the truth that you have been purchased by Jesus and are His servants?

As you consider your community, what might change if you saw yourself as a servants of Jesus? Who might you serve together, and how?

discussion notes

7

**WE ARE
SERVANTS**
[set free by
the Son]



discussion notes

7 WE ARE SERVANTS [set free by the Son]



The Application.

Practically, how does this change your life?

Learning to live as servants of King Jesus can be a difficult, challenging process. It's more crucial than ever to take practical application steps to make sure that this good news actually makes a change in your life.

The Book of Common Prayer, written in the 1500's, has a prayer that says: "From all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, Good Lord deliver us." This is the prayer of the Servants of Jesus. We need to be delivered, over and over, and reoriented to Jesus and his servant way.

As servants of Jesus, we acknowledge that all we have belongs to Jesus, and that we are simply stewards entrusted to use his resources for his purposes. Take an assessment of what you have been entrusted with by Jesus. Think about your skills or abilities, time commitments, career, money, or other resources. **List out all you have, and prayerfully relinquish it to Jesus.**

Next, consider the resources your whole community has been given. What has God entrusted to you all, and how might you use these resources to serve one another more fully?

Now think about the needs of the world around you. Begin at home, with those closest to you, and move out to your neighborhood or network, city, region, and world. What needs are most pressing, and in what ways do you feel compelled to help reweave Shalom?

Now consider your involvement in your local church. Use the following 4 categories to think through how you'll live as a Servant within the life and mission of your church.

Gather: How will you make yourself available to serve on Sundays?

Go: How will you serve within your small group or missional community?

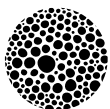
Grow: How will you continue to mature as a servant of Jesus?

Give: How will you financially contribute to the life and mission of your church?

section 8

We Are Missionaries

[empowered by the Spirit]



The Big Picture.

What's the point?

Key Question: What is our new identity, now that we've been empowered by the Holy Spirit?

Key Answer: We are now Missionaries, sent by the Spirit to share and show the good news of Jesus.

Jesus was a man on a mission. When he was baptized by John, the heavens opened and the Spirit of God descended upon him, the sign that he had been empowered for his ministry. Immediately the Spirit led him into the wilderness, where he stayed for 40 days, being tempted by that old snake, the devil. In dramatic fashion, Jesus resists and rebukes the devil, quoting the Scriptures and sending the devil running — until a more opportune time.

From there, Jesus comes into Galilee and begins his public ministry, saying “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel.” Filled with God's Holy Spirit, Jesus moves with power: He teaches with authority, performs many amazing miracles, casts out evil spirits, and calls disciples to follow. And central to his mission is the message of the gospel: “The kingdom of God is at hand! Repent and believe the good news!”

At the end of his earthly ministry, John records Jesus saying to his disciples, “As the Father sent me, so I'm sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit.” In Luke, Jesus tells his disciples to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, but to wait for the Spirit to come and empower them. And in the early chapters of the book of Acts, after Jesus' ascension and return to his Father, he sends the Holy Spirit to fill and empower his church, just as the Spirit filled and empowered him.

The implication is clear: Every disciple of Jesus is intended to be a Spirit-empowered missionary! We're given the same Spirit that led, empowered, and sustained Jesus in his mission, and we're called to carry that mission forward in reliance upon the power and presence of the Spirit. In much of the world, Christians use the word "missionary" to refer to a unique kind of person, often conjuring up ideas of super devoted people doing really radical things for specific people in far away places. But the model of the New Testament is that all Christians are missionaries, all are filled and empowered by the Spirit, and all are sent to specific people and places, all around us!

In this section, we will learn how to live our identity as Missionaries, depending on and being empowered by the Holy Spirit. We want to receive the Spirit's empowering presence, and join in the mission of Jesus today. Jesus was a man on a mission, and so his disciples are a community on a mission. We'll learn how to be missionaries right where we are, both as individuals and in community.

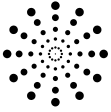
Preliminary Questions

When you think of a missionary, what are some stereotypes that come to mind?

What hesitations or fears come to mind when you think of yourself as a missionary?

**WE ARE
MISSIONARIES**
[empowered by
the Spirit]

8



The Reading.

What does the Bible say about this?

8 WE ARE
MISSIONARIES
[empowered by
the Spirit]

Made Alive by the Spirit

A huge part of what we are trying to grasp throughout this study is that becoming a Christian is a work that God does in you - a total transformation in which God does something for you that you cannot do for yourself, from start to finish! God the Father initiates, God the Son redeems, and God the Spirit applies it to our lives. The Spirit's role is to give us a new heart – to fill our soul with the love of God, and to bring us into participation with God as Father and the Son as our Savior and Lord.

“For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.” (1 Thess 1:4-7)

What was the role of the Holy Spirit when Paul preached the gospel to the Thessalonians?

What happened to those who believed? How did the Spirit work in them?

You are a Christian in the first place because of the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the one who caused the good news to come alive in you! Jesus says it is the Holy Spirit who causes us to be born anew, or born again. In his conversation with the religious leader Nicodemus, Jesus said that the Spirit's work is essential for us to become Christians.

"Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3:5-8)

What does Jesus say is the role of the Holy Spirit? Why must we be "born again" by the Spirit?

What is Jesus saying by comparing the Holy Spirit to the wind?

The Spirit has been leading your new life since the very beginning, and he will continue leading for your whole life. In addition, throughout Scripture, the Holy Spirit is described as Helper, Counselor, Sanctifier, Motivator, Intercessor, Guide, and more. Getting to know the Holy Spirit in all his ways and work is central to being a disciple of Jesus!

NOTABLE QUOTE

Human nature, with which all of us are born, will not enter into the kingdom of God unless it is changed. This change is called being born again. And what this means is that the Spirit of God creates something new; he takes out of us the heart of stone that rebels against God, and he puts into us a new heart which trusts God and follows his ways. Or to put it another way, the Holy Spirit establishes himself as the new ruling principle of our life. 'That which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'

JOHN PIPER

Being Led by the Spirit

From the first chapter of the Bible (“let there be light”) to the last (“Behold, I am coming soon”) God reveals himself as a God who speaks. He does not keep His will hidden, but communicates it so that people can walk in His ways. One of the primary roles of the Holy Spirit is to communicate God’s will to us, acting as our guide as we walk through this world.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.” (John 14:15-17)

Jesus tells his disciples they already know the Helper, because they’ve seen the Helper in Jesus. How have the disciples seen the Spirit at work in and through Jesus?

Jesus says the Spirit who has been “with” them will soon be “in” them. What is he promising his disciples?

Jesus allowed the Holy Spirit to guide him, regularly withdrawing for times of prayer and refreshing, listening to the Spirit’s direction. The Spirit directed his ministry, empowered his words, and enabled his miracles. In the same way, the disciples and the early church allowed the Holy Spirit to guide them, prayerfully depending on the Spirit’s leadership. The book of Acts tells us how the Spirit directed, empowered, and enabled their ministry, too.

In the very same way, the Holy Spirit is our guide as we seek to discern God’s will for our lives. The Apostle Paul encourages the Christians in Galatia to “walk by the Spirit,” be “led by the Spirit,” and “keep in step with the Spirit.” God has given us a Guide; our job is to learn to follow the Guide.

A Compass and a GPS

Think of the Bible like a compass. If I am lost in the forest and home is north, a compass can point me in the direction of home. It does not give me step by step instructions, but it gives me everything I need to make it home. If we will faithfully follow God's will as revealed in the Bible we will honor Him with our lives.

If the Bible is like a compass, the Holy Spirit is more like a GPS. A GPS does not simply tell you to go north; it tells you exactly which path to take and where to make turns. Can God lead us that specifically? Yes.

For example, in your life you may encounter a situation wherein two distinct opportunities to serve present themselves. They are both good opportunities. Both would honor God. Both would enable you to use your spiritual gifts to bless others. The Bible affirms both. The Spirit can help you to know which one God is calling you to say "yes" to, and which one you aim to say "no" to.

Does God always lead us that specifically? No. Sometimes God simply wants us obey His written word and trust Him along the way. Other times we refuse to receive His counsel or our own sin hinders us from hearing His voice. But at times, God wants us to take a specific course of action as He leads us on His mission. The Book of Acts gives us many examples of God directing His people on the mission through the Holy Spirit.

Start With The Bible

It is easy to want the guidance of a GPS before we have proven ourselves faithful with a compass. We want God to guide us specifically and we want it now! But we haven't yet learned the basics of knowing and obeying God's will. We need to begin with the basics like:

A growing understanding of God's character and God's will through daily time in the Bible. Find a daily reading plan – perhaps through the Bible in 1 year – and stick with it, so you're consuming a steady diet of truth. Let your mind and heart be saturated in the Scriptures!

A growing relationship with God through daily time in prayer. Let your reading of the Bible direct your prayers, turning what you're learning into praise or petition. You may want to journal your prayers, as this helps with focus.

A growing obedience to God's will so that we do not grieve the Spirit and our prayers are not hindered. The scriptures are "living and active" and will often penetrate our hard hearts. Commit to obeying what you are learning, and to confessing when you fail.

A growing commitment to mutual accountability within Christian community. The Bible is meant to be read, understood, and applied in community. Let others regularly speak into your life, and find wisdom in a multitude of counselors.

Hearing the Spirit's Voice

If you want to get to know the Holy Spirit, reading John 14-16 would be time well spent. As you go further in your Christian walk, you will inevitably become more in-tune with the voice of the Spirit. You won't hear an audible voice, but you'll learn to recognize his voice when you read Scripture, when you pray, when you share life with other disciples of Jesus. Sometimes he will counsel you and lead you to deeper understanding; sometimes he will comfort you and remind you of the Good News; sometimes he will compel you into new or uncomfortable situations. But he will always go with you.

Let's look at just a few of Jesus' promises regarding the Holy Spirit in John 14-16. **Under each scripture, jot a few notes about what Jesus is promising his disciples.**

"These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." (John 14:25-26)

"But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. ²⁷ And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning." (John 15:26-27)

"I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:12-15)

The failure to recognize the Holy Spirit as personally present in our lives is widespread in churches today. Sometimes the lack of recognition is intentional and theologically motivated... More often it is simply ignorance. Even where Christians know about the Holy Spirit doctrinally, they have not necessarily made a deliberate point of getting to know him personally. They may have occasional experiences of his reality on a hit-and-run basis, but the fact that the pronoun "it" is so frequently used to refer to him is not accidental. It reflects the fact that he is perceived impersonally as an expression of God's power and not experienced continually as a personal Guide and Counselor.

What should be done to reverse this situation? We should make a deliberate effort at the outset of every day to recognize the person of the Holy Spirit, to move into the light concerning his presence in our consciousness and... share all our thoughts and plans as we gaze by faith into the face of God. We should continue to walk throughout the day in a relationship of communication and communion with the Spirit mediated through our knowledge of the Word, relying upon every office of the Holy Spirit's role as counselor mentioned in Scripture. We should acknowledge him as the illuminator of truth and of the glory of Christ. We should look to him as teacher, guide, sanctifier, giver of assurance concerning our sonship and standing before God, helper in prayer, and as one who directs and empowers our witness.

RICHARD LOVELACE

Considering all that Jesus promises the Spirit will do, what role of the Spirit is most exciting to you?

What is your experience of the Holy Spirit, both in the past and in the day to day now? How might you begin to cultivate your relationship with the Spirit in daily ways?

Missionaries.

We are missionaries sent by the Spirit.

As Missionaries, we follow the leading of the Spirit as we are empowered to share and show the good news of Jesus.

Being Filled By The Spirit

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:18-21)

Notice that Paul contrasts being filled with the Spirit to being drunk on alcohol, a fitting contrast. When you're drunk, you're “under the influence” of a substance, and you do and say things you probably wouldn't otherwise! To be filled by the Spirit is to be “under the influence” of the Spirit, and you'll do and say things you probably wouldn't otherwise! Thankfully, what you'll say and do include things like singing praise to God with all your heart, living more thankfully and joyfully, and honoring others. The greatest evidence of being filled by the Spirit is the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

The Greek for verse 18 could be translated, “keep on being filled with the Spirit,” as the tense emphasizes an ongoing experience. And notice that “being filled” isn't something you do (fill yourself with the Spirit), but it isn't passive either (wait and see if the Spirit will fill you). We are active, but the Spirit does the work. We come to the Spirit in expectation, but we're dependent on the Spirit to do fill us: Keep on being filled with the Spirit!

If you want to be filled, empowered, and led by the Spirit, the best place to begin is by simply acknowledging that. Jesus tells us in John 15 that we can do nothing apart from him, so we know we need the Spirit's presence and power. Address the Holy Spirit directly. Ask the Spirit to fill you, believing that Jesus means for us to know the fullness of the Spirit in all the ways he promised in John 14-16. Jesus actually said it is better for us if He goes away, because then the Spirit can come to us! Finally, simply trust that Jesus gives the Spirit to all, freely and liberally, not based on any sort of spiritual gymnastics we might attempt or spiritual maturity we might attain. Jesus promised to supply His people with His Spirit; our job is to walk through life with expectation of his presence, leadership, and his power.

The Role of the Spirit in Mission

God is on a mission. From the moment humans rebelled against him, God launched his Great Rescue Plan, and has been working with and through sinful human beings throughout history to bring it about. He chose Abraham, worked through Moses, called David, spoke through the Prophets, and finally came in person, in his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus said he came "to seek and save the lost." That was the mission – to rescue humanity from sin, death, and destruction, and restore them to relationship with God. In the end, Jesus will return and make all things new so we can enjoy God forever!

God is still on that same mission, and Jesus is still seeking and saving the lost. And all disciples of Jesus are part of God's mission! The mission of Jesus reached us, and we were saved; now the mission of Jesus goes through us, so others can be saved! The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Mission, and has been empowering God's people on God's mission for 2000 years. We are Missionaries.

Not only is the Spirit with us as we go forth as missionaries, he is actively empowering us. When you open your mouth to speak, the Spirit will give you words to speak! When you lack energy or motivation, the Spirit will give you the energy that you need. Before you go, the Spirit will go before you, opening doors and preparing hearts to hear the message. In the book of Acts, a book about the early Church, the Holy Spirit emerges as the primary agent of mission. Members of the early Church would obey the prompting of the Spirit - going wherever he wanted them to go and saying whatever he wanted them to say - but the Spirit was the one doing the actual work!

Read each of the scriptures below and jot down insights about the Spirit's role in the Church's mission.

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

What does Jesus promise his disciples the Spirit will do in them and for them?

Where will the Spirit take them?

"And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

This is Peter's first sermon after the Holy Spirit comes to the church. What does Peter promise all who respond to the gospel message?

"When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:31)

What happens to the community of disciples as a result of being filled by the Spirit?

NOTABLE QUOTE

The rapid and wide expansion of the Church in the early centuries was due in the first place mainly to the spontaneous activity of individuals. The early Church recognized the natural instinct to share the new-found joy, and gave free scope to it. The names of a few great Apostles were known to the whole Church; but the first teachers of the majority of the Christians were probably unknown to any but those whom they had quietly influenced. Thus as men moved about there were constantly springing up new groups of Christians in different places. The gift of the Holy Spirit, who desires and strives after the salvation of men... means that this zeal constantly breaks out afresh.

ROLLAND ALLEN

The ABC'S of A Missionary Life

Being a missionary can sound intimidating. For some it conjures up images of moving to far-away places and slogging through swamps and rainforests. Mission could involve those things, but many of us are called to be missionaries in the places we are presently living. If you have faith in Jesus Christ and are a part of God's Family, you are on a mission from God. The location of that mission might be the cubicles at your office, the homes in your neighborhood, and the schools your kids attend. You don't have to move to be a missionary.

Living for Jesus and His mission takes intentionality and involves sacrifice, but it isn't as complicated as we think. The ABC'S of mission can help you and your community be a tangible expression of the love of God toward others.

Before you read through the ABC'S, write down the names of 3 people that you would like to see realize the depth of God's love for them. Keep them in mind as you read through the ABC'S.

Three people:



Ask God

It is important that we ask God to move in the hearts of others. Praying for people is one of the most loving things we can do for them. It is also one of the most important. Jesus said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him" (John 6:44). We can ask God to draw people to Himself. Here are 10 simple prayers based in scripture that you can pray individually or as a community for the people you have identified above.

1. Lord, I pray that you draw _____ to Yourself. (John 6:44)
2. Lord, I pray that _____ seek to know You. (Acts 17:27)
3. Lord, I ask You prevent Satan from blinding _____ to the truth. (2 Cor. 4:4, 2 Tim. 2:25-26)
4. Lord, I also ask that You give me the opportunity, the courage and the words to share with _____. (Col. 4:3-6)
5. Lord, I pray that _____ would put all of his/her trust in Christ. (John 1:12; 5:24)

Build Relationships

Building a relationship with someone is the best way to discover how to care for them personally. It is in the context of relationship that we can discover tangible ways we can love a person as an expression of God's love for them. In addition, as we learn people's stories, we can begin to hear ways that the gospel might be good news for them. 3 principles are really helpful as we learn to live like missionaries.

First, everyone is on a spiritual journey. No matter who your friend is, where they've come from, or where they're headed in life, everyone is spiritual. God made us in his image, and he made us as worshipers. Everyone is directing their hearts toward and building their lives on something or someone.

Second, the Spirit is at work in everyone's life. Because God loves the whole world, and because he's seeking and saving the lost, we can be sure he's at work in everyone's life in some way or another.

Third, the Spirit invites us to come alongside what he is already doing. We aren't the Savior, and we aren't the Spirit. It isn't our job to "get people saved" or to convince them to believe. But we have the privilege to be a part of what the Spirit is doing in others.

One good way to deepen relationships and move toward spiritual conversations is by asking good questions and listening well. Consider asking past, present, and future questions.

Past: What is your spiritual background? Did you grow up with any religious beliefs? Was that positive, negative, or neutral for you? Why?

Present: Would you say you believe in God or a higher power now? How would you describe God or that spiritual power? What has shaped your belief?

Future: Would you say you are moving toward God or away from God? In what ways? How important is it to you to figure out spiritual truth? Why?

Connect with Community

Experiencing Christian community is an important part of helping people get a clearer picture of who Jesus is. Each Christian has different gifts (Romans 12:4-5) from the Holy Spirit and God uses them all. One person may have the gift of hospitality, so they tangibly demonstrate the gracious welcome of God through how they welcome people into their home. But they may not feel particularly gifted at talking about Jesus. That's okay, someone else in their community may frequently talk about Jesus. If a person spends time with the whole community, they will both experience God's gracious welcome through hospitality and hear about God's

gracious welcome through hearing about Jesus. How can you create opportunities for the people you have identified above to get connected with your community?

Show and Share the Good News of Jesus

As we Ask God to draw people to Himself, Build relationships, and Connect people with our community, opportunities will arise to Show and Share the good news of Jesus. We show people that Jesus is good news primarily by serving them and meeting their needs, just as God has graciously served us and met our needs through Jesus. Serving others is a tangible way to express God's love to others. But there are other ways. Just ask yourself, "What has God done for me that I can do for others?" When we forgive because God forgives us, cancel debts because God has canceled ours, or come to someone's rescue because God came to ours, we are showing that God is good news.

As you pray, deepen relationships, and show that Jesus is good news by your actions, inevitably you'll create opportunities to share the good news with words. People's greatest need is to be forgiven of their sin, reconciled to God, and become His child for ever. For that to happen, we have to speak the gospel to people, telling them with our words what Jesus has done. This is why Gospel Basics is so helpful, as by this point you should have lots of good news to share with your friends!

Look at the 3 people you listed at the beginning of this segment. Next to each name, write one aspect of who Jesus is or what Jesus has done that you think would be really good news for them. How might you demonstrate that good news to them (show)? How might you speak that good news to them (share)?

A Family of Missionaries Sharing the Good News

"Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." (John 20:21)

As you no doubt noticed in those passages from the book of Acts, the Holy Spirit was on a mission to get the Good News to the very ends of the Earth. Ordinary Christians, compelled by the Holy Spirit, took the Good News with them as they traveled, engaged in business, or interacted with their neighbors. Not everyone was preaching the gospel to crowds of thousands, but everyone was engaged in the mission.

1 Corinthians talks about Jesus' church like a body that's made up of many parts, and nowhere do we see that more evident than when the church engages in mission. In order to keep up with the Holy Spirit, the early church needed every part of the body, every member of the family, to be dependent on God and speak the Good News in boldness in whatever context they were in. Some spoke to the Jews while others went to the Gentiles, some spoke in the market while others spoke outside the synagogues. God had put each of them in different places and given them influence with different people, along with different giftings.

The same is true of the church today! God has put each of us in different places and given us influence with different people, along with different giftings. The whole family of God is on this mission together, and we cannot be successful in obeying the Spirit if we don't all play our part.

So what is your part? Maybe you'll be tempted to say "I'm no good at speaking; I would just mess it up! I'm most cut out for cooking or cleaning or setting up, and would prefer to leave the talking to other people." While it's true that we can have a big impact by quietly serving, 1 Peter 3 says that our service will cause people to ask us questions about why we're different, and we must be prepared to answer them with the hope we have in Jesus! Both Jesus and His disciples prioritized telling others the Gospel.

"The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. ⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. ¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (1 Peter 4:7-11)

What are the marks of a community on mission? What sets it apart?

Peter says we all have been given gifts that benefit the community on mission, and he divides those gifts into 2 categories: serving or speaking. What kind of gifts have you been given? How can they serve the community on mission?

"Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts..." (1 Corinthians 14:1)

What might it look like in your life to both "pursue love" and "earnestly desire the spiritual gifts"?

"For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴ For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. ⁶ Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; ⁷ if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; ⁸ the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." (Rom 12:3-8)

The church is the body of Christ, and we each have unique roles and gifts. As you read through these two lists, what gifts do you see in yourself?

Consider your community. What gifts do you see in your community? How might you encourage each member to use the gifts they've been given?

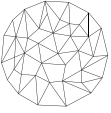
Missionaries.

**We are missionaries sent by the Spirit.
As Missionaries, we follow the leading of the Spirit as we are
empowered to share and show the good news of Jesus.**

It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community. He committed the entire work of salvation to that community. It was not that a community gathered around an idea, so that the idea was primary and the community secondary. It was that a community called together by the deliberate choice of the Lord Himself, and recreated in Him, gradually sought – and is seeking – to make explicit who He is and what He has done. The actual community is primary; the understanding of what it is comes second.

LESSLIE NEWBIGIN

8 WE ARE MISSIONARIES [empowered by the Spirit]



The Discussion.

Write your answers here to prepare for group discussion.

Look back at your answers to the preliminary questions in the Big Picture section of this chapter. In light of the content of this section, how has your initial answer changed? When you think of a missionary, what comes to mind now?

What is your experience of the Holy Spirit, both in the past and in the day to day now? Consider all the aspects of the Spirit's work we've covered, including: Made Alive by the Spirit, Being Led by the Spirit, Hearing the Spirit's Voice, Being Filled by the Spirit, and Being Sent by the Spirit.

"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." (Romans 10:17)

According to Romans 10:17, why is sharing the Gospel so important?

What are some things that prevent you from sharing the gospel with others?

How would your perspective on your neighborhood and workplace change if you embraced the truth that you are God's 'sent' person in these places?

From Fruit to Root with the Gospel Flow

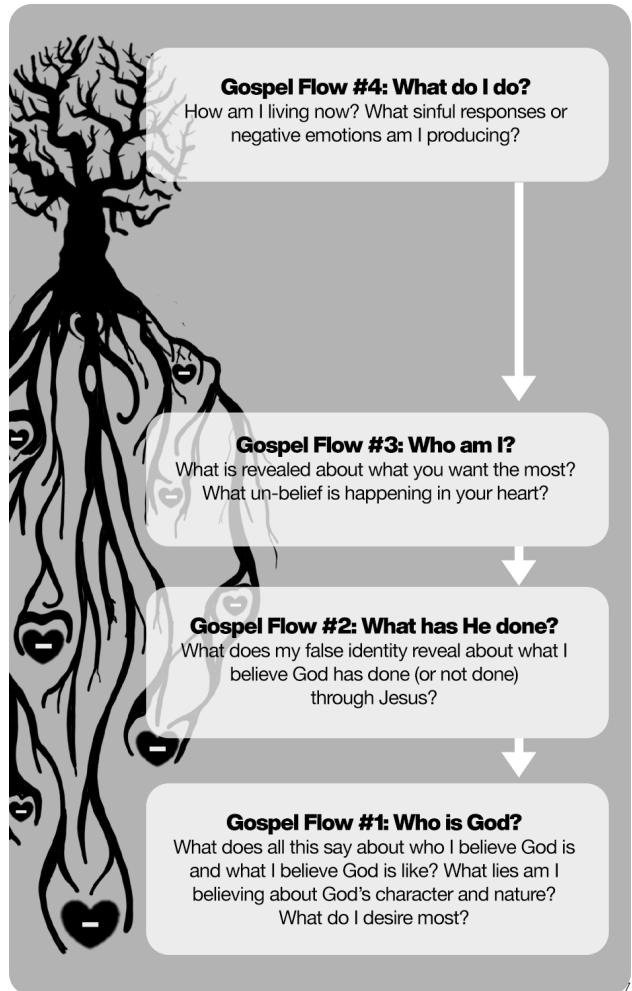
As we covered in chapter 5, Jesus said that the fruit of our lives (the things we think, say and do) is an indicator of what's happening in our hearts (see Luke 6.43-45). What our lives produce is the overflow of what our hearts treasure. This can be a really helpful tool as you think about the above question, "What are some things that prevent you from sharing the gospel with others?"

One way to get beyond your hesitations and fears and to the heart of what you're believing is to use the Gospel Flow questions. By starting with Question 4 and looking at the fruit of your life, you can work your way down to uncover what's happening in your heart, and then work your way back up to envisioning new fruit.

Start with the 4th question of the Gospel Flow: How do I live? Ask yourself - Where do I lack the fruit of the Spirit? What sinful responses or negative emotions am I producing? *For example, you might hesitate to see yourself as a missionary because you don't think you're "holy" enough. Or maybe you have a lot of fear when it comes to sharing your faith — fear of being perceived as ignorant or hateful, or of losing relationship.*

Next, ask yourself the 3rd question of the Gospel Flow: Who am I? What does my rotten fruit reveal about who I believe that I am? Where am I finding my identity, worth, or value? *With the example above, you may find that you still believe God is waiting for you to clean up your act. Or maybe you find your value in being thought of as smart or kind. Or maybe you find your are more defined by people's opinions of you then by God's opinion.*

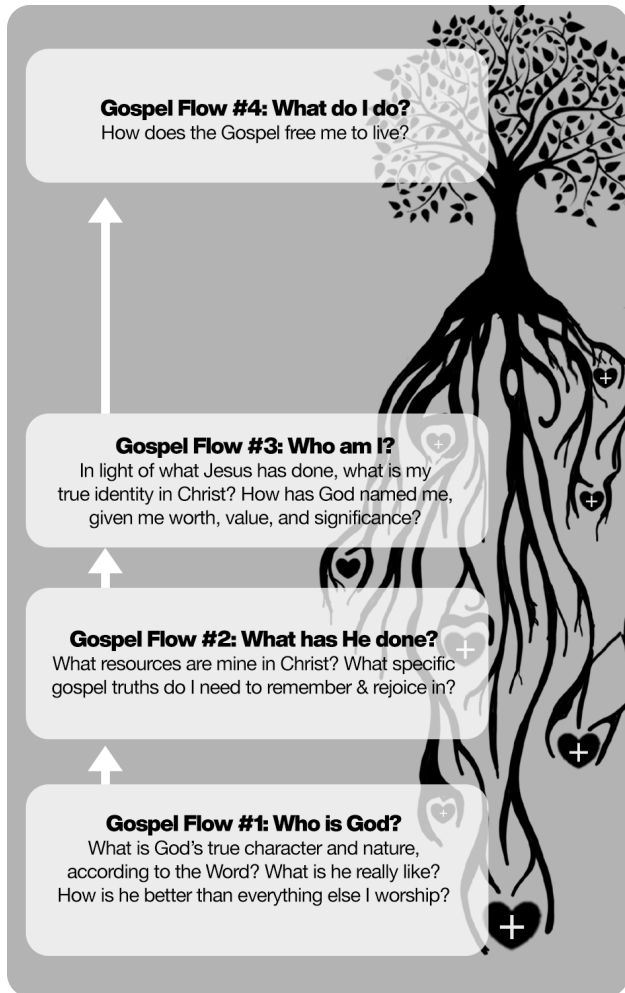
Next, ask yourself the 2nd question of the Gospel Flow:



What has he done? What does my false identity reveal about what I believe God has done (or not done) through Jesus? What do I believe will save me? *In the example above, you may be functionally believing that what Jesus has done for you is not enough, and that you have still have to qualify yourself. Perhaps you think being thought of as kind or smart is what makes you worthy. Or maybe you see Jesus' sacrifice as inconsequential compared to the opinions of others.*

Finally, ask yourself the 1st question of the Gospel Flow: Who is God? What does all this say about who I believe God is and what I believe God is like? What lies am I believing about God's character and nature? *In the example above, you'll find at the root you are worshipping the idol of acceptance or the approval of people. Or perhaps you'll find that you actually care more for your own glory than for God's. You've substituted the True God and his grace for a god substitute — no wonder you're hesitant to live like a missionary!*

But when you reach that bad root at the bottom of your bad fruit, you can repent and turn to God and his grace in Jesus. Use the Gospel Flow questions to chart out a new course.



Return to 1st question of the Gospel Flow — Who is God? — but ask the Holy Spirit to help you believe the truth! Who is God? What is God's true character and nature, according to the Word? What is he really like? How is he better than everything else I worship? Consider the 4 G's: God is good, gracious, glorious, and great. *With the example above, you could remind yourself that God sees the depths of all of you and yet has mercy on you. His glory is bigger and better than anything else you might worship! And you have his approval, delight, and joy.*

Then work up to the 2nd question of the Gospel Flow: What has he done? What aspect of the good news do I need to rejoice in? How does all that Je-

sus is and all he has done speak into my situation? What resources are mine in Christ? *With this example, you could remind yourself that Jesus moves toward you in your mess, not away from you. He alone makes you worthy! And he chooses the foolish, weak, and needy things of the world, not the wise and confident. But his love makes you wise, strong, and confident!*

Next, move up to the 3rd question of the Gospel Flow: Who am I? In light of what Jesus has done, what is my true identity in Christ? How has God named me, given me worth, value, and significance? Who am I in Christ? *In this example, you could be reminded that you have a new name and a new identity in Christ, no longer in need of securing your own identity. You are desired, chosen, and pursued by the God of the universe — you don't need to be thought of as smart or kind!*

Finally, ask yourself the 4th question of the Gospel Flow: How can I live, because of who God is, what he has done, and who I am in Christ? How does the gospel free me to live? *To complete the example, you are now free to live as the person God made you to be, without worry or self-conscious fear. Now that your energies aren't taken up with self-conscious striving, you can produce new fruit in your life: peace, joy, patience, and love for others. You can be an ambassador for Christ, telling the story of how he has delivered you.*

Now its your turn. Work through the 4 Questions with your own hesitations to live as a missionary and share the gospel.

What do you see at the root of your hesitations? What are you believing?

How does the gospel set you free and propel you to courageous witness?

discussion notes



8 WE ARE
MISSIONARIES
[empowered by
the Spirit]

8 WE ARE MISSIONARIES [empowered by the Spirit]



The Application.

Practically, how does this change your life?

Learning to live as missionaries who are entirely dependent on the Holy Spirit can be a difficult, disorienting process. It's more crucial than ever to take practical application steps to make sure that this good news actually makes a change in your life.

As a missionary, the Spirit is sending you. One way to discern who the Spirit is sending you to simply look around you and ask, "With whom has the Spirit given me favor?" Who do you have favor with in this season? As you think of these people, ask yourself, "What aspects of the gospel might be really good news for them?"

Consider how you might demonstrate the gospel in tangible ways to them. For some it may be simply prioritizing the relationship. Others may have specific needs you can meet. Prayerfully brainstorm a list of ways you can serve them.

Thankfully, the Spirit is not sending you alone! You have a community to support you, hold you accountable, and partner with you in mission. Consider how your community can live as Missionaries together, practicing the **ABCs of Mission**.

Ask: How will you regularly pray for those to whom you are sent?

Build Relationships: How will you encourage one another to prioritize these relationships?

Connect to Community: What opportunities can we create for our whole community to interact with, get to know, and love those to whom we are sent?

Show Good News: What needs can we meet together?

Share Good News: How can we speak the gospel to our people?

SECTION 9-10 OVERVIEW

Gospel Purpose: The Disciple-Making Mission of Jesus

In Part 1 of Gospel Basics we explored Gospel Power, unpacking all Jesus has done on our behalf, saving us from sin past, present, and future.

Past: We have been saved from the penalty of sin because of Jesus' life and death. We have been totally forgiven and perfectly accepted in Christ, and therefore we don't have to earn anything. We are no longer under condemnation and the guilt of our sin, and therefore we have no fear of death. We have nothing to prove, we no longer have to pretend or hide, and we no longer need to defend ourselves.

Present: We are being saved from the power of sin because of Jesus' resurrection and ascension. We have been raised up with Jesus and given every spiritual blessing and resource. We are being changed into new creations with new desires, from the inside out, by the presence of the Spirit in our lives. We can confess our sin and walk in the Spirit, knowing he will bring the work he has begun in us to completion.

Future: We will be saved from the presence of sin because of Jesus' return. We trust that Jesus is in the process of destroying sin and brokenness entirely, and has already begun that in us. One day he will restore all things in a new heavens and new earth where we will enjoy Him forever. We are confident that all things are being made new, and we can see his Kingdom breaking in even now, which fills us with peace and hopeful anticipation.

In Part 2 of Gospel Basics we unpacked our Gospel Identity, exploring who we are in light of our new relationship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are the Church!

We are adopted by the Father and love one another as **Family**. What a privilege it is to no longer relate to God as orphans or slaves but to be brought into the position of sons and daughters! We have access to the Father, and we can call him "Abba" or daddy. We are his heirs! And we are placed in a new Family, where we are learning to give and receive love.

We are set free by the Son and engage the world as **Servants**. Jesus redefined greatness, giving his life as a ransom for ours, and setting us free from sin, self, and Satan. Because he's paid for us with his life, we belong wholly to him. Abundant life is found in coming under his empowering lordship and stewarding what he's entrusted to us for the flourishing of the world around us.

We are empowered by the Spirit and live our everyday lives as **Missionaries**. The same Spirit who filled Jesus with the Father's love and empowered Jesus in his mission now fills us. The Spirit gives us life, guides our steps, equips us with gifts, emboldens us with courage, and makes us more like Jesus. By the Spirit's power and presence, we join Jesus on His mission.

In Part 3 of Gospel Basics we explore Gospel Purpose, the reality that what God has done to you and for you, he now wants to do through you. God has given us an astonishing amount of grace, and now wants to use us as a conduit of that grace to others. The gospel is not only the good news of what God has done to save us but also the good news of what God is doing to save the whole world — and he's included you in his plans!

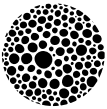
In **Section 9** we look at Everyday Mission, and explore what it means for us to wrap our lives into the disciple-making mission of Jesus.

In **Section 10** we pull all of Gospel Basics together, and discuss how to live our Gospel Identity in Everyday Life.

section 9

Everyday Mission

[the purpose of the Gospel]



The Big Picture.

What's the point?

Key Question: What is the purpose of the new life we have received in Jesus?

Key Answer: As disciples of Jesus, we are called to the purpose of making disciples in all of life.

The good news of the gospel is not just what we are saved from – sin's penalty, power, and presence. It is also the good news of what we are saved for – Jesus' ongoing work in the world. We have a God-given purpose in life. That is good news! We are saved by God's power for God's purpose. We are saved by God's work for God's work.

Ever since Jesus sent out His first disciples, the gospel has been spreading throughout the world, reaching every nation. The goal of our lives in Christ is to fulfill the Great Commission: to spread the gospel to all people so they can be saved, filled with the Holy Spirit, and begin living their lives for God's glory as participants in His plan of restoration.

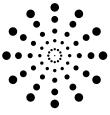
Preliminary Questions

When you consider the lives of people in your neighborhood, what is their apparent purpose in life?

If your neighbors looked at your life, what might they say is your apparent purpose?

**EVERYDAY
MISSION**
[the purpose of
the Gospel]

9



The Reading.

What does the Bible say about this?

9

EVERYDAY
MISSION
[the purpose of
the Gospel]

Our Purpose in God's Big Plan

Purpose and plans go hand in hand. By looking at the plans for a building you can begin to determine the purpose for the building. Plans for a home will look very different from plans for a baseball stadium because they serve different purposes. One of the best ways to understand God's purpose in salvation is to look at His plan. That plan is found in the Bible. The Bible is comprised of 66 books, but there are six primary movements or acts, like acts in a drama: Creation, Rebellion, Promise, Redemption, the Church, and Restoration. By tracing the storyline of these acts, God's purpose in salvation becomes clear: to restore humanity and creation to its original purpose of reflecting God's goodness and bringing Him glory, all through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Act 1 - Creation

Creation: In the beginning, God makes the heavens and the earth, and He makes it all perfect. He reigns over His creation as the all-loving King, and Adam and Eve are His agents, made "in His image". They are charged with taking what He made and cultivating it, creating a culture that brings glory to God and reflects His goodness and good purpose for it. This is what the Bible means by the term "the Kingdom of God" or "the Kingdom of heaven."

Act 2 - Rebellion

Rebellion: God's people choose to doubt God's heart, reject His Kingship, and find their own sense of purpose and meaning in the world apart from God and His good purposes for them. As they turn from God, all of creation turns with them, and humanity has been in rebellion against a good and loving God ever since. While they remain image-bearers, that image is significantly damaged – they can no longer be the people God intended them to be. They put themselves and their glory first, rather than God and His glory. One of the first and most destructive results of this rebellion is the institution of religion - the human attempt to cover up and try to earn our way back to God.

Act 3 - Promise

Promise: Rather than wipe the slate clean and start over, God begins to enact a plan to redeem His creation. Rather than cast humanity aside, He calls a man named Abraham

and promises that through Abraham He will eventually remake the world as He intended it to be. The majority of the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis 12, is the outworking of this scene and traces the way in which God acts through this people – called Israel – to begin to redeem His creation.

Act 4 - Redemption

Redemption: The New Testament begins with Jesus who is the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham about remaking the world. Jesus is the one through whom God sets the world right and renews God's Kingdom. He does so not by destroying the world, but by taking the brokenness of the world on Himself, dying, and rising to life three days later. In His resurrection, the early Christians come to see that death has been destroyed and that God has done what He promised to do! Through Jesus, God has made a way for people to be restored to a right relationship with God and to begin to live again for His Kingdom and purposes.

Act 5 - The Church

The Church: We are living in this scene. It begins with Jesus sending His followers into the world to make disciples - to bring others to know, trust, and walk with Jesus - from all nations. He fills them with the Holy Spirit so that they are empowered to both share the good news about Jesus and to show the good news of Jesus with their lives. Ever since Jesus sent out His first disciples, the gospel has been spreading throughout the world, reaching every nation. The goal of this scene is to fulfill the Great Commission: to spread the gospel to all people so they can be saved, filled with the Holy Spirit, and begin living for God's glory and participating in His plan of restoration.

Act 6 - Restoration

Restoration: The final act in the drama begins with Jesus' return. One day Jesus will return as Lord to judge the living and the dead. Those who have trusted in Jesus' perfect resume rather than their own and who have joined in Jesus' purposes in the world will enter into eternal life. Those who have chosen to trust in their own resume and lived for their own purposes will be justly judged and will perish, forever separated from the love and presence of God. When Jesus returns, He will restore all of creation to His original intent. There will be no more sin, sickness, pain, or death. Everything that was damaged in the Fall will be healed and restored. Heaven will come down and God will dwell with His people again in a perfect world. Everything will serve its purpose of reflecting God's goodness and bringing Him glory.

We live after Jesus' resurrection and before His return—just before the final act of God's drama. We are like actors who have been given the script to a drama but the scene right before the ending is missing. The Director wants us to improvise our parts for that scene. How would you figure out how to improvise your part well? You would need to know the rest of the play well—everything that has come before and how the drama will end.

It is important to look backward as well as forward. We look back to the life of Jesus and see how He lived — how He played his part — because He played His part perfectly. We can also look back at the early church as recorded in the book of Acts, and see how they played their part. And we look forward to the New Creation, to the day when all is healed and made whole again. By looking backward and forward, we learn how to improvise our parts as participants in His plan. Dutch theologian

Hans Rookmaaker said, "Jesus did not come to make us Christian; he came to make us human again." This Story is what it means to be human, and what God has done to remake humanity and the world. Christianity isn't another world religion; it is the True Story of the world.

Good News from God's Word

The Apostle Peter wrote to disciples of Jesus living across modern day Turkey. They were what he called "elect exiles," belonging to Jesus and his Kingdom (elect!) yet living in a world still ruled by the Empire and its ways (exiles!). They enjoyed the benefits of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, but they were struggling to figure out how to live in a world that was opposed to Jesus and resistant to the gospel message, a world which pressured them to abandon the ways of Jesus and conform to the current cultural tide.

What would the Apostle say to these disciples?

First, he reminds them of who God is and all he's done for them in Jesus.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter 1:3-9)

What does Peter remind us about God? What does he highlight about what God has done for us in Jesus? How might this strengthen the disciples?

Second, he reminds them of who they are and all that have in Jesus.

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1 Peter 2:9-10)

Peter uses a number of significant Old Testament references to remind these Christians of their new identity. What does he say? What does each image highlight for their identity?

For what purpose does Peter say they’ve received God’s mercy?

Third, he calls them to live as courageous witnesses to the reality of Jesus.

“Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. ¹² Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:11-12)

In verse 11, Peter warns us to abstain – to hold back – from engaging in the selfish passions, knowing they damage our souls. What are the “selfish passions” of our day, which we ought to avoid as disciples of Jesus?

In verse 12, Peter urges us to engage – to move forward – in doing good in the world, in light of the coming return of Jesus. What sort of “good deeds” ought we give ourselves to as we anticipate the arrival of Jesus?

Finally, he calls them to speak as courageous witnesses to the reality of Jesus.

"...In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, 16 having a good conscience..." (1 Peter 3:15-16)

What does it look like to "honor Christ as holy" in our hearts? What is Peter urging us to do?

When it is time to speak of the hope we have in Jesus, what ought to govern our speech? How can we "always be prepared?" And how do we do so with "gentleness and respect?"

Jesus defines our purpose in the final command He gives His followers – The Great Commission – so called because he entrusts his mission to the community of disciples. In this communal mission, Jesus calls all those He had shaped into disciples to repeat the process and help others to become his disciples, too.

"And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

What does Jesus say about himself in this commissioning? How is this good news for his disciples?

What does Jesus command his disciples to do? What do you think they would have understood him to mean?

What promise does Jesus make to his disciples? How is this good news for the disciples and their mission?

In the Great Commission, Jesus reminds us of all that he has done for us and given to us. He is Lord. Through his life, death, and resurrection, all authority in heaven and earth has been given to him. He is the Cosmic Lord, the Once and Future King, and the Rescuing Savior of the world. Nothing would have been more mesmerizing to these first disciples than the Resurrected Jesus!

And all disciples of Jesus are given this same Commission by this same King! The Risen Lord stands over all of history, directing and overseeing the unfolding of his purposes. He wants the good news of the gospel – all that he has done in his life, death, and resurrection, and his soon coming return – to be proclaimed to every tribe and nation! He wants more people to know of his grace, more disciples to be made, and more churches to be formed. Every disciple is entrusted with the mission of making more disciples, and every church is entrusted with the mission of forming more churches.

The gospel... not only reminds me of the love of God for me, but it also reminds me of the love of God for the works that He has saved me to perform. When I see the Cross, I see the premium that God places on the works that He has prepared for me. How valuable all of these must be if Christ would die so that I might now perform them! And how precious are those for whom these works are done if Christ would die that they might be served!

MILTON VINCENT

The Challenge of Mission

Imagine a family, whose country is experiencing a terrible drought, is on the verge of starvation. The parents can see their children's ribs through their clothing, but feel entirely helpless to save them. They have no food left to give them. One day, when all hope seems lost, they smell the delicious aroma of bread baking next door. When they investigate, they meet the mysterious stranger next door. Not only does he have bread, but he is willing to give them as much as they want. They sit around his table and devour the bread. He gives them enough bread to sate their hunger, and promises they can return to his table for more the next day.

The next day, there is more bread on the table. In their hunger, they eat all of it, only to find that more appears on the table when it is time for the next meal. Meal after meal, day after day, there is enough to satisfy them and sustain their lives. Slowly, over time, the parents rejoice to see their children growing strong again.

When another hungry person from their community asks why they seem to be healthy and thriving, the parents feel embarrassed to answer, afraid they may be mocked or persecuted for believing such an impossible thing. But they know it is not impossible, for they are seeing it play out in their home every single day. How wicked would they be to not share with others about the gift they've been given, and help lead other hungry people to the source of bread?

It has been said that Christians who obey the Great Commission are "just beggars, trying to tell other beggars where to find the bread." But sadly, the fear of rejection and persecution can hinder Christians from actively engaging in God's purpose. The stark reality in the lives of most Christians, however, is that we often struggle to make the Great Commission central to our lives. For various reasons, we want to enjoy the benefits of God's grace in Jesus, but we resist the whole-life rearrangement toward which Jesus calls us.

For some, it is a defective view of faith, believing Jesus should be part of their lives, not their whole lives. For these, Jesus, his church, and his mission are slices of a pie, alongside myriad

other pursuits and purposes. Jesus is important, but not central; His mission matters, but it is not the organizing principle of their lives.

Unfortunately, this view is often encouraged by our models of church. Church is too often an event that happens in a big building on a Sunday morning, where only a handful of staff and volunteers are actively doing ministry. In these settings, church can be seen as something you attend, watch (sometimes online), and support financially, but not a whole new way of life.

Jesus intends that his mission be the primary organizing principle of our lives, the purpose around which we shape our whole lives.

NOTABLE QUOTE

The ‘ultimate concern’ of most church members is not the worship and service of Christ in evangelistic mission and social compassion, but rather survival and success in their secular vocation. The church is a spoke on the wheel of life connected to the secular hub. It is a departmental sub-concern, not the organizing center of all other concerns. Church members who have been conditioned all their lives to devote themselves to building their own kingdom and whose flesh naturally gravitates in that direction anyway find it hard to invest much energy in the kingdom of God. They go to church once or twice a week and punch the clock, so to speak, fulfilling their ‘church obligation’ by sitting passively and listening critically or approvingly to the pastor’s teaching. Sometimes with great effort they can be maneuvered into some active role in the church’s program, like a trained seal in a circus act, but their hearts are not fully in it.

RICHARD LOVELACE

Those are strong words: “like a trained seal in a circus act.” The Apostle Paul says it is the role of church leaders to “equip the saints for the work of ministry,” not to maneuver the saints into church programs! The saints — by which he means the whole church! — is called to do the work of ministry: loving, serving, using gifts, and engaging their whole lives in the disciple-making mission of Jesus.

In many Western societies, there is an inclination toward individualism and personal autonomy. People tend to value their personal comfort, security, and privacy above communal responsibility or collective evangelistic endeavors. As a result, Christians may compartmentalize their faith, relegating it to a personal sphere rather than integrating it fully into their lives and actively engaging in missions and evangelism.

But Jesus has such bigger things in mind for us than just maintaining our social status quo! Surely, he cares about the people to whom you are sent, proclaiming “come with me to find the Bread of Life!” But just as much as his Commission is about saving them, it is also about sanctifying you.

That is our hope and vision — that every disciple of Jesus would be fully and joyfully involved in fulfilling the Great Commission today, from our neighborhoods to the nations.

NOTABLE QUOTE

There has been a long tradition which sees the mission of the Church primarily as obedience to a command. It has been customary to speak of 'the missionary mandate.' This way of putting the matter is certainly not without justification, and yet it seems to me that it misses the point. It tends to make mission a burden rather than a joy, to make it part of the law rather than part of the gospel. If one looks at the New Testament evidence one gets another impression. Mission begins with a kind of explosion of joy. The news that the rejected and crucified Jesus is alive is something that cannot possibly be suppressed. The mission of the Church... is more like the fallout from a vast explosion, a radioactive fallout which is not lethal but life-giving.

LESSLIE NEWBIGIN

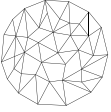
The Hope of Mission

The hope of mission is for every disciple to embrace this whole-hearted, all-of-life surrender to the purpose of Jesus. This is deeper than simply obedience to the commands of Jesus, although obedience is surely a mark of Jesus' people. Instead, the hope is for a deep and ongoing gospel renewal that frees us and propels us and compels us along a life that is submitted to Jesus and on his mission. The goal is that every disciple of Jesus experiences this "explosion of joy" that sends us into our everyday lives with eagerness to share Jesus, build community, and invite others to join us.

If the power of the gospel is at the center of who we are, and disciple-making is at the center of what we do, that will radically shape how we walk through the world. We will prioritize sharing life together with other disciples of Jesus as Family. We will be engaged in our communities and workplaces in a different way, as Servants and Missionaries. We will regularly be inviting others to "come and see" Jesus.

The gospel of Jesus is so electrifying that we are drawn to make it the very center of our lives. And as that happens, one of the fruits is that we will make more disciples. Truly, anything less than a life wholly re-arranged around gospel, community, and mission is slavery for you! Anything less than being a disciple who makes disciples is less than the abundant life Jesus purchased for you!

9 EVERYDAY MISSION [the purpose of the Gospel]



The Discussion.

Write your answers here to prepare for group discussion.

Look back at your answers to the preliminary questions in the Big Picture section of this chapter. In light of the content in this section, how has your initial answer changed? If your neighbors looked at your life, would they be able to see how your life's purpose is wrapped up in Jesus and his mission? Why or why not?

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”
(Ephesians 2:8-10)

Paul says we are not saved by our good works, but then turns around and says we are saved for good works! What is the difference? And why does it matter?

What comes to mind when you think of "good works?"

Look back to the beginning of **The Reading** at "Our Purpose in God's Big Plan" and the 6 Acts of His Story.

Where did the Story begin?

What happened in the Fall?

What did God promise Abraham?

How did Jesus accomplish Redemption?

What did the early church do after Jesus left them?

What is God's ultimate purpose?

What ought to characterize our lives now as we live between Redemption and Restoration?

Take a look at your activities from the previous week. Consider your calendar, your to-do list, activities you do at home, in your neighborhood or at work. What do your activities from the past week tell you about your purpose in life?

To what degree is “making disciples” the clear purpose of your life? What are your resistances to submitting your life to the purpose of making disciples?



discussion notes

9 EVERYDAY MISSION [the purpose of the Gospel]

GOSPEL BASICS 191



The Application.

Practically, how does this change your life?

9 EVERYDAY MISSION [the purpose of the Gospel]

As you consider these questions, please don't forget that you have been given all the resources you need in Christ for living the Great Commission in the every day! The whole purpose of God's rescue of you is so that you no longer have to live for the lesser purposes of comfort, control, and the "American Dream." You've been rescued from that, for a much greater purpose – to put God's grace on display in a community of discipleship and disciple-making!

To help all this hit the ground, **we'd like you to write a mission statement for your life.** Take what you've been learning over the last few weeks and consider what it means for you to live from the Power of the Gospel for the Purpose of the Gospel, to draw on the resources of Christ to live as a disciple-maker for Christ.

If you are married, do this together with your spouse, and consider how this affects your family.

What has God given to you in Christ? What has He freed you from? What resources are yours right now, in Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit?

What has God called you to in Christ? What new purpose has He given you? How would you describe this new purpose?

Now, put this together into a mission statement. Start with a “because” statement that sums up all that is yours in and through Jesus’ work on your behalf. End it with a “therefore” statement that summarizes what you want your life to be about. It can be as short and simple as you’d like, but try to make it both concise and comprehensive.

A few examples:

Because I have been rescued by the grace of God through Jesus, therefore I am surrendering my whole life to the purpose of helping others to know and live in this grace with me.

Because in Jesus I’ve been saved, am being saved, and will be saved, therefore I purpose to live the mission that Jesus has given me: making disciples by helping others know the full salvation of Jesus.

My Personal Mission Statement

You have many daily activities that you will continue to do, just with a new, Gospel intentionality. How does this mission statement change the way you engage in the current activities of your life?

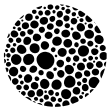
Other activities will need to come to an end to live faithful to the mission of Jesus. What patterns of life or activities do you need to stop in order to live faithful to your mission statement?

There will likely be new steps you need to take in order to live with Gospel Power and Purpose. What new patterns and activities do you need to engage in as you endeavor to live the mission?

Take your Mission Statement and put it somewhere visible as a reminder to yourself of what you have in Christ and how He's freed you to live. Return to it a few times this week and ask yourself if it is true to your life or not. Be prepared to share your Mission Statement with your DNA group!

Gospel Identity in Everyday Life

section 10



The Big Picture.

What's the point?

Key Question: In light of who Jesus is and all we have in him, how do we live?

Key Answer: We take personal responsibility for the Great Commission, becoming disciples who make disciples in all of life.

All of us, whether we know it or not, are being shaped into some way of life. Even when we are unaware of it, we have been and are continuously being discipled. Whether it is our family of origin, our friend group or peers, our entertainment, or our cultural moment, some external voice is shaping our vision of the good life. Every single person is a disciple of someone or something.

But the gospel says we've already been claimed, and there is One who is very invested in shaping us in his image. He wants to be the Voice that we listen to and the Life by which we're shaped. In fact, the early church was called "The Way" for precisely this reason: They were known by the particular ways their lives conformed to the ways of Jesus. They didn't just believe in him and trust him with their eternity; they followed him, internalized his teachings, and committed themselves to his pattern of his life.

In this Section, we wrap up Gospel Basics by pulling together everything we've covered and putting it together into a cohesive way of life. We're going to focus on the nuts and bolts of living a life shaped by Gospel Power, in Gospel Identity, for Gospel Purpose. We'll learn how to arrange and rearrange our lives around The Basics, and map out some practical next steps. We'll consider our daily rhythms of life, learning to engage all of life as a disciple who makes disciples.

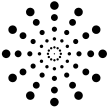
Preliminary Questions

After everything we've learned together, how would you define a disciple of Jesus Christ?

What would you say are the most important activities for a disciple of Jesus to prioritize?

10

GOSPEL IDENTITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE



The Reading.

What does the Bible say about this?

In 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul gives one of the most important summaries of the gospel message. He emphasizes both what God has done in Jesus and our responsive obedience.

"Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. ³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, then to the twelve." (1 Corinthians 15:1-5)

What does Paul say is of "first importance?" What facts does he include in the gospel he preached? What does he say Jesus accomplished?

What was the response of the hearers when Paul preached the gospel? What was their role in the salvation Jesus accomplished?

Captivated by Good News*

**Adapted from an article by Tim Keller*

The Gospel is the news that, through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God accomplished salvation for us, rescuing us from judgment for sin into fellowship with Him, then restoring the creation in which we can enjoy our new life together with Him forever. From this definition comes a few key insights:

First, the Gospel is news rather than instruction: The Greek term “Gospel” (evangelion) distinguished the Christian message from that of other religions.

- An “evangel” was news of a great historical event that changed the listeners’ condition and required response (such as a victory in war or the ascension of a new king).
- So the Gospel is news of what God has done to accomplish salvation through Jesus Christ in history. It is not advice about what we must do to reach God.

Point: We do not achieve this salvation. We only accept it.

Second, the Gospel is grace rather than merit: The Gospel is: “I am accepted through Christ, therefore I obey.” Religion is: “I obey, therefore I am accepted.” So the Gospel differs from both religion and irreligion.

- You can seek to be your own “lord and savior” by breaking the law of God. But you can also do so by keeping the law in order to earn your salvation.
- Disbelief in the Gospel of grace, of course, keeps the unconverted from God. But a lack of deep belief in the Gospel is also the main cause of spiritual deadness, fear, and pride in Christians. Our hearts continue to act on the basis of “I obey, therefore I am accepted.”

Example: Our failure to forgive others is not simply a lack of obedience, but a failure to believe we are saved by grace. Our lying, in order to cover up a mistake, is not simply a lack of obedience, but a failure to find our acceptance in God rather than in human approval.

Point: We do not “get saved” by believing the Gospel and then “grow” by trying hard to live according to Biblical principles. Believing the Gospel is not only the way to meet God, it’s also the way to grow up into Him.

Third, the gospel is reversal of the weak and the strong: Christ wins our salvation through losing, achieves power through weakness and service, and comes to wealth via giving all away.

Those who receive His salvation are not the strong and accomplished but the ones who admit they are weak and lost.

- This pattern creates an alternate kingdom or city (Matt 5:14-16) in which there is a complete reversal of the values of the world with regard to power, status, & wealth.
- When we understand that we can be saved by sheer grace through Christ, we stop seeking salvation in these things. The reversal of the cross—the grace of God—thus liberates us from bondage to the power of material things and worldly status.
- This means we no longer disdain those that we used to think were beneath us, and we are free to sacrificially and joyfully serve and love others.

Point: The way of life that embodies the Gospel is a life of sacrificial service for the least and lowest.

If all this is really true—the True Story of the World—what difference does it make?

What kind of people would we be if we believed this deeply and lived it consistently?

How has your understanding and experience of the gospel changed throughout this study?

Good News from God's Word

In Titus 2, the Apostle Paul is writing to his young protegee, Titus, encouraging him to get the churches in Crete from infancy to maturity. Paul instructs Titus on everything from the roles and responsibilities of church leadership, to healthy relationships within the church family, to clarifying matters of doctrine. But his greatest concern is that Titus ensures that the churches in Crete have a firm grasp on the gospel, on who they are as the Church, and what that means for their live together on mission.

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹² training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. ¹⁵ Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you." (Titus 2:11-15)

What does the text tells us about God's grace and all God has done and will do for us in Jesus?

What does Paul say about who the Church is (identity)?

What does he say about what the Church should be doing (activity)?

Why do you think Paul adds v.15, urging Titus to declare all this with utmost authority?

Paul's emphasis is on the work of God for us — the grace of God to us — and how that grace reshapes our lives. Notice how he uses grace in a past, present, and future tense way!

Past: God's grace “has appeared bringing salvation.” Salvation has been accomplished in the first coming of Jesus, through his life, death, and resurrection in history. We have been saved from the penalty of sin!

Present: That same grace of God is now “training us” toward Christ-likeness in the present. The word “trains” means “wrestling” or “arguing.” Grace doesn't berate us or bully us into right living. Instead, grace wrestles with us, saying “Look at all you have in Jesus!” The more we see what we've been given in Jesus, the less we need to be right, have our way, or enjoy the comforts of this life, and the more we're freed to love like Jesus. We are being saved from the power of sin!

Future: The grace of God is also in our “waiting for the appearing of the glory of Jesus” in the future. We're looking forward in eager anticipation of Jesus' return, the establishment of his kingdom, and the day when his glory will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. We know one day all creation will be made new, including us. We will be saved from the presence of sin!

In light of all that, we are His people — a people for his own possession! For Paul and the New Testament writers, the Church was the people Jesus has redeemed by the sacrifice of his life. Jesus came to rescue individuals, but his goal was to make a people — a whole community. The Church is the people — people who belong to Jesus as his own special possession.

And the people he redeemed are a people “zealous for good works.” His love compels and propels us to surrender our lives to King Jesus. His love makes us zealous for good works, and so we are eagerly giving our lives to the mission and ministry of making disciples.

Paul's summary of the Church here in Titus is exactly what we've been trying to say for the last 9 weeks. And he really wants to make sure Titus doesn't back down from declaring it, exhorting the Church to believe and live it, and correcting them when they don't!

NOTABLE QUOTE

One thing is sure: You are somebody's disciple. You learned how to live from somebody else. There are no exceptions to this rule, for human beings are just the kind of creatures that have to learn and keep learning from others how to live. A disciple of Jesus is not necessarily one devoted to doing specifically religious things [but one] learning from Jesus how to lead my life, my whole life, my real life.

DALLAS WILLARD

Disciples Who Make Disciples

So what does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus?

Here's a good working definition: **A disciple of Jesus is one who is coming to know, to believe, and to live in light of Jesus and his work, and helping others to do the same.**

First, notice our definition emphasizes Jesus and his work. Our definition of disciple can not only be about what we do for Jesus (follow his ways!). It must also include, as context for our motivation, everything that he has done for us (trust his work!).

Second, notice that being a disciple is holistic, and includes our heads, hearts, and hands.

To Know (head): To comprehend the gospel and all God has done for us in Jesus.

To Believe (heart): To repent and rejoice in Jesus and be filled with all the fullness of God.

To Live (hands): To do the everyday stuff of life with new power, identity, and purpose.

Third, notice that being a disciple is a process. By the ongoing work of his Spirit, Jesus is still the primary disciple-maker, and we are all in the process of being formed by him and following after him. And as all disciples know, this is a life-long process!

And finally, notice that being a disciple includes helping others along on this journey, too. By definition, a disciple of Jesus is going to be making disciples. If our lives are conformed to His, and that's what He did with His life, then so shall we!

Who is God?	What has God done?	Who are we?	What do we do?
Father	Adopted Us	Family	As Family, we love God and love one another.
Son	Set Us Free	Servants	As Servants, we serve King Jesus and serve others as a foretaste of the coming Kingdom.
Spirit	Empowered Us	Missionaries	As Missionaries, we follow the leading of the Spirit as we share and show the good news of Jesus.

As we said in the Introduction to Gospel Basics, **our Aim is to form whole-hearted disciples of Jesus in life-shaping relationship for everyday disciple-making mission.**

By **“form whole-hearted disciples of Jesus”** we mean this ongoing process of working all the implications of the gospel into our minds, hearts, and our lives.

By **“in life-shaping relationship”** we mean this happens in the community called the Church, a Family of Servants and Missionaries.

By **“for everyday disciple-making mission”** we mean every disciple is called to the mission of making disciples in the regular stuff of life.

Disciples of Jesus are people who believe the good news of what God has done for them in Jesus (Gospel Power!), enjoy a new privileged status with God by faith (Gospel Identity!), and who find their lives in the unfolding Story of God’s mission (Gospel Purpose!).

Gospel Rhythms

The real challenge of being the Church is the realization that church is no longer an event you attend but a whole new way of life to which you are increasingly conformed. This is the way the Scriptures describe the Church - a community of disciples who are sent to make disciples together (see, for example, Acts 14.21-28). You can’t live this vision of life and continue to move in other directions. This is the Christian life: motivated by the love of Christ to you, sent by His Spirit, in community, for Jesus’ mission.

As this new identity begins to take root, we’re faced with a new question: **how do we actually live in Christ as people who’ve been given a new identity?** What does it look like to be God’s Family? How do we live as a Missionary people? What activities do we engage in as Servants? Because these are identities (who we are) and not activities (what we do), we often need help getting from “who I am” to “what I do.”

To meet that need, we’ve developed a set of practices that can be helpful to anchor our lives in these new identities. These practices—what we call Gospel Rhythms—give us a pattern to follow as we grow in our identities by taking the regular stuff of life and infusing them with gospel intentionality. Thinking in terms of rhythms helps us to learn to live in grace together, rather than simply think or talk about it. Rhythms move us out of theory and into the real world.

In a sense, as we learn to live in these rhythms, we are learning how to live all over again. We are learning how to rely on God in ordinary life and how to daily go to God to receive grace so that we can live each day in His ways. To live these rhythms requires an ongoing awareness of God’s presence in each conversation, with each person and in every situation.

When we can begin to think about being the Church in terms of rhythms and patterns of grace, we more easily move beyond the Sunday service. The rhythms we are talking about don't primarily take place when the Church gathers. Our rhythms are lived on Monday morning and Wednesday afternoon, in the home and at the office, with our family and with our neighbors. We want to function as the Church throughout the week, not just when we meet together on Sunday.

The basic idea is that we believe the gospel changes everything. *It doesn't just make us Christian, it makes us human as God intended us to be.* As we learn to live as new creations together, rhythms keep us grounded in God's infinite grace in the daily activities of life. We are learning how to do the ordinary stuff of life with extraordinary love and power.

We've chosen six key rhythms that shape our life in Christ. These six practices are deeply rooted in the Biblical Story and help to shape how we live in that Story today.

EAT: We regularly eat meals with others to invite them into the community of God. Meals are a daily reminder of our common need for God and His faithfulness to provide for us both physically and spiritually. Jesus called us to remember Him and His sacrifice for us through a meal. When we eat together, we commune around this truth. We regularly eat meals with those not in our immediate family or circle of close friends, discipling them toward a life of dependence on God. (Leviticus 23; Matthew 6:11, 26:17-30; Acts 2:46-47; Romans 12:13)

LISTEN: We set aside regular times to listen to God both "backward" and "forward." Jesus listened to God in prayer to know His Father's will. We are also called to listen to God. We listen "backward" by regularly interacting with God's Word—the Story and the Son. We also believe He speaks today through His Spirit in us and through creation. We spend time actively listening "forward" to hear what God is saying to us today. (Mark 1:35-37; John 16:7-15; Hebrews 1:1-3; Romans 1:20)

BLESS: We intentionally bless others through words, gifts or actions. God desires that all nations—all people—would be blessed through Jesus. And now, as his Body (soma), we live out this mission as we bless others. We intentionally seek God's direction for who He would have us tangibly bless each week. (Ephesians 1:22-23, 2:8-10; 1 Peter 2:12)

STORY: We understand, experience and intersect with God's Story and others'. God has been unfolding His Story since before time began. We believe we are participants in the Story and need to understand it in order to see how our lives intersect with it. Therefore, we regularly reacquaint ourselves with the Story by interacting with God's Word. We look for ways and times to tell the Story often. We also take time to listen to others' stories and help them find their lives within God's Story. (Genesis 1:1-2; John 1:1; Psalm 1)

CELEBRATE: We gather together to celebrate God's extravagant blessings. God calls people to regularly celebrate His goodness and grace. We gather weekly in Missional Communities, and regularly as a larger family to share stories and celebrate all that God is doing in and amongst us. We invite everyone to these celebrations as a way of displaying God's glory. (Leviticus 23; Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:24-25)

RECREATE: We take time to rest, play, create and restore beauty in ways that reflect God to others. After powerfully and joyfully creating the universe, God rested. We were created in His image and were therefore made to joyfully create and rest as well. We regularly take time to rest, play, create and restore beauty in ways that reflect what God is like to our community. (Genesis 1-2:3; Deuteronomy 5:12; Mark 2:23-28; Hebrews 4)

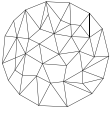
Essentially, by naming a few key rhythms, we're focusing the life of the disciple on the normal, everyday practices that we are all engaged in anyway, bringing to them gospel intentionality. "Everyday life with gospel intentionality" is a simple but profound statement regarding what it looks like to be a disciple of Jesus who makes disciples of Jesus.

These rhythms help us to structure our daily life around Gospel, Community, and Mission. Take some time to work through the following questions, and consider what it might look like for you to do regular life with Gospel intentionality. How would you do these rhythms as Family, Missionaries, and Servants? Some examples are given.

	Key Postures	Family	Missionaries	Servants
Eat	Hospitality: use your table to advance the Gospel. 21 opportunities weekly.			Bring the best food/drink. Do the dishes/ dirty work
Listen	Ask the Spirit, "What's next?" How is the gospel good news?	Ask one another questions.		
Bless	What have you been given? Whose feet can you wash?			
Story	Remember God's Story. Tell your own story. Learn others' stories.	Know each other's stories.	Know neighbors' stories. Know the culture's stories. Tell the Gospel story.	Demonstrate how the Gospel story answers neighbors' needs by serving.
Celebrate	Date Night & Family Night. Birthdays, parties, holidays.		Join neighborhood parties.	
Recreate	Play, rest, vacation together - think kid activities & workouts.			

10

GOSPEL IDENTITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE



The Discussion.

Write your answers here to prepare for group discussion.

NOTABLE QUOTE

The gospel has done its work in us when we crave God more than we crave everything else in life—more than money, romance, family, health, fame—and when seeing His kingdom advance in the lives of others gives us more joy than anything we could own.

J. D. GREER

Look back at your answers to the preliminary questions in the Big Picture section of this chapter. In light of the content in this section, how has your initial answer changed? How would you define a disciple of Jesus Christ? What would you say are the highest priorities for a disciple of Jesus Christ?

Think back on the life and ministry of Jesus. How did Jesus form his disciples?

For a new identity and a way of life to be formed in us, what has to happen?

Consider our definition of disciple on page 201. In light of that definition, where do you most need to grow as a disciple? What specific steps might you take to engage with God in those areas?

What are the biggest hindrances to you rearranging life in order to live as Family, Missionaries, and Servants? What holds you back?

discussion notes



discussion notes

10

**GOSPEL IDENTITY
IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

10

GOSPEL IDENTITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE



The Application.

Practically, how does this change your life?

Let's take some time to put together all the pieces from throughout the course, mapping out how you can live a life shaped by the Gospel, in Community, and on Mission in the everyday stuff of life.

We've written a mission statement (end of Section 9). Rewrite yours here:

What has God called you to in Christ? What new purpose has He given you? How would you describe this new purpose?

In the sections on our Gospel Identities, we thought through the ways that God is leading us to live as Family, Servants, and Missionaries. Review and summarize your actions steps below:

FAMILY: Who will we connect with as our primary Gospel community? How will we be with them in regular ways? How will we exhibit our love for them in tangible ways?

SERVANTS: How will you learn the needs and meet the needs of your community? What would most tangibly demonstrate the coming Kingdom in your neighborhood or network? How will you make your time, talent, and treasure available for these needs?

MISSIONARIES: To whom are you sent? With whom has God given you favor in this season? How will you share and show the good news? How will you support one another as missionaries?

Finally, consider the actual contours of your everyday life, and map your action steps onto the hours and days of your week. Almost everyone has both free spaces and challenging constraints in their daily and weekly schedules. Use the space below to map an “ordinary week,” knowing that no week is ever “ordinary!” What spaces do you have, and how will you shape them with gospel intentionality?

Sunday
Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
Friday
Saturday

afterword

a Vision for Gospel Saturation

There is a day coming when every person — man, woman, and child — will know the truth about who God is, what he is like, and all he has done in and through Jesus. We call this Gospel Saturation, and it is predicted by the Old Testament prophet, Habakkuk:

*"For the earth will be filled
with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea."
(Habakkuk 2:14)*

Consider the imagery here: The whole earth — every nook and cranny! — filled to overflowing with a deep and abiding awareness of God's glorious reality. There will not be any person or place where God in his fullness — his true character, in all its myriad dimensions — will not be fully known, deeply trusted, and joyfully obeyed. Habakkuk anticipates the Last Day, the arrival of the Kingdom of God, when God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. What a vision!

In his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul connects this grand, all-encompassing vision to what God has done in Jesus, and to the church which is his body:

*"And God put all things under Jesus' feet and gave him as head over all things to the church,²³
which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all." (Ephesians 1:22-23)*

This is a massive claim: God has put “all things” under Jesus’ feet, giving him dominion over everything. He is the Lord of all, and God’s purpose is to restore all things to what he intended it to be in the beginning! Habakkuk’s prophecy has begun in and will one day be fulfilled in Jesus, the True King of the World. Jesus will unite heaven and earth, and all things will be under his glorious and gracious reign.

But then Paul says God gave Jesus to the Church, as her head, and made the Church his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. Try to get your mind around that exalted view of the Church! Jesus has an earthly body, through whom he is exercising his Rule and Reign, right now. Jesus is filling the earth with the knowledge of the glory of God in and through the Church. Gospel Saturation isn’t just a future hope but a present unfolding reality: The knowledge of God’s glorious reality is moving into all the nooks and crannies through God’s blood-bought people!

In Ephesians 3:10, Paul says it even more cosmically: *“so that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.”* It isn’t just that God is filling the earth with his glory; he’s also showing his glory over and against the powers that be, both earthly and demonic, in and through the Church.

The Church is not an afterthought for God. It is not his Plan B (or C, D, or X, Y, Z!). This has always been his plan: To reconcile the world to Himself through the work of his Son, and to put his glory on display through His People, the Church.

This is the reason Paul prays in Ephesians 3:14-19 that we would be filled by the Spirit, strengthened to comprehend the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of God to us in Christ, so that we might be filled with all the fullness of God! As we are Saturated with the gospel and scattered into the world, the whole earth becomes Saturated with the gospel.

This is the glorious vision of being the Church: Sin-wrecked rebels become grace-renewed sons and daughters, sent together to put on display the full glory of our rescuing Savior and triumphant Lord, Jesus Christ.

So go be the Church!

“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us,²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20-21)

References:

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