



gospel basics

the whole church bringing the whole gospel to the whole world

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Gospel Centrality and Power

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOSPEL

Questions for Discussion

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

The Importance of the Gospel

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 rarely the first thing. And yet, the Bible says that the gospel is “of first importance.” 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)

“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 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 were going to 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:

THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL

Scriptures on the Gospel

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.

John 3:16-17

"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. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

Romans 3:23

"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."

Ephesians 2:8-10

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Good News for Everyday Life

The gospel makes Christianity unique among all religions. Some people say that all religions basically teach the same thing, but those people have never studied religions closely. While there are some similarities among religions, the message of the gospel makes Christianity fundamentally different. Anyone whose life is shaped by the truth of the gospel, as opposed to religion, will have completely different motives, relationships, emotions, and behaviors.

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

First, Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God. In every way, he was perfectly pleasing to God, absolutely faithful, and entirely obedient. 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 in Christ.

Second, Jesus died as a perfect substitute, taking the just penalty against my sin. 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. God the Father turned his back on his own Son so that he could turn his face toward rebels like me. 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, and 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.

Third, Jesus rose from the dead and defeated sin, death, and hell. 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. Additionally, Because Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father, I can be certain that God's love towards me will never change, and one day Jesus will return to re-make the world as he intended it to be in the beginning, set all things right, and bring me to be with him for eternity.

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, our past is gone, our identity today is in Him, & our future is life in God's kingdom with God forever!

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):

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.

THE GOSPEL CHANGES EVERYTHING!

We believe that the Gospel separates Christianity from any and every other religion. On 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 are to grow in grace each day, to more fully work the reality of what God has done for us – the Gospel – into the everyday parts of our lives. **Christianity is fundamentally about learning how to live as a new person in Christ, where your heart is set on Jesus Christ and your life is the overflow of your joy in God.**

As one author has said, it's about "doing everyday things with Gospel intentionality."

READ *Religion vs. The Gospel*

Religion vs. The Gospel

	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.

1) Having read through the chart, 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.)

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

Quotations about the Gospel

Below are quotations about the gospel by people who have studied its message for many years.

"The gospel is the word about Jesus Christ and what he did for us in order to restore us to a right relationship with God." - Graeme Goldsworthy

"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. Greer

"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

"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." - Tim Keller

1) Based on the key points from the scriptures and the definitions above, write down several summary statements that capture the message of the gospel.

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-
-
-

2) Now in 1-3 sentences, using your own words, answer the question: What is the gospel message?

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?*



Gospel Centrality and Power

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL - PART 1 (PAST)

Question for Discussion

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

The Gospel in Three Statements

Over the next three lessons we will examine the message of the gospel in greater detail, as well as some of its implications for everyday life. We can divide the message of the gospel into three statements which focus on what Jesus has done for us. Remember: 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, (that is, by trusting our lives to his work on our behalf) we receive the following benefits:

- I. *We have been saved* from the *penalty* of sin because of Jesus’ life and death. (Past)
- II. *We are being saved* from the *power* of sin because of Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. (Present)
- III. *We will be saved* from the *presence* of sin because of Jesus’ return. (Future)

1) What is common among each of these statements?

2) What is different in each of these statements?

Notice that each statement has a different tense - past, present, and future. Romans 1.16 says that the gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” Throughout the Bible, salvation is spoken of as an accomplished event (past tense), an ongoing experience (present tense), and a coming reality (future tense). Over the next few weeks we’ll look in depth at salvation in each of the three tenses, beginning this week with the *past tense*.

READ Article: Your Resume, Your Righteousness.

Your Resume, Your Righteousness

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 our resume and rap sheet is our righteousness. Our righteousness (sometimes called a righteousness 'of God' or 'from God') is our standing before him based on the quality of our life. We have all of our accomplishments and qualities on our resume. We also have all the ways we have fallen short of God's perfect standard on our rap sheet. Together they are our righteousness.

If you were to compare your life resume—the one you will hand to God—to other people, how do you think you will measure up? Most of us would probably say we land somewhere between Hitler and Mother Theresa. If you are like me, you are pretty good at noticing lots of reasons why your status should be shifted up the scale, and ignoring the reasons why your status should be shifted down. Just like a resume we would construct for a job interview is skillfully skewed from reality, we are pretty good at painting a better picture of ourselves than is reality.

Adolf Eichman was the mastermind of the "final solution," the Nazi plan to exterminate the Jews. He committed shocking crimes against humanity. And 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: even the best people cannot justify themselves to God.

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.

There was a guy 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.

Your Resume, Your Righteousness *(Continued)*

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 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 says, "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 we have to stand before God with our resume and rap sheet, we don't stand a chance. Our 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 we have not earned that God will freely give to us. He will allow us to trade in our insufficient resume and rap sheet, and receive a perfect resume and rap sheet--the one that belongs to Jesus. We can either stand before God with ours or with his. We can either put our faith in what we have done, or we can put our 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. But here is the good news: God loves you so much that he sent his Son, Jesus, to live the perfect life you don't live and 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 simply need to humble yourself, set aside your resume, and thank Jesus for his.

*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.*

Good News from God's Word

Through faith, we have been saved from the penalty of sin because of Jesus' life and death. (Past Tense)

THE BAD NEWS ABOUT OUR RESUME

Romans 3:9-10, 20

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

3) 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?

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT JESUS' PERFECT RESUME

Romans 3:21-25

"But 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."

4) According to vs 23 is anyone's personal resume good enough? Why? What is the standard?

5) What is the good news according to vs 24?

6) According to vs 22 & 25, how do you get this perfect resume that is now available?

7) 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 Romans 3:24-25 how was our penalty paid off?

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, and God will treat us based on His perfect life and not on our failure.

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.

In 1 Corinthians 5:21 we are told, "For our sake, God made him (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God."

8) *According to 1 Corinthians 5:21 what is the exchange that takes place?*

9) *Imagine the opportunity to stand before God and hand in Jesus' resume. Would you like to do that one day? If so, you can say to Jesus, "Thank you for living the perfect life that I haven't lived, and thank you for paying the penalty for all the ways that I have fallen short of God's standards. I no longer want to rely on what I have done for my standing with God. I put my trust in you and what you did for me."*

***The Bad News: I am so sinful that Jesus had to die for me.
The Good News: I am so loved that Jesus was glad to die for me.***

Good News for Everyday Life

Many of us have an internal drive to prove ourselves to ourselves, to others, and even to God. We approach tasks like a test that will either build our resume or lengthen our rap sheet. We approach encounters like we would a job interview, trying to make ourselves appear better than we actually are. The author Donald Miller said we live our lives like we are in a life raft that holds 15 people, but 16 are in the raft. Someone has to go and so we are bound and determined to prove that we deserve to stay. This drive to prove ourselves leads to all kinds of problems: stress, anger, jealousy, lying, debt, fear, to name just a few.

But the message of the gospel is that we have nothing to prove and no need to pretend. We have nothing to prove because we will pass the greatest job interview—the one with God—with flying colors because of Jesus. We have no need to pretend because God has loved us at our very worst and all of our sin is forgiven sin. Nothing to prove. No need to pretend. That is good news right now!

RELIGION	GOSPEL
My identity is based on what I do for God	My identity is based on what God has done for me in Jesus
I feel the need to prove myself to God and others because my acceptance is based on my good performance. I am constantly under pressure.	I don't have to prove myself to God or others because my acceptance is based on Jesus' good performance. The pressure is off.
I have to pretend that I am better than I really am. I try to hide my faults and failures because every sin condemns me.	I am free to be myself with all of my faults and failures. I don't have to hide because all of my sin is forgiven sin.

NOTHING TO PROVE¹

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. The pressure I feel to achieve in this area is costing me in the area of relationships.

Parenting

I do everything I can to give my kids an edge. I get them the best academic support and have them in all the right sports and extracurricular activities. When they don't succeed or when they misbehave I am embarrassed. I suspect that they feel an unhealthy amount of pressure from me.

¹ Adapted from *Gospel Transformation*, World Harvest Mission

Intelligence

In conversation I try to demonstrate my knowledge on a broad array 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 and is noticed by others. I don't exercise and eat well just to be healthy but to be admired by others. I catch myself looking in the mirror a lot. 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 we are struggling financially I try to hide it.

Behavior

I don't drink, cuss, chew, or go with girls 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.

10) What are some of the negative consequences that you have experienced by feeling the need to prove yourself?

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

NO NEED TO PRETEND²

Pretending 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 do the right things. Few people know the real me.

Hiding

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 and 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 the significance of my sin and mistakes. I dismiss them as insignificant. Rather than seeking forgiveness from God and others, they build up and end up causing more damage.

12) *Which area of pretending do you struggle with the most? How does it negatively affect your life and relationships?*

13) *How could this area of struggle be altered if you believed that you were unconditionally accepted by God--if you believed the gospel: that through faith, you have been set free from the penalty of sin through the life and death of Jesus?*

REFLECTION *This week look for a moment when you are responding by Proving or Pretending. What are you forgetting about the gospel? 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. Report back to your group next week!*

² Adapted from *The Gospel Centered-Life, World Harvest Mission*



Gospel Centrality and Power

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL - PART 2 (PRESENT)

Question for Discussion

Describe a time when you tried to change. Maybe you were trying to end a bad habit or start a good habit. What was your motivation to change in that circumstance?

The Power of the Gospel to Change Us

In the last lesson we learned that Jesus lived a perfect life and then died to pay the penalty for our sin. He was perfectly righteous and then died for our unrighteousness. But Jesus did not stay dead. He rose from the grave and then 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 the truth that: *Through faith, we are being set free from the power of sin because of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.* We will not be fully set free from the power of sin in this life, but the Holy Spirit enables us to increasingly grow in likeness to Jesus Christ.

1) 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

“Religion can tell you what to do--namely, to “love God with all your heart, soul and mind” and “to love your neighbor as yourself”; but the gospel alone gives you the power to do it.”

- J.D. Greer

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

Good News from God's Word

Through Faith, we are being set free from the power of sin because of Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS' RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION

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

Referring to the resurrection, Paul writes:

"Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." - 1 Corinthians 15:55-56

Referring to the resurrection, Paul prays that the Ephesians would know:

"what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come." - Ephesians 1:19-21

Referring to his ascension, Jesus says to his disciples:

"But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor [the Holy Spirit] will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." - John 16:7

2) According to these passages, what are some of the reasons that Jesus' resurrection and ascension are good news?

THE HOLY SPIRIT: A NEW POWER TO CHANGE

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.

3) *What is one thing you did this week that you wish you hadn't? What were some of the consequences for you and for those around you?*

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.

Romans 8:9-11

"You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you."

2 Timothy 1:7

"For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline."

2 Peter 1:3

"His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness."

4) *Where do we receive power to live a life that honors God?*

5) *According to these verses, is there enough power to change anyone's life, even your own? How great is the power of the Holy Spirit?*

6) *Why do we sometimes think that there is not enough power to change?*

THE GOSPEL: A NEW MOTIVATION TO CHANGE

The Holy Spirit gives us a new power to change. The gospel gives us a new motivation to change. Often times we want to change so that we will look better in our own eyes, others' eyes, or God's eyes--we want to prove ourselves. Other times we want to change in order to avoid the guilt and shame we experience when we sin--we are motivated by guilt. 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.

Romans 2:4

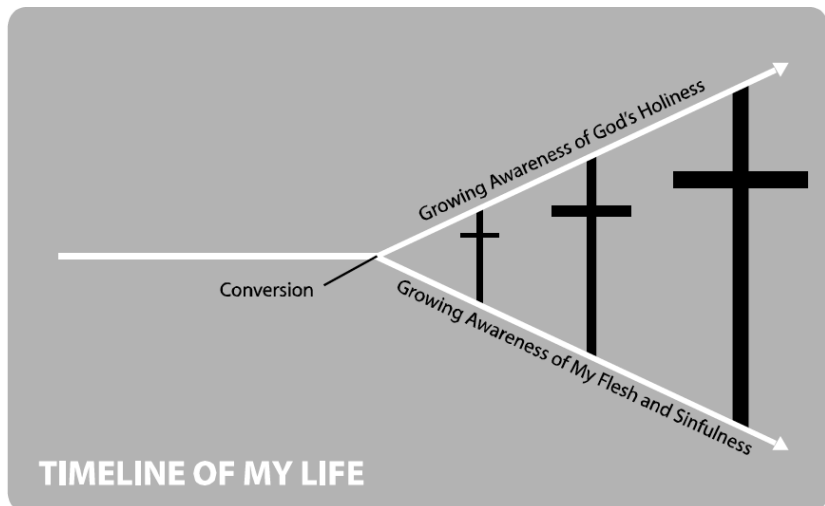
"Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"

7) According to Romans 2:4, what is a Christian's motivation for repentance?

Change for a Christian is not motivated by fear, guilt, or proving oneself. It is motivated by love and gratitude in response to God's grace, God's 'kindness'.

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 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. The result is that we want to live for God. We want to honor him with our lives. In this way, the gospel gives us new desires and motivations to change that have their root in love and gratitude, not guilt and shame.



(From The Gospel-Centered Life)

READ *The Gospel and Transformation*

“ 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 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.

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. They try to change their behavior to no avail because they never address the underlying unbelief that is driving their behavior.

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.

One of the important roles of the Holy Spirit is to reveal to us of 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.

“ 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).” - Tim Keller

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—that 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—that he 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, 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—that 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, 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 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—that 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 a through vital connection with a community that will lovingly remind them of the truth each time they struggle with unbelief.

“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

Good News from God's Word

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

GOD IS GRACIOUS » SO We Don't Need To Prove Ourselves

8) When you are believing the lie that you need to prove yourself to God, others, and yourself, what are some of the sinful behaviors that result?

GOD IS GOOD » SO We Don't Need To Look Elsewhere

9) When you are believing the lie that ultimate satisfaction is found in things other than God, what do you tend to turn to? What are the negative consequences?

GOD IS GREAT » SO We Don't Have To Be In Control

10) When you are believing the lie that God is not in control and he doesn't care for you, how do you respond when life feels out of control?

GOD IS GLORIOUS » So We Don't Have To Fear Others

11) When you are more aware of people and their opinions or approval than of God's approval, what happens when you don't feel accepted and approved of?

REFLECTION *Which of these four truths is the most important for you to be reminded on a regular basis? There is often one lie that is most attractive to our souls and is at the root of most of our sinful patterns and negative emotions. See if you can identify throughout the week what is at the root for you. 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?*

4

Gospel Centrality and Power

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL - PART 3 (FUTURE)

Question for Discussion

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

Hope For the Future

In session 2 we learned that the gospel is good news for the past - Jesus' life and death have brought us into a perfect, unbroken relationship with God. In session 3, we discussed how the gospel is good news for the present - Jesus sets us free from the power of sin and gives us new motivation to change. Additionally, by faith in Jesus we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit who gives us a new power to change.

“**We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.**”
- 1 Corinthians 15:51-52

But the gospel not only gives us hope in our present struggles, it gives us hope for the future.

In this lesson we examine the good news that: *Through faith, we will be saved from the presence of sin because of Jesus' return.* A day is coming when the struggle with sin will be over and every thing that is wrong in this world will be made right.

1) According to the two statements below, what is in the process of being accomplished, and what has yet to be accomplished?

I. Through faith, we are being saved from the power of sin because of Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

II. Through faith, we will be saved from the presence of sin because of Jesus return.

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

Good News from God's Word

Through Faith, we will be saved from the presence of sin because of Jesus' return

JESUS' RETURN IS GOOD NEWS FOR US

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

2) 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

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

JESUS' RETURN IS GOOD NEWS FOR THE WORLD

Not only will those who put their faith in Jesus be perfected when he returns, so will the whole world. Read these two passages from John's account of what will happen after Jesus returns.

Revelation 21:1-5

"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 22:1-5

"Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² 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.⁵ 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."

4) *If you put your faith in Jesus, you will immediately be with Jesus when you die. But after Jesus returns, something else is going to happen. Will people go up to heaven, or will heaven come down?*

5) *According to these passages, how will human experience change when Jesus returns?*

6) *People often think of salvation in terms of individual souls rising up to heaven for a non-material existence. How does this passage indicate otherwise? How is this picture of 'eternal life' different from what you may have heard or assumed in the past?*

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

Re-Imagining Salvation

What is salvation? Why did Jesus live, die, rise, ascend and - eventually - why will he return?

It is often assumed that the whole point of salvation is for people to go to heaven after they die. It is assumed that God's goal in salvation is to have a bunch of disembodied souls floating around with him in heaven. But that can't be God's goal in salvation because it is not the final outcome of God's plan of salvation.

After Jesus returns, people don't go up to heaven for an immaterial existence. Quite the opposite. Heaven comes down and transforms the material. 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 God.

Ordinary life is not our problem. Ordinary life is quite wonderful when you think about it: 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; enjoying winter slowly turn to spring as trees push out white blossoms and the smell of wisteria filling the air. Ordinary life—in the absence of pain and suffering—can be quite wonderful.

God cares about our everyday lives and this world, so his plan is to *redeem* 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.

One day, Jesus will return and the life that we are familiar with will be fully transformed—not into something completely different, but into something completely perfect. God isn't going to take away the pleasure of diving into a pool on a hot summer day, He is going to take away the risk of sunburn and skin cancer. God isn't going to take away the joy of being in love, He is going to take away the pain of divorce. That is the picture the Bible gives us of eternal life—life after Jesus' return.

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 they learn to live, here and now, under the influence of God's transforming power, they give others a picture of the transformed life that will be enjoyed when Jesus returns.

“ Very often people have come to the New Testament with the presumption that 'going to heaven when you die' is the implicit point of it all...They acquire that viewpoint from somewhere, but not from the New Testament." - N.T. Wright

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.

An eternity wearing white robes and playing harps is a movie most would rather skip. We won't be playing harps or sitting on clouds. An accurate picture of eternal life is learning to live ordinary life with the transforming power of God. 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, sin and suffering. Living ordinary life with the intentionality of giving people a picture of the gospel, the good news of Jesus, is the goal—everyday life with gospel intentionality.

If you just imagine this world, but imagine it perfect, you begin to get a picture of the future salvation that belongs to those who trust in Jesus. You also get clarity on how to live, right now, in a world that is not yet perfect. What Christians believe about the nature of salvation in the future will impact how they live in the present.

7) *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, and finally remove sin and sin's effects completely?*

8) *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?*

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

Good News for Everyday Life

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.

9) *In one of your relational roles (spouse, parent, child, 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?*

10) *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?*

11) *As a missional 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?*

Action *As a group, discuss one need that you could meet together as a preview of the salvation that Jesus will bring at his second coming. It could be meeting a practical or emotional need in someone's life, or addressing a concern you see in your community. Come up with a plan for how to meet that need together so that others can experience the good news of Jesus here and now.*

Gospel-Powered Life Workshop

SPEAKING GOSPEL TRUTH IN LOVE IN EVERYDAY LIFE



Purposes for the Workshop

Over the last few weeks we've looked at the power and purpose of the gospel. Discipleship to Jesus is coming to understand the Power of the Gospel and the Purpose of the Gospel, 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?

To help answer those questions, we've created a training we call the "Gospel-Powered Life Workshop." 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. We have to leave behind the old ways of giving advice and urging one another to "try harder" and learn to listen for gospel needs and "speak the truth in love" to one another. This is a process of development as a disciple, and doesn't happen overnight.

We call it a "workshop" because we don't think this can happen in a lecture; rather, we want to take what we've already learned in the last 4 weeks and work on putting it into practice. We want to disciple one another in a safe context, learning to apply the good news to our 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, and then move into the practicalities.

Good News from God's Word

We said in session 5 that a disciple is someone who has been saved by God's power for God's purposes and is living out those purposes in everyday life by helping others to live in the power and purpose of the gospel.

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

[14] 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 ESV)

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.

Consider the implications. Paul doesn't want for 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 want their spiritual growth to be built on the foundation of the gospel. He wants their growth to be "further up and further in," a deeper grasping and sensing on the heart that which they already know to be true in their heads.

And 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.

So Paul is not unconcerned with growth in areas of character and Christlikeness; rather, 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 the everyday life.

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

[3] 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 ESV)

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 - 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 basic truth 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, in real-world obedience like Jesus 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.

Understanding Idolatry

One way to explain this is to use the Biblical category of idolatry. Read Romans 1:18-25.

[18] For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. [19] For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. [20] For 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. [21] For 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. [22] Claiming 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.

[24] Therefore 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 ESV)

1) 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 important, great, supreme. Second, we do not give thanks to God, failing to act dependent and indebted to him. In other words, our hearts become futile and darkened for the very same reason that Adam and Eve at 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.

2) What is the result? (v.22-23)

Because we were created as worshipping beings, when we reject God and deny him, we don't cease to worship. Rather, we simply exchange one god for another. 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!

3) What is the result of this idolatry in our lives? (v.24-25)

The result of the exchanging of the true God for false gods and idols is deception: *They exchanged the truth about God for a lie.* In the absence of worshipping 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 & 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. And then, because these idols ultimately can never give what they promise, 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 worshipping 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 (commandments 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.

Freedom from Idolatry

We grow through ever-deeper understanding of and repentance from our idols, and ever-deeper faith and joy in Jesus Christ as our Savior. This is the only way we ever will obey God not to get something but simply to get God! But what does that look like? There are really 3 simple postures or practices that are the heart-beat of grace-centered growth and change in our lives: Recognize, Repent, and Rejoice.

RECOGNIZE

First, we learn - in light of Scripture, the Spirit's conviction, and life in community - to **recognize** the specific idols or god substitutes in our lives. Consider the following list of possible idols. 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 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 the list above “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.

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

2) 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, time

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

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

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

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.

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 - has any of these idols ever actually produced lasting joy and satisfaction? Have they ever really been for you a source of ongoing life? 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 often we are 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 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 - despite what good or moral actions we may be doing - not 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 me this 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.

"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 there 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.

All of Life with Gospel Intentionality

Above all else, the Christian life is fueled by the ongoing rediscovery of the gospel. This grace of God has to be the engine of your soul. 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 missional community, but at the end of the day, everything that is missional community is the fruit of a people who are increasingly being gripped by grace. Missional community is what happens when your life is captivated by God’s gracious rescuing work.

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. The best way - no, the only way - to live missional community is to do so in confession of your own need for Jesus. As Ted 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. 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. Here’s the simple reality: you’ll never disciple anyone, lead anyone to confession of sin, 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, and 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, 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, practice DNA with your spouse. The whole purpose of a weekly date night (which can be as simple as a walk in the neighborhood!) is 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 your spouse. 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 judgement 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, and mostly you'll do 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 bed-time 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! Because missional community is a way of life and not a meeting, setting aside regular time with a few others from your missional 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 we move on, take a moment and consider:

1) Who will I do this with, and when will I do it?

2) How will I make sure that this time is prioritized and intentional?

We've created a manual called "Gospel DNA" that may be helpful in learning how to "spur one another on to love and good deeds" in a way that is full of grace and truth. Copies of this resources are available printed and in .pdf form. Please contact info@somaspokane.org.

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 with the good news? Around our tables and in our neighborhoods?

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!

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

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

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

Growing In Gospel Fluency Together

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 Missional 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 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 in light of the gospel need they expressed after everyone has shared. 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 proclaim several times and 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 an-

other'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?” Train your group to 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

As the 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 they putting their 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 “better”; the resolution to what they are seeking elsewhere; the opposite of what they are experiencing; or the deeper reality of what they are searching for.

6

Gospel Purpose and Identity

THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL

Question for Discussion

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?

Saved *From* and Saved *For*

The good news of the gospel is not just what are saved from - sin's penalty, power, and presence; it is also the good news of what we are saved for. 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.

Ephesians 2:8-10

"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."

1) *According to Ephesians 2:8-10, what has God saved us for?*

2) *We are not saved by our good works, but we are saved for good works - what is the difference?*

3) *What has God done to help us walk in these good works?*

READ *Our Purpose in God's Big Plan*

Our Purpose in God's Big Plan

GOD'S 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 four primary movements or acts, like acts in a drama: Creation, Fall, Redemption, 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" and 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 - FALL

Fall: 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 the fall is religion - the human attempt to cover up and try to earn our way back to God.

ACT 3 - REDEMPTION

Scene 1 – Israel: 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.

Scene 2– Jesus: 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, and he does so not by destroying the world, but by taking the brokenness of the world on himself, dying, and rising to life again 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 begin to live again for his Kingdom and purposes.

Scene 3 – 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 live lives that show the good news of Jesus. 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 their lives for God's glory as participants in his plan of restoration.

ACT 4 - RESTORATION

Restoration or New Creation: The final act in the drama begins with Jesus' return. One day Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. Those who have put their hope in Jesus' perfect resume rather than their own will enter into the new heaven and new earth. Those who have chosen to trust in their own resume will be judged accordingly and banished from the new heaven and new earth to pay for their sin in hell—a place devoid of 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. Rather than individual souls going up to heaven, 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.

OUR PURPOSE

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.

In the last lesson we learned about the importance of knowing the ending and living our lives as a preview to the coming attraction. It is important to look back 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. As we look back to Jesus and forward to the New Creation we learn how to improvise our parts as participants in his plan.

According to Jesus, our primary role in God's plan is this: to make disciples of Jesus who make disciples of Jesus.

Good News from God's Word

God has saved us for the purpose of making disciples.

Jesus defines our purpose in the final command he gives his followers—it is called The Great Commission. In this commission, Jesus calls all those he had shaped into disciples to repeat the process and help others to become disciples of Jesus, too. A disciple is someone who has been saved by God's power for God's purposes and is living out those purposes in everyday life by helping others to live in the power and purpose of the gospel.

Matthew 28:18-20

"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."

4) *How would you sum up the purpose Jesus gives his followers?*

5) *What kind of power does Jesus have? How is this good news for the disciples' mission?*

6) *What promise does Jesus make to his disciples? How is this good news for the disciples' mission?*

Disciple-making is the process of helping someone to understand the Power of the Gospel and the Purpose of the Gospel, and live everyday life in light of these truths. Disciple-making is the process of applying the good news to every area of life and learning to live in the new identity given to us through Jesus, and helping others to do the same.

In our Gospel Fluency Workshop in Session 6, we'll cover how you can grow into someone who is able to do this in the everyday. You'll learn how to listen for gospel needs, how to ask good questions, and how to speak the good news into the lives of both those who know Christ and those who don't yet know him.

Good News for Everyday Life

Take some time to consider the following questions. As we wrap up Track 1 of Basic Training, we're asking you to consider the degree to which your life is lived in the power of the gospel for the purpose of the gospel. We want to ask the hard questions: Is my real life about fulfilling the Great Commission? Do I *want* it to be about fulfilling the Great Commission? How can I actually be faithful to make disciples?

7) *Take a look at your activities from the previous week. Consider your calendar, your to-do list, activities at home, in your neighborhood, at work. What do your activities from the past week tell you about your purpose in life?*

8) *If you are a Christian, is "making disciples" the clear purpose of your life, based on what you observe in your weekly plan? If not, why not?*

9) *What are your resistances to submitting your life to your God-given purpose of making disciples?*

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 Story and purpose - to put God's grace on display in a community of discipleship.

To help all this hit the ground in your real life, 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 together.

10) *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?*

11) *What has God called you to in Christ? What new purpose has he given you? How would you describe this new purpose?*

Now put it 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, and 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

Now that you've worked through that, consider the following questions regarding the practical shifts that embracing this mission statement requires.

12) You have many daily activities that you will continue to do but with a new, gospel intentionality. How does this mission statement change the way you engage in the current activities of your life?

13) 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?

14) 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?

Action *As we work on writing our personal mission statements, we'll be sharing them with one another and revising them together in the Gospel Fluency Workshop and in Gospel Basics, Sections 7-10. 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!*



Gospel Identity: Family

ADOPTED BY THE FATHER

Question for Discussion

What are some of the things that make up your identity? One way to think about this question is to finish the statement “I am _____” (an engineer, father, good cook, etc.). As you reflect, ask which identities are most core to who you are, those that really form your sense of self.

Gospel Identity

Many of us base our identity on what we do. Christians are different—they base their identity on what God has done for them. Christians receive a whole new identity by virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection. They are defined by what He has done for them, not by what they do - whether for Him or for anyone else. Christians are called to live radically new lives because they are radically new people. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

Over the coming weeks we will look at the new Identity of a Christian based on who God is and what he has done for us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Remember the Great Commission’s twin tasks of disciple-making? Jesus says we are to make disciples by first baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and second, teach them to obey everything [He] taught us. Our new relationship to God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit shapes who we are - that is the power of the gospel! As that new identity takes shape in us, we begin to live differently - that is the purpose of the gospel! We call these our “Gospel Identities.”

The chart below summarizes what we will cover.

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.
Spirit	Sent Us	Missionaries	As Missionaries, we follow the leading of the Spirit as we share and show the good news of Jesus.
Son	Purchased Us	Servants	As Servants, we serve King Jesus and serve others as a foretaste of the coming Kingdom.

Notice that the chart moves, left to right, from the Power of the gospel to the Purpose of the gospel. This is the “gospel flow,” and is the pattern for life in Christ: Who God is -> What He Has Done -> Who We Are -> What We Do. 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.

A disciple is someone who is living out their God-given identity as a member of God’s Family of Missionary Servants who makes disciples who makes disciples. In Track 2 of Basic Training, we discover how we can grow as disciples who make disciples by living out our identity as Family, Missionaries and Servants.

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL <i>(Who God is and what he has done)</i>	THE PURPOSE OF THE GOSPEL <i>(Who we are and what we are to do)</i>
We have been saved from the penalty of sin and adopted by the Father into His Family.	As Family , we love God and love one another.
We are being saved from the power of sin and sent by the Holy Spirit as Missionaries.	As Missionaries , we follow the Spirit’s leading as we share and show the good news of Jesus.
We will be saved from the presence of sin, and have been purchased by the Son as Servants.	As Servants , we serve King Jesus and serve others as a foretaste of his coming Kingdom.

- 1) *What has God the Father done? How do we relate to God as people who have been adopted by the Father? How do we relate to others?*

- 2) *What has God the Holy Spirit done? How do we relate to God as people who have been sent by the Spirit? How do we relate to others?*

- 3) *What has God the Son done? How do we relate to God as people who have been purchased by the Son? How do we relate to others?*

Developing Your Mission Statement

At the end of Class 5 of Gospel Basics, you wrote a personal mission statement that embodied how you sense the Spirit leading you to live in light of Gospel Power and Gospel Purpose. In classes 7-10 of Basics, we discover how we can grow as disciples who make disciples by living out our identity as Family, Missionaries and Servants. **A disciple is someone who is living out their God-given identity as a member of God's Family of Missionary Servants who makes disciples who make disciples.** Over the coming weeks, you'll be adding to your mission statement by writing out the specific ways you'll live your gospel identities of Family, Missionaries, and Servants.

When we get to the end of Gospel Basics, our Missional Community Workshop will be an opportunity to dig into the daily realities of living these gospel identities personally and corporately. The work you do in developing your mission statement over the coming weeks will serve to prepare you to bring it to ground in the day-to-day commitments of life.

Take a moment and re-write your mission statement here, making any adjustments in light of what you've learned of the power and purpose of the gospel since you wrote it in session 5.

My Personal Mission Statement

Good News from God's Word

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

In lessons 7 and 8 we will look at our new identity as Family. In this lesson we will focus on our relationship with God and in the next we will focus on our relationship with others.

Ephesians 2:1-5

"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 5:1-2

"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."

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

Romans 8:15-17

"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."

- 5) *When are times that you have seen a small child cry "Dada"? (Abba means Dada). Why does a child call for a parent in their time of need?*
- 6) *Do you ever call God, "Dad," in prayer? If not, how might your times in prayer change if you called God, "Dad," instead of simply "Lord" or "God?"*
- 7) *What is an heir? How is being an heir better than being a slave?*

1 John 4:13-19

"By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us."

8) *What role does the Holy Spirit play in knowing the love that God has for us?*

9) *Do you struggle with being afraid of God? If you trust in Jesus as the Savior of the world, why don't you need to fear?*

10) *What is our motivation in loving God?*

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

READ *Abba's Child*

Abba's Child³

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."⁴ 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

³ Adapted from *Discipleship Essentials* by Greg Ogden

⁴ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1973), p. 181.

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."⁵

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—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ" (Romans 9:17). 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!

⁵ C.S. Lewis, quoted in *Hymns for the Family of God* (Nashville: Paragon, 1976), p. 167.

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 vs. Children¹

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.

¹ Adapted from *Sonship and The Gospel-Centered Life* by World Harvest Mission.

11) According to the chart, 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?

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

Action *When you gather this week with your missional community or with your DNA group, take the time to share one of the areas where you consistently live as an orphan. Speak openly about where you see evidence of this, and ask your brothers or sisters to speak the good news in love to your unbelief. What are you forgetting about God's love to you in Christ when you live like an orphan?*

The Church as Family

As we consider our new vertical relationship with God as Father, we also begin to realize our new horizontal relationships with Christians. We share the same Father, so we must learn to relate as brothers and sisters. In light of the love we've experienced from our Father, what kind of lives ought we live together?

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

Many people think of church as a service you attend, a building with a steeple, or an organization within the community. Church is something you do some of the time. You "go" to church. But the biblical understanding of the church is very different. You don't "go" to church, you "are" the church if you are a child of God by faith in Jesus. Church isn't a service, a building, or an organization. It is a family. It is a community that shares life throughout the week in relationship with God as Father and one another as brothers and sisters. Consider the frequent use of familial language in the New Testament to describe the church:

- The Church is a family with God as Father (*1 Thessalonians 1:1-3, 3:11-13, 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2, 2:16*)
- The Church is the "household of God" (*1 Timothy 3:15, 1 Peter 4:17, Hebrews 3:3-6*)
- Christians are God's children (*Romans 8:16-17, Galatians 4:4-6*)
- Christians are brothers and sisters with Jesus (*Mark 3:31-35, 10:28-31, Luke 9:60*)
- Christians are brothers and sisters with one another (*Matthew 23:8-9*)

13) *What does the church seem most like to you? Does it seem like a family?*

14) *Have you ever experienced the church as a "family"--a truly loving and caring community?*

Good News from God's Word

THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH FAMILY

Acts 2:42-47

"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."

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

16) *Choose three adjectives to describe this community.*

17) *What is appealing to you about a community like this?*

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

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

Good News for Everyday Life

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

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

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

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

Take out your personal mission statement, and add to it, answering the questions below to build personally (or as a couple) what you sense the Spirit leading you to in light of your Identity as Family. Our goal is to build from the general idea of living from gospel power for gospel purpose to the specifics of your real life being shaped.

FAMILY — *We Are Dearly Loved Children Adopted By The Father. As Family,
We Love God And Love One Another.*

Questions to Consider:

- What actions/behaviors/habits will we practice as evidence that we are living life in community as family?
- What group of people will we connect with regularly as our primary gospel family?
- How will we welcome others into this family so they can experience a gospel-soaked community?
- How will we stay connected to the larger Soma Spokane family?

Here is how I will relate to God and my community as Family:

Once you answer these questions on a personal level, you're ready to consider answering them on a corporate level. If you are a part of a Missional Community, you'll want to work through some of this together, discussing how you can live your Family identity together. As a Community discuss the questions below and then decide on a couple of key habits, priorities, or practices that will go the furthest in helping you become a loving "family".

FAMILY — *We Are Dearly Loved Children Adopted By The Father. As Family,
We Love God And Love One Another.*

Questions to Consider:

- How will we help those in our missional community to relate to God as our loving Father?
- What actions/behaviors/habits will we practice as evidence that we are family? (eating, playing, celebrating, serving, praying, etc.)
- How will we discover and meet the needs of those in our MC as they arise?
- How will we welcome others into this family so they can experience a loving Christian community?
- How will we stay connected to the larger Soma Spokane family?

Here is how we will relate to and care for one another as Family:

Action *Make a plan for how you will live out one of the things you discussed this week so you can grow in becoming a loving family.*



Gospel Identity: Missionaries

EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

Question for Discussion

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

The Church as God’s Missionary People

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.*

Just as the church is the Family of God, the church is also the Missionary People of God. If you are a Christian, you are a missionary: someone who has been sent by God to show and share the good news of Jesus. In this lesson we will explore our Missionary Identity:

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.

In this lesson we will learn how to live out our identity as Missionaries in relationship to Holy Spirit by asking the question, “How do we follow the Spirit’s leading?” In addition, we’ll learn how to live out our identity as Missionaries in relationship to others by asking the question, “How do we show and share the good news of Jesus?”

WHO IS GOD?	WHAT HAS GOD DONE?	WHO ARE WE?	WHAT DO WE DO?
Spirit	Sent Us	Missionaries	As Missionaries, we follow the leading of the Spirit as we share and show the good news of Jesus.

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

Good News from God's Word

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.

THE MISSION OF GOD

God is on a mission. After people rebelled against him and started living for themselves and their glory, everything God created was damaged. Every human relationship was broken: with God, with one another, with the world, and even with oneself (our view of self). But God set a plan in motion to heal and restore both humanity and creation through the savior Jesus Christ. He reveals his plan in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, and we get a picture of the completed plan in the last book of the Bible, Revelation.

THE MISSION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

God's people are part of God's mission. As they show others the good news of Jesus through serving, and share with others the good news of Jesus (the gospel), people are restored to a right relationship with God, are filled with his Spirit, and become participants on His mission.

Jesus saved us for the purpose of participating in God's mission. Followers of Jesus are missionaries: people sent by God on a mission.

THE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT IN MISSION

In the book of Acts, a book about the early church, the Holy Spirit emerges as the primary agent of mission. Read each of the scriptures below and jot down insights about the Spirit's role in the church's mission.

Acts 1:8

Acts 2:4-8

Acts 4:31

Acts 8:29-31

Acts 11:27-30

Acts 12:12-15

Acts 13:2-5

Acts 16:6-10

Acts 20:22-24

- 1) Having read these scriptures about the Holy Spirit, how do you believe you need to grow in your role as a missionary? How does your community need to grow?

- 2) Have you ever had experiences of being clearly lead by the Spirit? How did you know it was the Spirit?

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.

The Holy Spirit is our guide as we seek to discern God’s will for our lives. Jesus told his disciples, “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” (Jn 16:13). 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

God’s will is revealed in the Bible. The scriptures in the Bible were written by people who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. James says, “All scripture is God-breathed”. The Bible gives us everything we need to know to honor God with our lives.

The Bible is 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 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, two opportunities to serve may present themselves. They are both good opportunities. Both would honor God. Both would enable me to use my spiritual gifts to bless others. The Bible affirms both. The Spirit can help me to know which one God is calling me to say "yes" to, and which one I am 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.

THE BASICS

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
- A growing relationship with God through daily time in prayer
- A growing obedience to God's will so that we do not grieve the Spirit and our prayers are not hindered
- A growing discernment of God's voice through listening, testing what we hear with the scriptures and the Christian community, and then obeying

“The Holy Spirit doesn't need to equip you for what you're not going to do, so if you're in rebellion against Jesus and refusing His right to be Lord, He doesn't need to send the Holy Spirit to equip you for service. And, tragically, you miss out on the joy that He brings. So let the Holy Spirit deal with anything that's keeping you from obeying Christ.”

- Henry T. Blackaby

LISTEN TO GOD THROUGH HIS WORD: 4 QUESTIONS

As you come to study the Scriptures, here's a few things to keep in mind. First, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to speak through his word. It's his job to guide us into all truth and to glorify Jesus (John 16:13-14). Second, depending on the passage, a study Bible may be helpful in providing some important background information. Third, commentaries can be helpful as well, but most will provide too much information and could be distracting. Keep it simple!

THE 4 QUESTIONS

1. 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 narrative portions, look for implied references to his attributes. What does the story reveal about his character and nature as Father, Son, and Spirit?

2. 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.

3. 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 special service to God.

4. HOW DO WE LIVE?

In light of all of this, how does it change the way we live? When reading the Bible, we almost always start with the question, "How does this apply to my life?" But rightly motivated, 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. Rather than starting with this question, end with it. And then, take action! Jesus warns against being merely a hearer of his word but not a doer (Mt. 7:24-27). The gospel motivates and empowers us to live in an entirely new way.

When we are faithful in these basics, God begins to entrust us with more. As a missional community, help one another be faithful with the basics of building a relationship with God and obeying his Word. That is essential. But also ask God to guide you on his mission through the Holy Spirit. Find ways to be still and ask God to speak to you (which will often involve thoughts, impressions, or images).

"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 14:26)

Good News for Everyday Life

God wants a relationship in which He is intimately involved in your life. Not only is He the Father who loves you, he is the Holy Spirit who guides you.

4) *Do you want to be led more clearly by the Holy Spirit? What hopes, fears, or doubts do you have?*

5) *Which of the "Basics" do you desire to grow in the most?*

6) *How can you help each other grow in some of these "Basics" as well as the practice of regularly listening to God?*

Question for Discussion

Penn Jillette of Penn and Teller is a devout atheist, but he has a surprising perspective on Christians who share their faith with others. Watch the video clip by Penn Jillette at <http://youtu.be/qCdCVto2MN8> and then discuss the following questions.

1. What are some of the things that Penn appreciated about the man who gave him the Bible?

2. Why does Penn Jillette, an atheist, think that Christians should share the gospel with others? What do you think of his perspective?

On a Mission from God

God's people are missionaries - and not just the ones who go to foreign countries! All God's people are sent. If we think of a missionary as someone who is on a mission from God, then all Christians are missionaries in the places they reside. Key to living out our God-given purpose in life is embracing our identity as Missionaries.

Missionaries: We are missionaries empowered by the Holy Spirit. We follow the leading of the Spirit as we show and share the good news of Jesus.



You simply cannot be a disciple without being a missionary – a sent one. For way too long discipleship has been limited to issues relating to our own personal morality and worked out in the context of the four walls of the church with its privatized religion. In doing this, we have severely neglected our biblical mandate to go and “make disciples.” The fact is that you can’t be a disciple without being a missionary: no mission, no discipleship. It’s as simple as that. *-Alan Roxburg*

Good News from God's Word

Jesus came to earth on a mission and he sent his own disciples out to continue that mission before departing.

John 20:21

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you."

3. 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?

SHOWING THE GOOD NEWS

Jesus' primary message is captured in Mark 1:15, "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" Jesus came to tell people that God had good news, but he also showed them that God was good news.

4. Glance through the section headings in the book of Mark. What are some of the ways that Jesus showed people he was good news?
5. One of the ways that we can show that God is good news is to do for others what God has done for us. Think about the gospel that we have been studying. What are some things that God has done or is doing for us that we can do for others as an expression of who he is?

The ABC'S of Mission

Being a missionary can sound intimidating. For some it conjures up images of moving to faraway 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 your missional 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" (Jn 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 _____ hear and believe the Word of God for what it really is. (1 Thess. 2:13)
3. Lord, I pray that _____ seek to know You. (Acts 17:27)
4. Lord, I ask You prevent Satan from blinding _____ to the truth. (2 Cor. 4:4, 2 Tim. 2:25-26)
5. Holy Spirit, I ask you to convict _____ of his/her sin and need for Christ's redemption. (John 16:7-14)
6. Lord, I ask that you send someone who will share the gospel with _____. (Col. 4:3-6)
7. Lord, I also ask that You give me the opportunity, the courage and the words to share with _____. (Col. 4:3-6)
8. Lord, I pray that _____ turn from his/her sin and follow You. (Acts 17:30-31; 1 Thess. 1:9-10)
9. Lord, I pray that _____ would put all of his/her trust in Christ. (John 1:12; 5:24)
10. Lord, I pray that _____ confess Christ as Lord, take root and grow in faith and bear fruit for your glory. (Rom. 10:9-10; Col. 2:6-7; Luke 8:15)

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. What are some simple ways you can strengthen your relationship with the three people God has put on your heart?

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 missional community may frequently talk about Jesus. If a person spends time with this missional community they will both experience God's gracious welcome through the person with the gift of hospitality and hear about God's gracious welcome through the person with the gift of evangelism. How can you create opportunities for the people you have identified above to get connected with your missional community?



"The future of Christianity lies not in a return to the dominance of Christendom, but small, intimate communities of light. Often they're unseen by history. But like yeast they're what transforms neighborhoods and cities."

-Tim Chester

Show and **S**hare the Good News of Jesus

As we Ask God to draw people to himself, Build relationships, and Connect people with our missional 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, come to someone's rescue because God came to ours, we are showing that God is good news.

As you show that God is good news by your actions, don't be surprised when you have opportunities to share his good news with words. People's greatest need is to be forgiven of their sin, reconciled to God, and become his child forever and ever. That happens by hearing and believing the good news about Jesus. So it is important that we both show and share the good news of Jesus as God gives us opportunities.

Keep mission simple by starting with the ABC'S. You don't have to board a plane to Africa to start blessing others and honoring Jesus. You can start where you are with the people you know. And you can start with your Missional Community. Together, find small ways to help one another Ask God, Build Relationships, Connect with Community, and Share and Show the Good News of Jesus.

Good News for Everyday Life

Take out your personal mission statement, and add to it, answering the questions below to build personally (or as a couple) what you sense the Spirit leading you to in light of your identity as Missionaries. Our goal is to build from the general idea of living from gospel power for gospel purpose to the specifics of your real life being shaped.

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

Questions to Consider:

- How will we listen to the Spirit and learn to follow his leading?
- Who are the people we are 'sent'? Is it the three people we have on our hearts? Others?
- How will we practice the ABC'S with these people?
 - **A** How can we set aside time to pray for these people?
 - **B** How will we build relationships with these people?
 - **C** How can we connect them with our community?
 - **S** How can we show the good news of Jesus by serving them?
How can we be intentional about sharing the good news of Jesus with them?

Here is how we will show and share the good news of Jesus:

Once you answer these questions on a personal level, you're ready to consider answering them on a corporate level. If you are a part of a Missional Identity together. As a Community discuss the questions below and then decide on a couple of key habits, priorities, or practices that will go the furthest in helping you live as Missionaries.

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

Questions to Consider:

- How will we seek the Spirit's leading as a community? When and where will we do this?
- Who are the people we are 'sent' to as an MC? Is it the three people we each have on your hearts? Others?
- How can we support one another as the Spirit sends us to these people?
- How will we practice the ABC'S with these people?
 - **A** How can we set aside time to pray for these people?
 - **B** How will we build relationships with these people?
 - **C** How can we connect them with our missional community?
 - **S** How can we show the good news of Jesus by serving them?
How can we be intentional about sharing the good news of Jesus with them?

Here is how we will partner together to show and share the good news of Jesus:

Action *Decide as a Missional Community what your next step will be in partnering together to show and share the good news of Jesus.*

Gospel Identity: Servants

RANSOMED BY THE SON

Question for Discussion

Bob Dylan wrote a song called, "Gotta Serve Somebody." Here is the first verse and chorus:

*You may be an ambassador to England or France
 You may like to gamble, you might like to dance
 You may be the heavyweight champion of the world
 You may be a socialite with a long string of pearls*

*But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed
 You're gonna have to serve somebody
 Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord
 But you're gonna have to serve somebody*

8) *In what ways do you agree or disagree with Bob Dylan's claim that we all serve somebody?*

9) *What are some things that you are prone to serve? What are the consequences in your life of serving these things?*

The Church as God's Servants

In the last lesson we explored the truth that the church is the missionary people of God. Every Christian is on a mission from God--the mission of making disciples who make disciples.

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 Missional Community.

Servants: We are servants purchased by the Son. As Servants, we serve King Jesus and serve others as a picture of the coming Kingdom.

WHO IS GOD?	WHAT HAS GOD DONE?	WHO ARE WE?	WHAT DO WE DO?
Son	Purchased Us	Servants	As Servants, we serve King Jesus and serve others as a picture of the coming Kingdom.

Good News from God's Word

Servants: We are servants purchased by the Son. As servants, we serve King Jesus alone, and we serve others as a picture of the coming Kingdom.

Jesus claimed to be a king, and not just any king. He claimed to be the king over all kings--God himself. And yet, Jesus gave us an atypical picture of kingship. When two of Jesus' disciples were arguing about who would be higher up in his kingdom, he said to them:

Mark 10:45

42 . . . "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. 43 But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

3) *How does Jesus redefine 'greatness' in this passage?*

4) *How did Jesus model a different kind of kingship? How does this make him a better king?*

5) *If Jesus is Lord of your life, have you experienced his rule in your life as oppressive or freeing? How has he been a good king?*

Paul often refers to himself as a servant of Jesus Christ (Rom 1:1, Ph 1:1, Tt 1:1). In fact, all Christians are servants of Jesus. It is part of their new identity. He reminds the Corinthian church that God paid a high price to make them his children:

1 Cor 6:19-20

19 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.

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

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

Slaves of a Better Master ⁶

Jesus is Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3) is the distinguishing article of Christianity and marks the essential confession of faith (Romans 10:9). Jesus proclaimed it to His disciples, His enemies, and His casual inquirers alike—and He refused to tone down its implications. The expression “Lord” (*kurios*) speaks of ownership, while “Master/Lord” (*despotes*) denotes an unquestionable right to command (John 13:13; Jude 4). Both words describe a master with absolute dominion over someone else. That explains Jesus’ incredulity at the practice of those who paid homage to Him with their lips but not with their lives: “Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (Luke 6:46).

There is no legitimate way to adjust the message in order to make it sound appealing to people who admire Jesus but aren’t prepared to serve Him. Jesus didn’t seek admirers; He was calling followers—not casual followers, but slaves. Remove that spirit of submission, and the most profound kind of “admiration” for Christ is a spiritual fraud that has nothing to do with true faith.

Western society, in particular, places a high premium on personal liberty and freedom of choice. So, to present the good news in terms of a “slave/master relationship” runs contrary to everything our culture holds sacred. When one examines the teachings of Jesus, however, we find that many of His illustrations and parables were taken from the “slave world” of His day. Christ repeatedly used slave imagery as the best analogy to clarify profound spiritual realities. From His teaching we learn that slaves are not greater than their master. They are not privy to their master’s plans, they are accountable to the master for how they use his resources, they are liable for how they treat their fellow slaves, they are expected to obey and honor their master without complaint, and the faithful slave will be honored for his diligent service (Mt 10:24; 18:23, 26-33; 24:45-50; 25:14-30; Lk 6:40; 12:37-47; 17:7-10; 19:13-22; Jn 13:16; 15:15-20). Discipleship, like slavery, entails a life of total self-denial, a humble disposition toward others, a wholehearted devotion to the Master alone, a willingness to obey His commands, an eagerness to serve Him even in His absence, and a motivation that comes from knowing He is well pleased (Mt 24:44-46; 25:21; Mk 10:44; Lk 6:46; 12:37; 14:26-33; 16:13; Jn 14:15, 21). Though they were once the slaves of sin, Christ’s followers receive spiritual freedom and rest for their souls through their saving relationship with Him (Jn 8:34, 36; Mt 11:28-30). A slave’s life was one of complete surrender, submission, and service to the master – and the people of Jesus’ day would have immediately recognized the parallel. Christ’s invitation to follow Him was an invitation to that same kind of life. Consider the following five parallels between biblical Christianity and first-century slavery:

EXCLUSIVE OWNERSHIP

Roman law considered slaves to be property in the absolute control of an owner. Though we were born “slaves of sin,” we were purchased by Christ through His death on the cross (Rom 5:18-19; Eph 2:1-3; 1 Pet 1:18-19). We were bought with a price, therefore, we are no longer under the authority of sin, instead we are now “slaves of righteousness” (Rom 6:17-18), and Christ is our new Master. We are a “people for His own possession” (Tit 2:14), we belong to Christ Jesus (Gal 5:24), we worship Him as our “Master in heaven” (Col 4:1). Just as first-century slaves

⁶ Adapted from Ch. 20 of *Slave* by John MacArthur.

would receive new names from their earthly masters, so will we each be given a new name from Christ. Believers in the eternal state will serve the Lord as His slaves forever (Rev 3:12; 22:4).

COMPLETE SUBMISSION

Being a slave meant being always available to obey that person in every way. The slave's sole duty was to carry out the master's wishes. The New Testament repeatedly calls believers to faithfully obey the Master (Col 3:22-24; 1 Cor 6:19-20; Phil 1:22). Submission to the lordship of Christ – a heart attitude that works itself out in obedience to Him – is the defining mark of those who are genuinely converted (1 Jn 2:3; 3:22; 1 Pet 1:2; Rom 12:1; 1 Cor 6:20). The New Testament describes false teachers as “slaves of corruption” (2 Pet 2:19) and slaves of their own appetites (Rom 16:18). The true man of God, by contrast, is “the Lord's slave” making himself “useful to the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Tim 2:24, 21).

SINGULAR DEVOTION

Slaves had only one primary concern: to carry out the will of their master. Like slaves in the first century, we are to be fully devoted to our Master alone – “you cannot serve God and mammon” (Mt 6:24). Exclusive devotion makes it impossible to serve God and other masters at the same time. Believers are to “please God” in all things (Col 1:10; 1 Th 4:1; Rom 14:18); we are called to seek His glory in everything we do (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17).

TOTAL DEPENDENCE

As part of the master's household, slaves were completely dependent on their owners for the basic necessities of life, including clothing, food, and shelter. Because their needs were met, they could focus entirely on serving the master. The parallels to the Christian life are striking – we can focus on the things God has called us to do, trusting Him to meet our needs. Jesus said, “Seek first My Kingdom and My righteousness, and I will provide for all your needs” (Mt 6:25-33; also 1 Tim 6:8). Paul writes, “My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19; also 2 Cor 9:8; 12:9).

PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

In everything they did, first-century slaves were fully accountable to their owners. If the master was pleased, the slave would benefit accordingly; if the master was not pleased, the slave could expect appropriate discipline. Rewards and punishments provided powerful stimulation for slaves to work hard and do well. Believers likewise are to be impelled by the realization that one day they will stand before Christ and “give an account” (Rom 14:12; 2 Cor 5:10). Each of us, like the diligent slave pictured in Matthew 25, longs to hear the Lord say, “Well done, good and faithful slave – enter into the joy of your Master!” (Mt 25:21, 23).

The notion of being a slave may not be appealing. But the truth is that we will all be slaves to one master or another: Sin or Jesus. The good news is that God loves us enough to purchase us from a master who is a tyrant so we can belong to Him, a master who treats His slaves as beloved sons. We are set free from bondage to sin, guilt, misery, and condemnation and given the freedom to obey and please God, and to live the way our Creator intended us to live – enjoying intimate fellowship with Him.

The Discipline of Serving⁷

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 instead had the heart of a servant, so those who believe the gospel of Jesus are given Christlike hearts of servants.

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 effects 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.

⁷ Adapted from *The Discipline of Serving* by Donald Whitney. Some sections have been taken word for word from this article.

Good News for Everyday Life

- 8) *If you are a Christian, you have been purchased by Jesus and are no longer a slave to sin, but a slave of Jesus. Why is it good news that we are slaves of Jesus? How do we know that He is a better Master than sin?*
- 9) *The implications of being servants of Jesus include exclusive ownership, complete submission, singular devotion, total dependence, and personal accountability. In which if these areas are you most struggling and in need of growth?*
- 10) *How would your missional community look different if you more deeply believed the truth that you have been purchased by Jesus and are his servants?*

Take out your personal mission statement, and add to it, answering the questions below to build personally (or as a couple) what you sense the Spirit leading you to in light of your identity as Servants.

Servants -- *We are servants purchased by the Son. As Servants, we serve King Jesus and serve others as a picture of the coming Kingdom.*

Questions to Consider:

- How will we discover the needs of the people to whom we are sent so that we can serve them?
- How will we discover the needs of those in our MC and serve one another?
- Which of our resources will we make available to Jesus by making them available to others?
- How will we serve the larger ministry and mission of Soma with finances, time and talents?
- How will we serve the Soma Family on Sunday mornings?

Here is how we will seek to live out our identity as Servants:

Once you answer these questions on a personal level, you're ready to consider answering them on a corporate level. If you are a part of a Missional Community, you'll want to work through some of this together, discussing how you can live your Servant Identity together. As a Community discuss the questions below and then decide on a couple of key habits, priorities, or practices that will go the furthest in helping you live as Missionaries.

Servants -- *We are servants purchased by the Son. As Servants, we serve King Jesus and serve others as a picture of the coming Kingdom.*

Questions to Consider:

- How will we discover the needs of the people to whom we are sent so that we can serve them?
- How will we discover the needs of those in our MC and serve one another?
- How will our resources be available to our community?
- How will we serve the larger ministry and mission of Soma with finances, time and talents?
- How will we serve the Soma Family on Sunday mornings?

Here is how we will work together to live out our identity as Servants:

Action *Decide as a community how you can serve one of the people who is a part of your mission in the weeks ahead.*

Missional Community Workshop

GOSPEL IDENTITY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Question for Discussion

1) *After everything we've learned together, how would you define a disciple of Jesus Christ?*

2) *How do our gospel identities affect the way we define and live as disciples of Jesus Christ?*

In the Missional Community Life Workshop, we're going to focus on the nuts and bolts of living a life shaped by Gospel Power and Gospel Purpose. We're going to talk about how you'll rearrange life around your new Gospel Identities, and move toward the practical, daily rhythms necessary to walk as a disciple who makes disciples. Before we get there, let's review some of the major gospel themes from the previous 11 weeks.

Reviewing the Gospel⁸

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, and then restores 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" (ev-angelion) 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, because our hearts continue to act on the basis of "I obey, therefore I am accepted." Examples:

⁸ Adapted from an article by Tim Keller

a) Our failure to forgive others is not simply a lack of obedience, but a failure to believe we are saved by grace

b) 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: So 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, but 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, comes to wealth via giving all away. And those who receive his salvation are not the strong and accomplished but those 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 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.

3) If all this is really true – the True Story of the World – what difference does it make?

4) What kind of people would we be if we believed this deeply and lived it consistently?

5) How has your understanding and experience of the gospel changed during the last 9 weeks?

Disciples Who Make Disciples

Disciples are people who believe the good news of who God is and what God has done for them (gospel power!), and are increasingly living a life that is consistent with their new identity (gospel purpose!). The chart below sums up what we have learned over the last several lessons about both the beliefs and behaviors of a disciple.

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.
Spirit	Sent Us	Missionaries	As Missionaries, we follow the leading of the Spirit as we share and show the good news of Jesus.
Son	Purchased Us	Servants	As Servants, we serve King Jesus and serve others as a foretaste of the coming Kingdom.

At Soma we define a Missional Community as a Family of Missionary Servants who live everyday life with gospel power and gospel purpose. By “gospel power and gospel purpose” we mean that our lives are shaped by the power of the gospel (past, present, and future) and the purpose of the gospel (making disciples who make disciples). In this workshop we will consider what it means to be disciples who make disciples, and how to live in your gospel identities in the everyday.

Good News from God's Word

Read Titus 2.11-15:

1) What does Paul tell Titus the church is and should be doing?

Paul's emphasis is on the work of God for us - the grace of God to us - and how that grace reshapes our lives. He uses the word "trains" to describe this shaping, and it is a word that means "wrestling" or "arguing," a perfect picture of how grace works its way into our hearts, and begins to wear away at our self-righteousness, our individualism, and our longings for comforts of the American dream. As that grace is being worked in, we're also looking forward in eager anticipation of Jesus' return, his kingdom, and his glory, and we live with increasing freedom from the siren calls of the immediate pleasures of this world. As his people - a community, a family - we surrender our lives to King Jesus and are made zealous for good works, giving our lives to the mission and ministry of making disciples.

2) Given this text of Scripture, how would you summarize who the church is (identity) and what the church should be doing (purpose)?

Paul's summary of the church here in Titus is exactly what we've been trying to say for the last 11 weeks! The church is the people of God by the grace of God doing the works of God for the glory of God!

3) What are some of the implications of defining the church with this Biblical terminology and images?

The church is a people, a network of relationships created by the Gospel. The church is a unique spiritual people, a new human race, with her own culture. And the church has a purpose – to be doing the works of God (Eph. 2.10). The church has a singleness of purpose in making much of Jesus by making disciples!

The implication of Titus 2.11-15 is that who we are is already established by God in the gospel. Being God's people - being the church - is our identity. It is first and foremost *who we are*, as a given reality, made true by the grace of God. Only by orienting ourselves to our true identity in Christ can we even begin to ask the questions of how we should live and what we should do in our everyday lives. The Gospel creates a people, and as a result this people begin to live radically different lives. What are some of those key differences? How can we live faithful to our identity in the everyday?

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: in community, for Jesus' mission, motivated by the love of Christ to you, and sent by his Spirit.

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 regular 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, 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, and 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.

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 and 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; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

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)

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)

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 believe 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. (Genesis 12:1-3; Ephesians 1:22-23, 2:8-10; 1 Peter 2:12)

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 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)

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 therefore were 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, and 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.

As people endeavoring to live missional community, to live our lives as a Family of Missionary Servants, 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.

EVERYDAY RHYTHMS

1) What difference does it make to define faithful discipleship as engaging Daily Rhythms with gospel intentionality?

2) How would you do these Rhythms as Family, Missionaries, Servants? (some examples are given)

	FAMILY	MISSIONARIES	SERVANTS
STORY	Know & study God's Story 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
BLESS			
LISTEN	Ask the Spirit to lead Ask one another questions		
RECREATE			
CELEBRATE		Join neighborhood parties	
EAT			Bring the best food/drink Do the dishes/dirty work

3) As you look over this chart, what are 2-3 practical steps you can take this week to live your gospel identities in the daily rhythms of your life?

4) Who will you engage in these Rhythms with? Think both in terms of Family (with whom you're sharing life) and of Missionaries (to whom you are sent). Who do you need to pursue?

5) What are the biggest hindrances to you rearranging life in order to live as Family, Missionaries, and Servants? What holds you back?

Putting It All Together

As we move toward wrapping this course up, let's take some time to put together all the pieces of living missional community that we've worked on over the last 11 weeks.

We've written a mission statement. Rewrite yours here:

We've added to that our gospel identities, thinking through the ways that God is leading us to live as Family, Missionaries, and Servants. Sum up 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? (see your notes on pp. 70-71)

MISSIONARIES: To whom are you sent? How will you share and show the good news? How will you support one another as missionaries? (see your notes on pp. 84-85)

SERVANTS: How will you learn the needs and meet the needs of your community and your neighbors? What would most tangibly demonstrate the coming kingdom in your neighborhood? What resources are you making available to this end? (see your notes on pp. 92-93)

Our final step is to think through the daily rhythms of life and brainstorm how we might live as gospel people in simple, everyday ways. During the Missional Community Life Workshop we'll be looking at our weekly schedules and discussing the ways we can use the time and resources God has given to us in order to be available for his disciple-making mission. Please come prepared with whatever you use to plan and organize your week.

Finally, please familiarize yourself with Appendix 3, Gospel Partnership. While we don't have official membership, this document serves as a way to clarify our core convictions and practices. We invite you to partner with us by prayerfully considering the Gospel Partnership document and discussing it with your missional community leaders.

Appendix 1: What We Believe

DOCTRINE AND SACRAMENTS

Doctrine

What is our basis for theological unity in Soma Communities? Simply, we believe the Bible. We intend to maintain unity on the important, primary, and core issues of theology without getting weighed down by secondary matters. While we highly value theology and doctrine, and believe that the content of faith is extremely important, we aim to keep it simple without being simplistic. It really is all about Jesus. We want you to know Jesus and to study theology. Get as much training as you can, learn more than “the basics,” be able to speak intelligently and articulately about the faith, and keep a close loyalty to Jesus.

We may find various theological issues about which we disagree; as long as it is not a disagreement over the essentials of historic, biblical orthodoxy, we may just “agree to disagree” and be united in the essentials.

In simplest form, we agree with the historic Apostles’ Creed:

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. AMEN.

If you want to go beyond that, here are the essentials, adapted from the Acts 29 Network Statement of Faith.

THE SCRIPTURES

We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the verbally inspired word of God, the final authority for faith and life, inerrant in the original writings, infallible and God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16, 17; 2 Peter 1:20, 21; Matt. 5:18; John 16:12,13).

THE GODHEAD

We believe in one Triune God, eternally existing in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; co-eternal in being, co-eternal in nature, co-equal in power and glory, having the same attributes and perfections (Deut. 6:4; 2 Cor. 13:14).

THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man without ceasing to be God, having been conceived by the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary, in order that He might reveal God and redeem sinful man (John 1:1, 2, 14; Luke 1:35). We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished our redemption through His death on the cross as a representative, vicarious, substitutionary sacrifice, and that our justification is made sure by His literal, physical resurrection from the dead (Rom. 3:24; 1 Peter 2:24; Eph. 1:7; 1 Peter 1:3–5). We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and is now exalted at the right hand of God, where, as our High Priest, he fulfills the ministry as Representative, Intercessor, and Advocate (Acts 1:9, 10; Heb. 7:25, 9:24; Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1–2).

THE PERSON & WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We believe that the Holy Spirit is a person who convicts the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment; and that He is the Supernatural Agent in regeneration, baptizing all believers into the body of Christ, indwelling and sealing them unto the day of redemption. (John 16:8–11; 2 Cor. 3:6; 1 Cor. 12:12–14; Rom. 8:9; Eph. 5:18)

THE TOTAL DEPRAVITY OF MAN

We believe that man was created in the image and likeness of God, but that through Adam's sin the race fell, inherited a sinful nature, and became alienated from God; man is totally depraved, and of himself utterly unable to remedy his lost condition (Gen. 1:26, 27; Rom. 3:22, 23, 5:12; Eph. 2:1–3, 12).

SALVATION

We believe that salvation is the gift of God brought to man by grace and received by personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, whose precious blood was shed on Calvary for the forgiveness of our sins (Eph. 1:7, 2:8–10; John 1:12; 1 Peter 1:18–19).

ETERNAL SECURITY AND ASSURANCE OF BELIEVERS

We believe that all the redeemed, once saved, are kept by God's power and are thus secure in Christ forever (John 6:37–40, 10:27–30; Rom. 8:1, 38, 39; 1 Cor. 1:4–8; 1 Peter 1:5). We believe that it is the privilege of believers to rejoice in the assurance of their salvation through the testimony of God's Word which clearly forbids the use of Christian liberty as an occasion to the flesh (Rom. 13:13, 14; Gal. 5:13; Titus 2:11–15).

THE MINISTRY AND SPIRITUAL GIFTS

We believe that God is sovereign in the bestowing of spiritual gifts. It is, however, the believer's responsibility to attempt to develop their sovereignly given spiritual gift(s). The baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs at conversion and is the placing of the believer into the Body of Christ. We also believe that particular spiritual gift(s) are neither essential, nor do they prove the presence of the Holy Spirit, nor are an indication of deep spiritual experience (1 Cor. 12:7, 11, 13; Eph. 4:7–8). We believe that God does hear and answer the prayer of faith, in accordance with His own will, for the sick and afflicted (John 15:7; 1 John 5:14, 15). We believe that it is the privilege and re-

sponsibility of every believer to minister according to the gift(s) and grace of God that is given to him (Rom 12:1–8; 1 Cor. 13; 1 Peter 4:10–11).

THE CHURCH

We believe that the church, which is the body and espoused bride of Christ, is a spiritual organism made up of all born-again persons (Eph. 1:22, 23; 5:25–27; 1 Cor. 12:12–14; 2 Cor. 11:2). We believe that the establishment and continuance of local churches is clearly taught and defined in the New Testament Scriptures (Acts 14:27, 18:22, 20:17; 1 Tim. 3:1–3; Titus 1:5–11). We believe in the autonomy of the local churches, free of any external authority and control (Acts 13:1–4, 15:19–31, 20:28; Rom. 16:1, 4; 1 Cor. 3:9, 16; 5: 4–7, 13; 1 Peter 5:1–4). We recognize believer's baptism and the Lord's supper as scriptural means of testimony for the church (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 2:41, 42; 18:8; 1 Cor. 11:23–26).

The Sacraments

BAPTISM

In the Bible, when someone declared faith in Jesus, they were almost always immediately baptized. Baptism occurred through the immersion of a person completely under water and then raising him up (Mark 1.5, 1.10; John 3.23) to show that he was united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6.1-7; Colossians 2.11-12).

What is this baptism? What does it do, what is its significance for the Christian life? And is it necessary for salvation? First, baptism is simply following the example of Jesus, our Lord. Though he was sinless, he humbly submitted to the Baptism of John. But more than following his example, it is also being obedient to his command:

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. (Matthew 28.19)

Baptism is also symbolic of the transformation that happens when we place our faith in Christ. The Scriptures declare that by faith we are united with Jesus, and this means a death (repentance) and a newness of life (faith):

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6.3-4)

Baptism is also symbolic of spiritual rebirth. It is not necessary for salvation, but is an outward sign of an inward reality. Like every act of obedience, being baptized should serve to strengthen and encourage your faith as it gives opportunity for public proclamation of faith and as it gives a clear physical picture of dying and rising with Christ and our sins washing away. It is not necessary that you be baptized in our church, but if you have never been baptized as a believing adult we highly encourage you to do so.

COMMUNION

Jesus at the Last Supper instituted Communion as a means by which God's people could continually remember and celebrate His body (shown in the bread) and His blood (shown in the wine) shed for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26.26-29). The final communion for God's people will be at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb with Jesus at the end of history in His Kingdom (Revelation 19.9). The church is to celebrate communion with a sober confession of sin and recognition of why Jesus died and rose (I Corinthians 11.17-34) and partake together to show that they are unified by Jesus (I Corinthians 10.17).

Therefore, communion is only intended for Christians (I Corinthians 11.29-30). It was the custom of the church, until a schism at the time of the reformation, to partake of communion each week. The elders of Soma Spokane have chosen to partake of communion every week as a reminder to confess our sins to Christ, be cleansed and transformed by Him, and celebrate the goodness of the Gospel in our lives and church.

Appendix 2: Gospel Giving

HOW GRACE AFFECTS OUR WALLETS

The Gospel Changes Everything

The gospel is the good news that God has done and is doing the work to rescue and renew creation. Jesus walked fully submitted to the Father in everything for us so that we, who do not, might have his perfect submission and righteousness in exchange for our rebellion and sin. Jesus took the wrath of God against our sin on himself when he went to the cross and gave everything so that we might be forgiven and redeemed. When he rose again from the dead, he not only proved that he conquered sin and death, but now he also lives in order to take possession of what is rightly his – his Bride, the Church.

The Scriptures are very clear: We are not our own, we have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). This could seem like bad news if we don't really know what he is like. To be owned by a sinful or evil master is a horrible deal. But to belong to Jesus means we are free to no longer be a slave to anyone or anything that doesn't give life abundantly. Jesus came to give us life and give it abundantly.

We all are slaves to Jesus or another master. In the case of money, many of us live as though we are still in bondage to it. We hoard it, we become consumed with it, we fear losing it, we become anxious that we will not make enough. And all along, instead of being free to use money for his purposes, we become mastered by it and enslaved to it. Therefore we don't walk in line with the gospel in the area of money and giving (Galatians 2:14)

When we begin to believe and embrace the gospel, learning that God is for us AND that God will provide us with everything we need for life and godliness, we approach money and giving very differently. When we realize that we really don't own anything – because everything we have is his – but then again, we really own everything – because all that is his is now ours in Jesus Christ, we can rest in the awareness that we are the wealthiest people on the planet. Then, like Jesus, who for our sakes became poor so that in his poverty we could become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9), we also, who are rich, become willing to empty ourselves so that others can be taken care of. All along we know that, just like Jesus was raised back up and seated in the heavenly realms, we also have nothing to lose because everything that is his is securely held in heaven for us.

The reality is none of us is ever sacrificing anything when we give money, time, possessions or our talents because we really don't own anything – it's all his. So what we're really doing is just using all that is his for his glory. It's not a sacrifice, but a privilege. As we think about stewardship and giving, we must begin with the foundation of our new identity given by grace in Jesus. We are now God's Family, on God's Mission, as God's Servants, for the sake of making Jesus known and multiplying disciples. Every penny that comes into our care must be stewarded in light of this new identity. We don't have certain percentages that belong to God and we get to keep the rest; rather, it is all his and it is all entrusted to us for his purposes. Every dollar you give, save, or spend reflects your understanding of your purpose for living.

One simple way to embody this is to look at your budget in light of this question: Is this the best way with the money we have to multiply gospel ministry? This question allows you to honestly evaluate every area of life with the central purposes of God right in the middle of it all. How you give, save, and spend should reflect the gracious work God has done to bring you in and the purpose of the gospel continuing to go forward.

Some Basics on Giving

- Our giving must be first of all be informed by the gospel and led by the Spirit – we are not doing it to gain approval nor do we give begrudgingly but as a joyful response to what God has given us in Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 8)
- Everything we have comes from God and belongs to God; therefore, we are not really sacrificing anything when we give. (James 1:17; 1 Cor. 6:19-20; Rom. 12:1-2)
- We are to seek first God’s Kingdom (a first fruits principle), not worrying about what we will eat or drink, and trust that he will take care of our needs. (Matthew 6:33)
- We are to give bountifully, without compulsion, and cheerfully. (2 Corinthians 9)
- Giving benefits the giver, not just the beneficiary – it is actually good for us to give because we learn to trust in God; we release our grip on things - idols; we experience God’s abundant grace more; we grow in grace and experience greater joy. (2 Corinthians 8)
- We are to be a slave to Jesus and his righteousness alone – not to anyone or anything. It was for freedom that Christ set us free. (Galatians 5:1)
- We are to support those who serve us in the equipping and training of the gospel. (1 Corinthians 9:1-14; Galatians 6:6-7; 1 Timothy 5:17-25)
- The gospel calls us to grow in grace – not just the receiving of it, but the giving of it as well. We should grow in our giving as we more fully embrace the gospel. This means we increasingly give to our local church AND to the needs we see around us in our community. (Matthew 25:31-46; Acts 2:44-45, 3:34-35)

Personal Diagnostic Questions...

If you want to do some self-examination regarding how the gospel has gripped your heart in the area of giving ask yourself these questions:

1) If I give money away, WHEN do I give it: After I’ve paid all of my bills or before?

The principal of first fruits informs us that our faith in God to provide leads us to give to him first. (Leviticus 23:9-14; Deuteronomy 18:1-5)

Jesus commands us to seek first the kingdom of God and trust that all our needs will be taken care of. (Matthew 6:33)

Jesus is considered the firstborn of many brothers (Romans 8:29); the firstborn of all creation (Colossians 1:15); and the firstborn from the dead (Colossians 1:18) and God gave him so that we might be his children, a new creation and have new resurrection life.

If God would do this with his own Son, so that we could have everything why wouldn't we give back to him?

God no longer asks us to give our first fruits only – he gets it all. The first fruits principle informs HOW we give.

2) Does my giving demonstrate that I believe God is not only trustworthy to take care of me, but generous in how he does it?

Do I give begrudgingly or with great joy? Is giving a privilege or an obligation?

When I give do I give what I think I am required to give or beyond what I think is required?

God did not give us what we deserve, but was merciful by not giving us what we deserve and gracious by giving us much more than we deserve.

3) Does my giving demonstrate that I believe the gospel? Do I believe that what I have is mine or that all I have belongs to God? How does that get reflected in my giving?

Since we have received unmerited/unearned favor from God we should also give not based upon what we get but because of what we got.

The gospel tells us we are now fully secure in God's hands and the most loved and accepted we could ever be.

4) Does having money and things or holding on to my money make me feel more secure or significant?

How have I approached the idea of a tithe: Legalistically, Licentiously or Gospel Informed & Led?

Legalistically – the OT commanded to tithe 10% to the temple in order to meet the standard of righteousness, so I also tithe with the desire to measure up to the law.

Licentiously – that was an OT thing and I am no longer required to do that in order to be made righteous, so I give whatever I feel like – it doesn't really matter.

Gospel – My righteousness does not come from my obedience to the law, but from Jesus' so I am free from trying to measure up to the law. In fact, when I trust in my ability to meet the standard of tithe as the thing that makes me righteous, I do not believe the gospel. At the same time, I am not my own, I was purchased by Jesus and his death for me, so I realize that all that I have I should give to him. In that case

a tithe is really not enough. So, I don't just legalistically give a tithe, I ask the Holy Spirit how much I should give of his money and joyfully give what he tells me. And, I let the law be both a tutor, showing me where to begin, and an indicator of my heart, showing me that I still am in need of Jesus to save me from my greed and selfishness, because I still find it hard to give what was once required by the law and now is within my freedom to give in the gospel.

5) When giving money do I release it or try to control it? Do I trust the elders of the Church to determine where it is best spent or do I want to make that call myself?

In the OT, the people brought the money to the temple (the NT Scriptures do not indicate that this ceased).

In the NT, the people also brought the money to the apostles or elders of the church entrusting it into their hands for where it would best be used.

One of the ways God grows us in our trust of him is by submitting to the leadership he places over us. One expression of that is through our giving.

6) If the people I'm leading followed my example of giving where would we be as a church? A Missional Community? A future church plant?

A student when fully when fully taught resembles their teacher. (Luke 6:40) We are discipling people not primarily with what we say, but with what we do.

All of us speak with conviction around the things we are both convicted about and responsive in – the same is often true on the contrary – we are often silent about what we are either not convicted about or not faithful to do.

The level of commitment, follow-through, responsibility and ownership of the mission by the people we lead will be directly connected to their giving and vice versa. All of which is connected to how well we train them in the gospel and gospel giving.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is a majority of the budget going to pay for buildings?

No. We have worked very hard to avoid connecting the identity of Church with a building instead of with the family of missionary servants. Proportionately, we spend significantly less on the space we use in order to redistribute funds elsewhere.

Why do we pay our elders or some of our staff? How do we decide who gets paid and how much?

We have some among us who give themselves fully to the work of equipping the body for works of service. If they are to do this effectively, they need to be freed up to give themselves fully to leading and equipping others in the gospel. Paul makes the case in 1 Cor. 9:1-14 that those who proclaim the gospel should make their living from the gospel – that they should be able to eat and live from the proceeds of the gospel community. In Gal. 6:6-7 he makes the case that those who are taught the Word should share all good things with the one who teaches. And then to Timothy, he says that the elders who rule well should be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching – “The laborer deserves his wages.”

We are working hard not to build a church run primarily by paid staff. In fact, we look within to see who is already equipping others well. If the elders agree that we need more of their time for equipping and leading in gospel mission, then we move to alleviate their need for income outside of the family. Staff salaries are needs based, meaning each person presents their family budget and we discuss as a family so that the family’s needs are met and the remaining resources are redirected back towards mission.

Do we have a large percentage going to elders or staff?

Yes. Because we don’t have a lot of our money going to buildings or programs, the largest percentage is for elders or staff (this wouldn’t be the case if we had to pay real costs for buildings and if we were highly programmatic). The elders and staff we pay, however, multiply ministry and mission because they are primarily responsible for equipping and sending the body. In that sense the majority of our money is going to training leaders, identifying and equipping church planters, coaching and mentoring and supporting the ministry of the Missional Communities.

How do financial decisions get made?

Ultimately, the elders are continually seeking Jesus on what he is calling us to do as his body and what resources are required to do it (primarily equipping the saints to make disciples who make disciples, along with the systems and structures to support that). We have developed some guiding questions to help us in our decision making process for prioritizing the needed resources based on our gospel identity in Christ (family, servant, missionary) and how we live this out in missional community.

What if I have questions about the budget?

We have an open book policy if anyone has questions about where/how the money is being spent. Please contact Soma Spokane offices (info@somaspokane.org or 509.435.2933).

Appendix 3: Gospel Partnership

AS FAMILY WE GO

Our Shared Vision and Mission

Soma is the Greek word for “body,” and the name emphasizes our goal to be a movement of Jesus communities across our region. Our vision is Gospel Saturation: that every person in our region would have a regular encounter with the good news of Jesus Christ in word and deed. To that end, we are building a network of gospel-centered, Spirit-powered communities taking responsibility for Jesus’ mission to make disciples and plant churches.

While we don’t have an official membership process, Soma returns yearly to our core **Priorities** and **Practices**, creating opportunity for all of us to consider what season of life we’re in and how we’ll live in light of the gospel and the call to make disciples in community. To that end, we invite you to consider how the Spirit is leading you to partnership!

As you end your time in Gospel Basics, the next step is to get connected with a missional community. All our missional communities are committed to the following Priorities and Practices, so be sure to learn from the community what sort of practices and rhythms they’re currently engaged in as they live this out together.

3 Shared Priorities: Gospel, Community, and Mission

1. The Christian life is fueled by an ever-deepening understanding and sensing of the **Gospel** message - the news of God’s gracious acceptance of us through Jesus.
2. We are rescued as individuals but placed into **Community**, called to be the church in the everyday - church isn’t a place we go but a people we are no matter where we go.
3. Every Christian is called to the **Mission** of making disciples of Jesus in all of life - Jesus invites us to come and give our all to the work of the gospel in the world.

4 Shared Practices: Go, Grow, Gather, Give

Go: Community

Our missional communities are the central component of all we do as a church. Being connected in a gospel-centered community with the intention of growing as a disciple and helping others to do the same is the primary way we live out our new identity in Christ. A missional community is a family of missionary servants.

[] I'm committed to active participation in _____ missional community. Some of the roles and responsibilities I've committed to include:

Grow: Development

Learning to be a disciple of Jesus who can make disciples requires ongoing development, and our DNA groups are one of the key ways we do so. Meeting as groups of 3 men or women, we gather to Discover (learn the gospel), Nurture (shepherd our hearts with the gospel), and Act (respond to the Spirit as he leads us to obey the gospel). In addition, consider other avenues for ongoing development you'll pursue this year.

[] I'm committed to DNA with _____, and I'll pursue further equipping through: Gospel Basics | Leader Training | Redemption Groups | Men's Advance | Women's Restore | Other: _____ .

Gather: Sunday

Our Sunday gathering is for connection with God and with one another, a regular moment of rest from the everyday life in community on mission. In addition to seeking rest and renewal, the gathering is one key space to live out our Servant identity by lending a hand with Kids, Worship, Connect, Hospitality, or Facilities.

[] I'm committed to the Sunday gathering, and will serve regularly in _____.

Give: Joyful Generosity

Partnership with the Soma family includes joyful stewardship of time, talent, and treasure for the sake of our shared mission. Financial commitment to the needs of the family is one key way we connect, share burdens, and partner together.

[] I'm committed to giving generously and sacrificially this year, and have discussed what that looks like with my spouse and/or my DNA group.

Going All In Together

I'm making the above commitments in humble reliance upon the Holy Spirit, endeavoring to lean into his presence and power as I walk in repentance, faith, and obedience, and offering afresh my whole life as a living sacrifice to the God of all mercy (Romans 12.1-2). I'm submitting my life to Jesus as the Chief Shepherd, to the Soma elders as those called and qualified to shepherd the flock of God, and to the church family in humility (1 Peter 5.1-5).

And with my community and with the Soma family, I'm giving myself to the vision of gospel saturation and to the mission of making disciples in gospel-centered and Spirit-propelled communities!