



271 Madison Avenue, Suite 1600, New York, New York 10016

(212) 808 4460

www.redeemer.com

Gospel Christianity

Leaders Guide | Course 2

*For whoever wants to save his life will lose it,
but whoever loses his life for me will save it.*

Luke 9:24

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Gospel Christianity

How do I follow Jesus?

Study 1 | Course 2

The gospels show us Jesus calling people to be his disciples, to follow him. What does it mean to be called to follow him?

KEY CONCEPT — DISCIPLESHIP

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

Called to relationship

In secular Greek, the word “disciple” referred to the pupil of a teacher or the apprentice of a craftsman.

- a) In both cases, the disciples entered into a close personal relationship with the master-teacher.
 - i. They often literally lived with the teacher and brought their whole lives under his authority.
 - ii. They did this to receive not simply information from him but wisdom and character.

Called to ultimate allegiance

In Mark 1:16-20, we see the first disciples “leaving” their father (v.20) and “leaving” their nets (v.18).

- a) This does not mean that they lost their relationship with him or that they never fished again.
- b) Discipleship means that Jesus becomes the ultimate, supreme allegiance of your heart.
 - i. Serving, knowing, pleasing and resembling him is the non-negotiable.
 - ii. He is the pre-eminent passion and purpose of your life.

Called to unconditional obedience

In Luke 6:46, Jesus asks “*Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?*”

- a) A consultant gives you recommendations that you can choose to follow or not, since you retain authority over your own life.
- b) But discipleship means giving up that authority to Jesus and, therefore, removing all conditions off of your obedience to him.

- i. If you ever say “I’ll obey the Lord if I get ‘X’ ” — it means you have some allegiance to “X” and value it higher than God.
- c) Conditional obedience is the sign that there has been no allegiance transfer yet.

Called to listen and learn

In Luke 10:38-42, we see that a disciple “sits at Jesus’ feet listening.”

- a) This metaphor implies both submission and attention to Jesus’ truth.
- b) A disciple is an extremely diligent student of the Bible, listening for his voice to us in his Word.
- c) It is difficult, if not impossible, to be a disciple of Jesus if you don’t believe in the entire authority of the Bible.
 - i. If you can omit from the Bible any thing that offends you or that you think is wrong, then you have no way for the Lord to tell you things you don’t want to hear.

Called to suffer and serve

Many times Jesus called his disciples to:

- a) live a simple lifestyle (cf. Luke 6:30-36, 9:3, 14:12-14)
- b) sacrifice (cf. Luke 12:4-12)
- c) not to feel any self-pity about it (cf. Luke 17:7-10)

That’s what servants do — and disciples are his servants.

Called to mission

Jesus “calls us in” to himself but also “sends us out” into the world in mission.

- a) In Luke 10:1-20, he calls us to “gospel-messaging.”
 - i. We are to publicly tell the gospel of Jesus and urge everyone to believe it.
- b) In Luke 10:25-37, he calls us to “gospel-neighboring.”
 - i. We are to sacrificially meet the basic human needs of those around us, whether they believe our message or not. (The men in the Good Samaritan parable are of different faiths.)

Called by grace

In Mark 2:14-18, we see Jesus calling a tax collector — a moral “outsider” — to be a disciple.

- a) This shows that Jesus does not look for spiritually qualified people to call.
 - i. He calls people before they are morally qualified.
 - ii. We are called by sheer grace.
- a) And the dynamic motivation of our discipleship is gratitude for this grace and a desire to please and enjoy the one who called us.

1. Which statements impressed you and why?**2. What are some of the concrete ways you can make Christ King and Lord of your life (rather than just a helper)?**

To treat Jesus as Lord means:

1. Obedying – That is to comply with God’s commands in his Word unconditionally.

- An example of failing to obey unconditionally is Jonah. He could not see how preaching to Nineveh would help him or his nation.
- But if God is King, then you must obey even if you don’t understand why.
- The evaluation question to ask is: **“Am I willing to obey whatever God says about this life-area no matter how I feel about it?”**

2. Submitting – That is to accept whatever comes into your life as part of God’s plan.

- An example of failing to submit to God’s will is Job. He thought God was unfair, that nothing good could come out of his suffering.
- But if God is King, then you must submit to the things he sends your way.

- The evaluation question to ask is: **"Am I willing to thank God for whatever happens in this area whether I understand it or not?"** (This is not the same as to believe that God is happy to send tragedy. Rather, it is to believe that God, in his overall purpose for your life, is always acting wisely and redemptively.)

3. Relying – If God is King, He is not simply someone you comply with. He should hold the title to your heart's deepest allegiance, loyalty, trust and love.

- An example of failing to rely on God is Abraham. He made Isaac an idol. Isaac had become what Abraham relied on more than God for his joy and meaning in life.
- The evaluation question: **"Is there something in this area I am relying on more than God for my hope and meaning in life?"**

4. Expecting – If God is King, He is someone who has great power and resources. He would not call you to do things without supporting you and "backing" you.

- An example of failing to expect great things is Moses. When he was called (Exodus 3), his sense of incompetence prevented him from immediately embracing God's charge.
- The evaluation question: **"Are there problems or limitations in my life I think are too big for God to remove?"**

BIBLE STUDY #1

Colossians 1:15-20

1. Make a list of the remarkable claims made about Jesus' person and power in these verses.

First, he is God. This is seen in a series of amazing claims about him.

1. – He is *“the image of the invisible God.”*

- This means that he is the way to grasp and know the invisible God.
- Hebrews 1:3 gets at this same idea when it says, *“The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”*
- When the Bible tells us that Jesus is the very glory or image of God it is telling us that Jesus is the ultimate, unsurpassable, perfect way to understand God. He is God made visible to us.
- This means Jesus is not simply one more prophet telling us how to get near the Lord of the universe. Rather, he is the Lord of the universe that all other prophets have been trying to get near.

2. – He is *“first born over all creation.”*

- This does not mean Jesus was the very first being made by the Father. But we are told he is *“over all creation.”* All creation — everything that was made — is under him.
- And *“all things were created by him.”* (Verse 16 – see paragraph below) Again, it does not say all other things that were created. Everything that was created happened through Jesus.
- This means Jesus was not created — he always existed with the Father in the Triune Godhead. So why the term *“firstborn?”* In most ancient cultures, the firstborn was the heir of everything the father owned. This is a vivid way for Paul to say that Jesus is equally God.

3. – Finally, Paul says *“for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.”* (Verse 19)

- There is a tendency for modern readers to think of the Trinity as a “God-pie” with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit each occupying one-third of the “pie.”
- But here we see that all the divine substance dwells in Jesus. (Traditionally, this has been understood that each person of the Trinity is indwelt by or contains the other two.)

2. What are the implications of all this for our own personal discipleship and obedience?

1. – “I owe it.”

- We must absolutely obey him just because it is right.
- Because he is our maker, our “inventor,” he has ownership rights over us. If you design and construct something — you and you alone have “rights” over it.
- Isaiah puts it rather forcefully when he says, *“Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker!...Does the clay say to the potter, ‘Why are you doing that?’ ”* (Is 45:9)
- “Jesus the Creator” means we owe him our complete, unreserved allegiance.

2. – “I can trust him.”

- We must absolutely obey him because we can trust him.
- The Isaiah question — “How dare the clay talk back to the potter?” — would be an overwhelmingly threatening thought to us, but Paul adds that this Maker was willing to sacrificially love and save us (*“by making peace through his blood”* v.20.)
- This inventor does not abuse and exploit his creation — he is willing to die to preserve and sustain it.
- So while “Jesus the Creator” means we must absolutely obey him, “Jesus the Redeemer” means we can absolutely trust him.
- We need to put these two ideas — of the Lord’s absolute authority over us and his absolute loving commitment to us — together. C.S. Lewis does it well in this famous quote:

“You asked for a loving God: you have one... Not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, nor the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist’s love for his work... provident and venerable as a father’s love for a child... inexorable, exacting as love between the sexes... To ask that God’s love should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God: because He is what He is, His love must, in the nature of things, be impeded and repelled, by certain stains in our present character, and because He already loves us He must labor to make us lovable. We cannot even wish, in our better moments, that He could reconcile Himself to our present impurities.”

– (C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, Chapter 3)

3. – “I need it.”

- We must absolutely obey him because we need it.
- If we were made for him, and in him all things hold together” (v.16-17), then our lives will experience disintegration — they won’t hold together if we don’t live for his service.
- To the extent that we submit to his Lordship, our lives “come together” and we experience coherence and wholeness.
- Through the cross, God is reconciling — re-uniting — all things in him.

In summary, Paul says that the implication of all these claims is “*that in everything he might have the supremacy*” (v.18). That means at least that we must look at every area of our own lives and ask — “Does Jesus have supremacy here? Here?” In the application section of this study we provide some practical ways to evaluate this.

BIBLE STUDY #2

Luke 9:22-25, 51-62**1. What do we learn about discipleship from vv.22-25?**

A disciple of Jesus is someone who has found a whole new identity.

- Jesus uses the metaphor “taking up your cross” to convey what it means to follow him, to be his disciple.
- You only “took up your cross” on the way to your execution! Discipleship, then, is a kind of death.
- Why would Jesus use such a radical metaphor? It is because discipleship is such a radical change of allegiances that it essentially means to “die” to your old self and identity and to get a new one.
- Jesus contrasts building your life on him with building your life on gaining and putting your hopes on “the world.”
- He says that if you try to build your life on anything in the world more than on him, then you lose your true self, your “*very self*.”

How is discipleship a change in identity?

- At the heart of discipleship is a transfer of ultimate authority from your own wisdom and will to God’s wisdom and will.
- The difference between a disciple and a generally moral person is the word *if*. Persons who are generally moral and religious but who ultimately retain control over their own lives say “I’ll obey *if* —.”
Examples:
 - a) “If it doesn’t offend my modern sensibility”
 - b) “If it doesn’t really cost me my reputation”
 - c) “If it doesn’t really cost me the possibility of marriage”
 - d) “If it doesn’t really cost me serious money.”
- If there is any “if” to your obedience, the rest of the sentence shows what your identity is really built upon.
 - a) If you say, “I’ll obey God if he will get me married,” then your ultimate hope and significance rests in being married, not in knowing God.

Here is a more specific example of what we mean. The Bible and common sense says you should not wittingly marry a person who has no faith in Jesus.

- If Jesus is the love and center of your life, than any partner or spouse who doesn't share that faith will fundamentally misunderstand who you really are — what really, ultimately, "makes you tick."
- What if you have the opportunity to marry someone who, in most other ways, is a terrific "catch" but is not a believer in Jesus — but you marry him or her anyway? What does it mean? It means that:
 - a) despite all your compliance with Jesus' teaching, you never ceded the ultimate authority to him, and
 - b) there is something that you look to more fundamentally than to Jesus for your happiness.
- You do not yet have the freedom to say, "Though I really want to be married, I ultimately don't need to be married to be complete, to feel significant. Jesus is my savior and joy, not marriage."
 - a) Though you may believe in the gospel at one level, and you have sought Jesus' salvation from the record of your sins, the gospel has not "sunk all the way down." You are still looking to other things more fundamentally for your sense of significance and security in daily life.
 - b) Because there are other competing "saviors" in your life, there are other competing "lords" as well.
 - c) And the way to find these "savior-lords" is by listening for the "ifs" in your obedience! When you say, "I'll obey if" — you are at that moment pointing to alternate "savior-lords."

In short, if there are any conditions or "ifs" to your obedience at all — you are still on the "throne" of your life.

- You are willing to consider God's recommendations, but you are ultimately the one with the final decision-making authority. You have kept control of your life.
- And you haven't fundamentally shifted your identity to Christ. You are still essentially deriving your significance and joy from other things, and these things limit and condition your obedience.

Disciples, then, are those who have "died."

- They have died to their old volitional foundation: their ego-centric desire to be their own masters. They have given up the right of self-determination.
- But they have also died to their old psychological foundations. What they once found in career, family, recognition, reputation, success, status and relationships, they now find in Christ.

This new identity means they no longer condition their obedience. They are *disciples*.

2. What do we learn about discipleship from vv.57-62?

A disciple of Jesus is someone who now has a whole new priority.

- In every one of these little stories Jesus shows that a disciple makes Jesus, and their relationship to Jesus, the absolute priority of their lives.
- Jesus' response to these men is rather off-putting. He does not undertake a "sales job" in order to recruit people to be his disciples!
 - a) The first man is warned about the rigor and difficulty of being disciples. Jesus essentially says: "Go home and think about it! I don't want you to agree to follow me until you've counted the cost!"
 - b) In the second and third cases, the men say, "*first let me [do this]*" (v.59) and "*but first let me [do this]*" (v.61.) Jesus response is clear. "Nothing else can be first. I must be first in your life."
- It is remarkable that in an extremely patriarchal, family-oriented traditional society Jesus has the audacity to say that a relationship with him must come even before one's family. (Note: Everywhere in the Bible we are encouraged to respect and honor our parents. So there could not have been anything *per se* wrong with burying one's father or saying good-bye to one's family. Jesus must have discerned that underneath their reasonable requests were heart-attitudes that he needed to correct.)

There are two interesting phrases that Jesus uses to get across what it means to give him priority in the life.

First, he says, "*no one who puts hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God*" (v.62.)

- In those days you plowed one furrow at a time with a plow pulled by animals.
- There were also many rocks and rocky outcroppings that had to be plowed around.
 - a) If you looked up or away from the ground for even a second, you could strike a stone and break the plow.
 - b) Plowing, then, was an image of being totally focused and undistracted. All competing thoughts and sights had to be avoided.
 - c) (Note: The word translated "fit" is a word that meant "potent" and

was ordinarily used to describe salt that had not lost its salty-preservative powers. Jesus is not saying that total, undistracted commitment to him qualifies you for being in the kingdom, but that it is necessary for you to be a vehicle for the power of God's kingdom.

Second, Jesus says, *"let the dead bury their dead"* (v.60.)

- It is obvious that the second "dead" is spiritual deadness, not physical. (The physical dead cannot conduct a funeral!)
 - a) To be spiritually dead is to be as blind, deaf and insensitive to spiritual realities as a dead body is to physical realities.
- Jesus means that if you put off discipleship until later, you are not merely being a procrastinator. It means you don't really see what you are doing.
- It takes some degree of spiritual deadness to refuse to make Jesus absolute Lord of your life.
 - a) It means you don't really see how wise he is, how great he is, how sacrificially loving he is.
 - b) Your heart is spiritually cold and blind to some degree or you wouldn't be so lukewarm in your relationship to him.

3. What do we learn about discipleship from vv.51-56?

Earlier in Luke 9, the disciples saw Jesus on the mount of transfiguration talking to Elijah. They learned that Jesus was even greater than Elijah. Now when they come to a village of Samaria they see people rejecting Jesus. They are outraged and they want to call fire down on the people. Why?

- They remember that when soldiers were trying to capture the prophet Elijah that fire came down from heaven to destroy them (2 Kings 1).
- If those rejecting Elijah were subject to God's wrath — wouldn't those who rejected Jesus be even more deserving of God's fiery justice? But Jesus rebukes them. Why?
- Because his ministry is different than Elijah.
 - a) Elijah came to tell people how they must live to please God's justice.
 - b) But Jesus came to live the life we should have lived and die the death we should have died — all to satisfy the requirements of justice.
- In essence, the fire of God's wrath came down on him on the cross. (He refers to the fiery baptism that he was going to have to undergo in Luke 12:49-50.)

This means, finally, that a disciple of Jesus lives a life filled with mercy. Jesus' disciples demand a great deal from themselves, but are extremely merciful and gentle to others. Why?

- We follow the one who took God's wrath for us so we can be accepted by grace. That humbles us and makes us very gracious with others.
- If you believed that you were *saved* because of your level of commitment, you would be very hard on those who disobey.
 - a) You would feel: "I work extremely hard to be good, so you should too! And if you don't work as hard as I do, you deserve to be punished!"
- But the gospel-disciple cannot feel like that. We know that we were saved in spite of not living right. We are disciples out of deep gratitude for his grace.
 - a) This makes us sad when we see others disobey. We may even speak very directly to them — but it is all for their sake.
 - b) We cannot feel superior to them. The gospel cannot create terrorists who want to bring fire down on people.
 - c) It takes enormous self-righteousness to want to do so, and the gospel dissolves that.

READINGS

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

Whatever controls us is really our god... The one who seeks power is controlled by power. The one who seeks acceptance is controlled by the people he or she wants to please. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our life... Jesus’ ownership of our lives is not a control that manipulates us or takes away our dignity. He governs our lives... by being who he is without compromise and by insisting we become all that we are meant to be. And this can only occur through following him, obeying him, and maintaining a living, passionate kinship to him... God created us for himself. If we live with any center other than Jesus, we will be living incompletely... Is Jesus’ desire to be the Lord of our lives some little fetish of his? Why is it so important to him? Besides the fact that he deserves it because of who he is, he knows he is the only one in the universe who can control us without destroying us. No one will ever love you like Jesus. The last breath Jesus breathed on this planet was for you. Jesus will meet you wherever you are, and he will help you. He is not intimidated by past failures, broken promises, or wounds. He will make sense out of your brokenness. But he can only begin to be Lord of your life today-not next month but now.

– Rebecca Pippert²

Imagine that the distance from the earth to the sun — 92 million miles — was the thickness of one sheet of paper. Then the distance from the earth to the nearest star alone would be a stack of paper 70 feet high. The diameter of just our galaxy would be a stack of paper 310 miles high. And our galaxy is only a single speck — one of an infinite number of galaxies just in the part of the universe that we can see. If, as the Bible says, Jesus Christ holds all *that* together with just a word of his power (Heb 1:3) — is that the kind of person you ask into your life to be your *assistant*? Or your *consultant*? Of course not. If you are to relate to such a person, he will be either the absolute Lord of your life or nothing at all.

– Barbara Boyd³

Cheap grace is the enemy of the church. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth... an intellectual assent to that idea is held to be itself sufficient to secure remission of sins. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance... grace without discipleship, grace without a cross... Costly grace is the gospel [of the church]... It is costly because it costs a man his life, and grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his son... it is grace

because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God... When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die. That is why the rich young man was so loath to follow Jesus, for the cost of his following was the death of his will. In fact, every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts.

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer⁴

APPLICATION QUESTIONS**1. Which statements impressed you and why?****2. Consider the Pippert and Boyd quotes. What reasons do they give for making Christ Lord of our lives?**

Reason #1 – Something else already is.

Pippert says: “*we do not control ourselves.*”

- Everyone must live for something, and what ever that thing is, is your lord and master. You don’t control yourself.
- So when we consider the claims of Christ we should not fear giving up our independence. That is already gone!

Reason #2 – We desperately need for him to be in control.

Pippert says “*created*” to have Christ as our Lord and center.

- Any thing that is created is designed for a purpose.
 - a) A watch was made to be attached to your wrist and tell you the time.
 - b) If you use it to hammer a nail, the watch won’t be able to tell time, and the nail won’t go into the wood anyway. Why?
 - c) It is because you are using the watch contrary to its design. That will always lead to disintegration.
 - d) If you drink Mr. Clean instead of using it to clean floors (which it was designed to do), disintegration will occur.
- The Bible tells us that our hearts were designed to know, love and serve the Lord. Our lives were made to center on him.
 - a) If we center them on anything else — disintegration will result.
- Jesus’ desire for our obedience and allegiance cannot be motivated by his need for us. Our following him in no way enhances his glory or

happiness — he is already infinitely, perfectly happy and filled with joy. (See John 17.)

- So why does he seek to secure our love and loyalty? It is because we need so desperately to have him as Lord. Without him as our center we will quite literally fall apart — for all eternity.

Reason #3 – He deserves it — because of the greatness of who he is.

Barbara Boyd drives that home powerfully as she reminds us of the vastness of the universe and (therefore) the immeasurable greatness of the One who created and sustains it all.

- It is “unfitting” in the extreme for us to treat the Lord as if he has to continually prove himself safe and worthy of our compliance.

Reason #4 – He deserves it — because of the greatness of his sacrifice for us.

He does not *need* us to worship him, but he treasures us so greatly that he was willing to give up his own life for us.

- Every other possible “lord” or life-center will demand that you give your whole life to procure it.
 - a) If you live ultimately for approval, or power, or status, or success, or romance — you *will* be so controlled by it that you will essentially give your life for it.
- But Jesus is the only Lord and life-center that instead was willing to give his life for you. As Pippert says, Jesus breathed his last breath for you.

Reason #5 – He exercises his control in a way that honors our dignity as human beings.

Pippert insists that he does not “*manipulate*” or coerce us but seeks to have us make deliberate and willing decisions to follow him. The very concept of a call to discipleship implies a willing response, not forced conscription.

3. Consider the Bonhoeffer quote. Read the following background.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, a group of younger ministers, including Dietrich Bonhoeffer, opposed him, but the Nazi bishop of the German church ordered ministers to “preach the pure gospel” and forbade them from speaking out about Hitler’s policies because that was preaching “politics.” Most of the German ministers and church members complied. The resisting ministers

spoke out and persecution followed. Bonhoeffer was eventually arrested and executed by the Nazis.

How does “cheap grace” help us explain why so many in the German church were willing to stand back and not oppose Hitler?

The Bonhoeffer quote is taken from *The Cost of Discipleship*, written in 1937. Bonhoeffer wrote it for his students in an underground seminary, training ministers who would not take oaths of allegiance to Hitler or support his racial beliefs. Bonhoeffer wrote that the Biblical gospel had become twisted into what he called “cheap grace.”

- The idea that we are saved by grace, not works, had led to the widespread inference that costly obedience was only optional.
 - a) The reasoning went like this: “We are saved by grace, not by our obedience. So while there may be some very advanced Christians who want to be very serious — giving their money away, taking unpopular stands, involvement with the poor, witnessing for their faith in public — that is not for everyone. We don’t have to do all that to be saved. We just have to believe and ask for forgiveness.”
- The German church had been founded by Martin Luther himself. But over the years the concept of salvation by grace had degenerated into this “religion of cheap grace” that had created a deep spiritual coldness and malaise in the German church.
 - a) People believed they were Christians because they were born and raised in the church and they simply embraced the concept of salvation-by-grace.
 - b) They gave lip-service to the idea of free justification/salvation but it was not changing their lives.
- To read Bonhoeffer’s first chapter, “Cheap Grace,” against the background of the rise of Hitler is a very chilling experience. Bonhoeffer is explaining how the church had become so sleepy and lifeless that at first, it could not recognize Hitler for what he was, and later it was too cowardly to speak up against his injustices against the Jews and others.

What is the solution? Notice that Bonhoeffer does *not* in any way jettison the Biblical gospel that we are saved by sheer grace.

- He does not say: “Stop thinking God accepts you freely by grace! He only accepts those who are completely committed and obedient!” The antidote for cheap grace — *costly* grace — is still grace.

- His argument is simple (and very reminiscent of the work of Jonathan Edwards).
 - a) He argues that those who have had their hearts gripped by how much our salvation cost God, *will* be willing to do God's will, even if it means the loss of life.
 - b) He denies that saving faith is merely "*intellectual assent*" to the idea of free forgiveness. Rather, the faith that truly saves you is joyful repentance for our self-centered lives in the light of the costly salvation of the cross.
 - c) All who truly see that Christ gave up his *life* for them will be willing to give up their *wills* for him. It is a natural response.

So how do we explain the people who say, "Oh, I believe in the gospel that we are saved by grace not works," and who then lead unchanged lives, refusing the joyful, costly obedience of discipleship?

- Bonhoeffer's theory is that they look only at the free-ness of grace to us, not at the costliness of grace to God.
 - a) If you don't truly understand the first principle (the free-ness), you fall into Phariseeism and legalism.
 - b) But if you don't truly understand the second principle (the costliness), you fall into apathy and joylessness, and your life does not change.

Note: One of the reasons that many in the German church did not see the costliness of God's grace may have been the kind of universalism that teaches that God simply loves and accepts everyone. In that view, the death of Christ is unnecessary, and so Christ's sacrifice never becomes a moving, life-changing fact to you.

In what way is "every command of Jesus a call to die?"

The context explains that Bonhoeffer means two things by this vivid metaphor.

1. Every command is a demand that we "die" to self-determination.
 - a) We don't obey Jesus because it makes sense or looks wise (though often it does) but simply because he says so and he is Lord.
 - b) So to be a disciple is to "die" living according to our own will and begin living according to God's will.

2. Every command is a demand that we “die” to what Bonhoeffer called our “affections and lusts.”
 - a) He perceives that under every desire to disobey God is some inordinate affection — some good desire that has become too great and therefore a “lust.”
 - b) For example, if we are tempted to lie because we are afraid to look bad we must die to our excessive need (“lust”) for human approval.
 - c) If we are tempted to lie to do a deal that makes us money we must die to our excessive need (“lust”) for wealth and/or status.

In these ways, submitting to the Lordship of Christ is always a metaphorical death.

- We die to our old will and its cost-benefit way of making decisions. We die to our inordinate affections — the “ultimate concerns” of our life. In short — we die to our whole old “self” and its identity.
 - a) The decision to be a disciple, to make Jesus Lord, leaves behind your old personality, built on other ultimate allegiances and hopes besides God.
 - b) The practice of discipleship — the daily acts of costly obedience — gradually constructs a new self.
 - c) That is why Bonhoeffer uses such radical terminology as “death” to talk of discipleship. Christ’s Lordship remakes us into a whole new person.
 - d) *“Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and put on the new self which is being renewed in the knowledge of its Creator.” (Col 3:9-10)*

The irony of Bonhoeffer’s statement is that, of course, his discipleship *literally* cost him his life. In order to be a witness for the truth against Hitler, he lost his life. His example shows us that *all* discipleship is a “call to die” because it is unconditional. When we give our lives to Jesus, we all die “in principle” because we agree to obey him no matter what the cost. Only a small percentage of disciples have to give their lives literally, but that is not because their discipleship is qualitatively different.

4. Think of the main areas of your life:

Career
Money and possessions
Self-image
Private thought life
Leisure time
Friendships
Marriage/or relationship
Family relationships
Physical health/maintenance
Church Involvement
Other (add here):

Look at each area and ask the following questions:

- *"Am I willing to obey whatever God says about this life-area no matter how I feel about it?"*
- *"Am I willing to thank God for whatever happens in this area whether I understand it or not?"*
- *"Is there something in this area I am relying on more than God for my hope and meaning in life?"*
- *"Are there problems or limitations in my life I think are too big for God to remove?"*

On the basis of your evaluation — choose one or two areas of your life that you most need to acknowledge Christ's lordship more deeply.

What could you do to give him greater Lordship? Consider including:
a) repentance and prayer, b) attitude/thought change, c) behavior change,
d) accountability to someone for the changes.

¹Consider this verse of a John Newton hymn:

*Thou art coming to a king
Large petitions with thee bring
For his grace and power are such
None can ever ask too much.*

²Rebecca Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker* (2nd ed. IVP, 1999), p. 52-54.

³Barbara Boyd was Inter-Varsity staff for many years. This quote is from notes taken from her "Lordship" talk that was part of the *Bible and Life* course of training she developed.

⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (MacMillan, 1959), p. 45-48.

Gospel Christianity

How do I meet Jesus myself?

Study 2 | Course 2

There is much talk about having personal fellowship with Christ through the Bible and prayer. How does that happen?

KEY CONCEPT — MEDITATION

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

Traditionally, devotional time consisted of Bible reading and prayer. But for many, these disciplines alone do not get them to the experience of God’s presence that the Psalms call us to (see Psalm 27, 63, 84).

- *Meditation* is a middle practice which bridges between reading and prayer.
- It is at once *prayerful* reading and *informed* prayer.
- It is “the descent of the mind with truth into the heart, until our whole being yearns for God.” (Peter Toon)

The Biblical term meditation often appears in the Psalms.

- One Hebrew word for it means literally to “talk to oneself.” This refers to how meditation entails both focused attention and personal application.
- Another word for it means to “muse” or “ponder.”
 - a) In Psalm 77:12 and 143:5, we are called to meditate on the works of God in nature and history.
 - b) In Psalm 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 148 we are exhorted to meditate on God’s Word, his verbal revelation.
 - c) In Psalm 63:6, the Psalmist simply meditates “*on thee*” — God himself.
- Many of the Psalms are themselves examples of extended meditations.

Incorporating Meditation into Your Time with Jesus**Lectio – Reading**Understand the passage

- Read slowly through the whole passage.
 - a) When a thought, phrase, or word captures your attention, stop and dwell on it. Underline or note each.
- Read a second time and ask: “What truth is the author getting across here?” Ask what it says about:
 - a) who God is
 - b) who we are
 - c) who Christ is and what he did
- Read a third time. List each:
 - a) example to follow
 - b) command to obey
 - c) promise to claim

Meditatio – ReflectingMeditate and listen for the voice of God

Choose the two or three most important insights or verses from your reading and ask:

- Adoration – How does this lead me to adore and praise God?
 - a) What attribute of God does it show?
- Confession – How does this lead me to confess or repent to God?
 - a) What wrong thoughts, feelings, and behavior happen in me when this is forgotten?
- Thanksgiving – How can I thank Jesus for being the ultimate answer to this sin?
 - a) How is this sin being caused by an inordinate hope for something to give me what only Jesus can really give me?
- Supplication – What does this lead me to petition God for?
 - a) What do I need from God if I am to realize this truth in my life?
- Why might God be showing me this today?

Oratio – Praying

On the basis of your meditation, speak very directly to God about what you are learning and hearing

- Pray every one of the meditations — Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication — back to him.

Contemplatio – Sensing

Often, though not always, during reading, reflecting or praying, you begin to get a “sense on the heart” of the reality of God and his presence.

- You may receive strong assurance of belonging to him. Stop and enjoy him!

1. Which statements impressed you and why?**2. On the back of this sheet, study the following four sets of Scripture passages using the directions provided for each set only.**Set #1 – John 1:29-38

1. Note words or ideas that are repeated.
2. Note metaphors, comparisons and contrasts.
3. Notice cause-effect relations between and within clauses, sentences and paragraphs.
4. What truth does each noted item convey?

Set #2 – John 1:29-34

1. List what it tells about God or Christ.
2. List what it tells us about us or me.
3. List: examples to follow or avoid, commands to obey, promises to claim.

Set #3 – John 1:35-42

1. The key verse that impressed me.
2. Put verse in your own words.
3. What is the thought just before the verse and just after?
4. Give 2-3 reasons it helped you.

Set #4 – John 1:43-61

1. What did you like?
2. What did you not like?
3. What did you not get?
4. How should you apply what you learned?

Which set of questions did you prefer? Why?

Each of these sets of questions will help you distill teachings or truths that you can then meditate on and pray over. But every set goes about the study in a somewhat different way.

- Set #1 and #2 stress a more objective approach. They are more analytical, breaking the text down into its constituent parts.
 - a) Set #1 is more of an inductive-literary approach, noticing the laws of literary composition and considering what the author was trying to say with each one.
 - b) Set #2 is more of a topical approach, looking for certain themes in every passage.
- On the other hand, set #3 and #4 stress a more subjective approach. That is, they look more for reader response, intuitions, connections and applications.
 - a) Set #3 works on looking at a verse's context.
 - b) Set #4 is the most subjective, doing an inventory of your personal reactions to the text as you read it.

Ultimately, no one of these sets of questions can stand alone. We must read the Bible in all of these ways. The objective without the subjective is sterile. But the subjective must not ignore the objective or you will be simply reading into the Scripture whatever you want to find there.

If you had plenty of time, it would be helpful to use all four sets because they move from the most analytical to the more synthetic and then on to the most practical and personal. But it is not possible to answer all the questions in one daily sitting. Choose the set that seems to fit your stage of growth and temperament and use it to begin regular study. But you should discipline yourself to use all of them at times, so you do not become too one-sided.

BIBLE STUDY

Psalm 1:1-6

1. What can you learn about meditation from v.2?

1. We see that the object or basis for meditation is *"the law of the Lord,"* the Word of God.

- There are many other things that people may and should meditate upon. But in Psalm 1, the primary concern is meditation on the Scripture.

2. We see that closely associated with meditation is *"delighting"* in the law of the Lord.

- If we are honest, we will observe that we do not usually think of the word delight and law as appearing in the same sentence. But this shows us at least two things about meditation.
 - a) Meditation involves not just the head but the heart. *"Delight in the law"* is not simply intellectual study, but an internal relishing and cherishing of the truth.
 - b) Meditation involves not just thinking but acting. *"Delight in the law"* is not simply a matter of noticing truths and principles. You only *"delight in the law"* if you just love having God tell you what to do!
- Meditation, then, means very hard thinking: How does this apply to me? How does this change me? How does this affect me? How does it make me different?

3. We see in the term, *"day and night,"* the consistency and discipline of meditation.

- This is not just a spontaneous epiphany that happens to us. It is something we decide to do. It must happen regularly, relentlessly. It is something you do whether you feel like it or not.

Note: Eugene Peterson in his study of Psalm 1 brings out the fact that the original meaning of the Hebrew word used here for *"law"* — torah — comes from a verb that means to throw something to hit its mark, as in a javelin. That is highly significant.

- The Scriptures are not simply words to study for an exam, unlocking information to use as we will. They are energies hurled at our heart. God's words are designed to penetrate, wound, remove, heal, and infuse!
- In the New Testament we read that the Word of God is alive and active, a sword (Hebrews 4:12). Now this is quite important practically.
 - a) This realization is necessary for meditation — that his word is TORAH — living truth aimed to penetrate.
 - b) Sometimes that very thought almost spontaneously moves us into meditation and prayer.

2. What can you learn about meditation by the contrast in v.1? (Hint: what is the significance of the progression from walk to stand to sit?)

1. We learn that meditation leads to blessedness!

- Because there are so many contrasting clauses in this first sentence, which stretches out all the way across the first two verses, we often miss the point of it.
 - a) If we look only at the beginning and the end, it becomes clear. "Blessed is the man who... meditates day and night."
 - b) Once we remove all the contrasts and the qualifiers, we see the point. If you want 'blessedness' you must meditate.
- The word "blessed" in Hebrew means far more than just "happy" — it refers to complete peace and fullness of life, total well-being. That is an enormous promise.

2. We learn what we could see implicitly before, that meditation is not just an intellectual exercise, but the basis for your whole way of life.

- The life of a godly man in v.2, based on meditation on God's law, is contrasted with the life of the ungodly man in v.1.
- Notice, however, that even ungodly life is also based on some form of meditation. It begins with "walking in the counsel of the ungodly."
 - a) "Counsel" means a form of wisdom and thinking. We will either be meditating and walking in God's wisdom or meditating and walking in worldly human wisdom.

- What shapes your thinking (counsel) shapes your behavior (way) and attitude/heart (scoffers). Thus we must always consider what we are listening to/meditating on — in our heart of hearts.
- We will naturally meditate on “the counsel of the wicked” or we will deliberately make ourselves meditate on the law of the Lord. There are no other alternatives.

In summary: Verses 1-2 – Our blessedness or lack thereof, depends on what we are listening to or meditating on in our heart of hearts.

3. How is vv.3-5 an example of meditation itself? a) Make a list of what the extended contrasting metaphors tell us of godliness and ungodliness? b) How is a tree like a meditating person? c) What else does this example tell you about meditation in general?

One of the most fascinating things about the psalm is how it actually does a meditation on meditation.

a) List of what the extended contrasting metaphors tell us about godliness and ungodliness.

- Verses 3 through 5 are an extended consideration of how the ungodly life contrasts with the godly life as a tree contrasts with “chaff.”
 - a) Some of us urbanites need to recall that chaff is the seed covering, husk and other debris that breaks off and separates from the more valuable grain during threshing. In ancient times, the grain and the chaff were thrown into the air, allowing the wind to blow away the useless chaff, which is lighter, leaving the heavier grain to fall back to earth and be gathered for planting or food.
- What does this metaphor-contrast tell us?
 - a) A tree is useful, but chaff is useless. So ungodliness is of no profit.
 - b) A tree is stable and lasting, while chaff is blown about and blown away. So ungodliness leads to instability and all its gains are temporary.
 - c) A tree bears fruit, thus it gives life to people and grows more trees. Chaff cannot bring forth any new life. Nor can it even feed anyone — it has no nutritional value.
- So godliness matures, nurtures, bears life, while ungodliness leaves you empty and hungry and unsatisfied and starving.

b) How is a tree like a meditating person?

- Verse 3 begins, "He is like." Who is "he?" He is the man who meditates on the law day and night (v.2). Therefore, the tree in v.3 is an extended meditation on the one who meditates. What do we learn? Ironically, as soon as we begin to answer the question — we are beginning to meditate!

- a) Meditation takes time, like a tree putting roots down. Trees don't grow overnight!
- b) Meditation leads to depth and stability. The deeper one's "roots" in meditation, the less likely that a wind storm will blow you over.
- c) Meditation is looking at the Word of God like a thirsty tree looks at water. This shows us that meditation goes beyond the intellectual.
 - i. It is spiritually tasting the Scripture — delighting in it, sensing the sweetness, thanking God and praising God for what you see.
 - ii. It is also spiritually digesting the Scripture — applying it, thinking out how it affects you, describes you, guides you in the most practical way.
 - iii. It is also drawing strength from the Scripture. Letting it give you hope, using it to remember how loved you are.
- d) Meditation will always lead to character growth — to fruit. It is not just a way to feel close to God. Real meditation changes the heart permanently, into a heart of love, joy, peace, patience, humility, self-control (Gal.5:22ff.).
 - i. *"The tree is no mere channel, piping water unchanged from one place to another, but a living organism which absorbs it, to produce in due course something new and delightful, proper to its kind and to its time."* (Kidner, p.48)
- e) Meditation leads to stability, but not immunity from suffering and dryness. This tree only bears fruit "in season" though "its leaf does not wither."
 - i. This means that on the one hand, meditation will lead to stability. A meditating person is an evergreen! Yet we must not always expect meditation to lead to uniform experiences of joy and love.
 - ii. There are seasons for great delight (springtime blossoms) and for wisdom and maturity (summer fruit). It means there are also spiritual winter-times, when we don't feel God close, though our roots may still be firmly in his truth.

iii. *"The promised immunity of the leaf from withering is not independence from the rhythm of the seasons, but freedom from the crippling damage of drought."* (Kidner, p.48).

- Only in light of the balance of this metaphor can we understand the last line of verse 3. When the Psalmist says, "Whatever he does prospers," he does not mean that "he reaches every goal" or "he is always successful." Rather, it means something like this: "A meditating person will always grow! Sometimes it is growth internally through suffering (as in winter) and sometimes it is externally through success (as in springtime). But you will always grow and prosper!"

c) What else does this example tell you about meditation in general?

- We learn here that meditation has a lot to do with the imagination. You are trying to get a grasp on how truth really affects you. There is no better way than to create an image in your mind, for an image not only helps you make an abstract truth more concrete to your understanding, but also more gripping to your heart.
- Someone once defined meditation as "the mind descending into the heart."

4. What do vv.5-6 promise? How can this be the result of a life of meditation?

Verse 5 gives us the chilling interpretation of the chaff metaphor; as the chaff is blown away by the wind into oblivion, so the wicked will be blown away by God on judgment day.

- By way of inference, we are being told that the one who meditates on the law of the Lord can be confident of "standing" on that day.
- Verse 6 tells us that the Lord "watches over" us — a word that means he comes close and cares for us.
- In sum, we will not have to be afraid of what will happen when we stand before God. We can have assurance that we will stand in the judgment.

How can a life of meditation lead to this kind of confidence and assurance?

- We who read Psalm 1 in the light of Jesus Christ have a ready answer. Without Jesus and the cross, it is frightening to meditate on "the Lord watches over the way of the righteous" (v.6).

- Who in the world is righteous enough for God? Without the assurance of Jesus' death for me and his righteousness imputed to me (2 Cor.5:21), I will lose confidence, the more I meditate on Psalm 1 and on the righteousness of God on judgment day.
- But if I meditate on what Jesus has done for me, then I truly will find my assurance growing.

"It is an item of faith that we are children of God; there is plenty of experience in us against it. The faith that surmounts this evidence and that is able to warm itself at the fire of God's love, instead of having to steal love and self-acceptance from other sources, is actually the root of holiness... We are not saved by the love we exercise, but by the love we trust." (R. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, p.213).

When Lovelace speaks of "warming oneself at the fire of God's love," he is describing what it means to meditate on the righteousness we have in Christ by his sacrificial death. If we don't meditate on that until our hearts are hot with assurance, we will steal love and self-acceptance from worldly achievements, beauty, and status.

That is why there are only two paths! We either walk in the counsel of the world — getting our warmth from there and walking in accordance with it (v.1) or we delight in what the Word tells us about our salvation. If we do v.3, we will have the confidence of vv.5-6.

In summary: Meditation on the Scriptures is pondering, relishing, imagining, applying and rehearsing God's truth until it becomes real to the heart and permanently affects your attitude and behavior. It leads to blessedness (v.1), stability and the ability to grow in all circumstances (v.3-4), freedom and independence from the world's ways (v.1-2), confidence and assurance in our relationship to God (v.5-6).

5. Psalm 1 is not itself a prayer, unlike most of the rest of the Psalms. It is a meditation on meditation. Why do you think it was chosen to stand here as an introduction to all the rest of the prayers of the Psalms?

The Psalms were collected and arranged at a certain point in Israel's history, and so the first Psalm is not an accident.

- This Psalm stands as the gate or doorway into the Psalter, the prayer-book of the Bible, and its subject is the doorway into real prayer.
- It is not itself a prayer. It is itself — what it talks about — a meditation.
- Now, if the first Psalm is about meditation, then that is a strong indication that meditation is the necessary preface or preparation to deeper prayer.

Eugene Peterson writes:

"Psalm 1 is not prayer, exactly, but a preface to prayer. We do not begin to pray by praying, but by coming to attention. Psalm 1 is a biblical preparation for a life of prayer. Most of us can't step immediately from the noisy high stimulus world into the quiet concentration of prayer. We need a way of transition. [Meditation] is a kind of entryway."

This is an important discovery. Most of us have a devotional life in which we jump from fairly academic study of the Bible into prayer. But there is a middle ground between prayer and Bible study, a bridge between the two.

After studying a passage, we need to learn to meditate our hearts hot, and yet quiet, on the truth of God. That is a doorway into deeper prayer.

READINGS

Read and mark "?" - question to raise "!" - insight or helpful to you

"Formerly, when I arose, I began to pray as soon as possible...But what was the result? I often... suffered much from wandering thoughts... I scarcely ever suffer in this way now... I began to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning... searching, as it were, every verse to get a blessing out of it... not for preaching [to others], but for obtaining food for my soul. After a few moments my soul is *led* to confession, thanksgiving, or intercession."

– George Mueller¹

"Meditation... is distinguished from the study of the word, wherein our principle aim is to learn the truth, or to declare it unto others; and so also from prayer, whereof God himself is the immediate object. But meditation is the affecting of our own hearts and minds with love, delight, and humiliation."

– Richard Baxter

"I...used to spend abundance of time, in walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy and prayer... I had then, and at other times, the greatest delight in the Holy Scriptures, of any book whatsoever. Oftentimes in reading it, every word seemed to touch my heart. I felt a harmony between something in my heart, and those sweet powerful words. I seemed often to see so much light, exhibited by every sentence, and such a refreshing ravishing food communicated, that I could not get along in reading. Used oftentimes to dwell long on one sentence, to see the wonders contained in it; and yet almost every sentence seemed to be full of wonders... I... found, from time to time, an inward sweetness, that used, as it were, to carry me away in my contemplations, in... a calm, sweet abstraction of soul from all the concerns of this world, and... fixed ideas and imaginations, of being alone... sweetly conversing with Christ, and wrapped and swallowed up in God. The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden as it were, kindle up a sweet burning in my heart; an ardor of my soul that I know not how to express..."

– Jonathan Edwards²

"First comes the actual exercise of the mind, fixing thoughts and meditations upon spiritual truths... Next comes the inclination of all the affections toward these things, whereby they cleave to the spiritual truths and make an engagement unto them... Finally comes a relish and a savor in which lies the sweetness and the satisfaction of the spiritual life. We taste then by experience that God is gracious, and that the love of Christ is better than wine... If we settle for mere speculations and mental notions about Christ as doctrine, we shall find no transforming power or efficacy communicated unto us thereby. But when, under the conduct of spiritual light, our affections do cleave unto him with full purpose of heart, our minds fill up with thoughts and delight in him — then virtue [change in character] will proceed from him to purify us, increase our holiness, and sometimes fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory... Where light leaves the affections behind, it ends in formality and or atheism; where affections outrun light they sink into the bog of superstition."

– John Owen³

"In the year of grace 1654 Monday 23 November... from about half-past ten in the evening till about half an hour after midnight. FIRE. God of Abraham. God of Isaac. God of Jacob. Not of the philosophers and the learned. Certainty. Joy. Certainty. Emotion. Sight. Joy. Forgetfulness of the world and of all outside of God. Joy! Joy! Joy! Tears of joy. My God, will you leave me? Let me not ever be separated from you."

– Blaise Pascal

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?**2. Consider the Mueller quote. What was his problem and how does meditation solve it? What have you done about wandering thoughts in prayer?**

George Mueller's route to the discovery of meditation came through his problem with wandering thoughts — an inability to concentrate when he was praying. He found that his mind strayed away from praying to God to thoughts about all the things he had to do that day, and so on. The ultimate reason, of course, was that his imagination and heart was more engaged in his practical business than in God. He lacked a sense of the reality and presence of God as he prayed.

Then Mueller discovered the method of meditation, which he describes very well as "obtaining *food* for the soul." Notice that he uses sensory language to describe the experience of God that comes from meditation. In the same way, we may talk about really "hearing the voice of God" in the Scriptures. This means something like: "I was studying the Bible, and suddenly Jesus really spoke to me through this one verse." Does that mean we heard a literal, audible voice in our ears? No — no more than Mueller means he got a literal sweet taste in his mouth.

But there is a *heart* sense of God that is different from a mere intellectual assent or belief. We desperately need that. Jonathan Edwards gave the classic description of it:

"There is a twofold knowledge of good of which God has made the mind of man capable. The first, that which is merely notional... and the other is that which consists in the sense of the heart, as when the heart is sensible of pleasure and delights in the presence of the idea of it. In the former is exercised merely... the understanding, in distinction from the... disposition of the soul. Thus there is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet and having a sense of its sweetness. A man

may have the former that knows not how honey tastes; but a man cannot have the latter unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind.” (J. Edwards, “A Divine and Supernatural Light”)

Edwards says that you can have cognitive, intellectual knowledge that God is love without *experiential* knowledge of his love. (Notice, he says you can have the intellectual without the experiential, but you can’t have the experiential unless you first have doctrinal/intellectual knowledge.)

So George Mueller learned the difference between studying a Biblical text “for preaching to others” — a more academic kind of study — and studying a Biblical text in such a way that you feed on it in your heart and hear what Jesus is saying to you in it. This kind of study brought him something of a sense on the heart of God’s presence, which led him naturally into prayer.

3. Consider the Edwards quote. What two extremes does Edwards avoid?

On the one hand, Edwards (we know from history as well as from this quote) was a very intellectual man who was willing to study the Bible and theology in the most detailed and extensive way. He did not reject close, scholarly analysis or despise doctrine. He was willing to spend long periods of time doing close exegesis of a single sentence of the Bible. He studied the text in Greek and Hebrew.

On the other hand, Edwards was deeply concerned to experience God himself. He was not content with abstract knowledge. He spent great amounts of time in private solitude, working on meditation and prayer until he began to experience “*inward sweetness*,” a sense of actually “*conversing with Christ*.” Notice that he did not seek these mystical experiences without rooting them strongly in the Scriptures, in meditation on God’s truth.

This balance of extremely deep intellectual study of the Bible along with almost mystical, rapturous experience of God is very rare today. Those who devote themselves strongly to study of the Bible and theology are very wary of the experiential, and those who devote themselves to experiencing God’s glory and power are very skeptical of too much emphasis on doctrine and head-knowledge. Edwards shows us that the two things not only are compatible but desperately need one another. He shows us the way forward.

4. Consider the quote from Pascal. After he died, this description was found sewn into the lining of his coat! It was the description of a “mountain-top” spiritual experience. What should our attitude be toward such experiences? Should we seek them?

Again, a balance must be struck. Everyone who has recorded such experiences testifies that during the experience, they have no desire for anything but the glory of God. For example, this following description is from Jonathan Edwards’s “Personal Narrative.” As we can see, the essence of this kind of experience is not one’s own happiness and experience. It is to want to see God glorified.

Once, as I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly had been to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and his wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared was so calm and sweet — it appeared also great above the heavens. The person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception... and I continued in this state near as I can judge an hour; which kept me the greater part of the time in a flood of tears and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated: to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone, to love him with a holy and pure love; to trust in him; to live upon him; to serve and follow him; and to be perfectly made pure with a divine and heavenly purity. I have, several other times, had views very much of the same nature, and which have had the same affects.

In the end, then, we should neither seek experiences for their own sake *nor* be afraid of them. We should be hungry for God himself, and we should learn to read, meditate and pray until we routinely (though not every day) get a sense of his presence and a joyful assurance of our salvation in him. Then we can let these unusual experiences come (or not come, or seldom come) at God’s discretion. If we fear these kinds of experiences, *or* seek them directly for ourselves, we won’t know what Pascal or Edwards knew at all.

¹George Muller (1805-1898), a Christian leader chiefly known for the orphanage he founded, and for his spirituality. *Soul Food* (London, 1897)

²Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) “Personal Narrative” in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* (Yale Press)

³John Owen, [The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded](#)

Gospel Christianity

How do I meet Jesus with others?

Study 3 | Course 2

You are not called only to have an individual relationship with the Lord, but to join a worshipping community of believers — to engage in corporate worship of God

KEY CONCEPT — WORSHIP

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

What is worship?

Our word *worship* is from the Old English *weorth-scipe* — literally “worth-shape.”

- Worship is:
 - a) seeing and being affected by what God is worth
 - b) in response, giving him all that we are because of his worth (Gen 28:10-22).
- Worship responds with all that we are to all that God is. It is offering our whole selves — mind, emotions, and will — in obedient service, motivated by the beauty of who God is in himself (Rev 4:9-11).

When is worship?

Christ has completely fulfilled the Old Testament worship ritual. He *is* the altar, the sacrifice, the High Priest. He has, once for all, opened the way into the Holy Place — the presence of God (Heb 10:19-21.) What does this mean for us?

- Christians are called to see *all* of life as worship.
 - a) The Old Testament language about the temple, priesthood and sacrifice is now applied to believers’ entire lives.
 - b) Our deeds of service to others (Heb 13:16) and God (Rom 12:1) are priestly sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5; Rev. 1:6).
 - c) We must conduct every part of daily life consciously for him, asking: “Since God is the most important — glorious — thing in my life, how should I be acting and living in this area of my life?”
- Christians are also called to gather weekly in corporate worship.
 - a) In Hebrews 10, we see that because Jesus fulfilled the temple worship ritual, we can and must “draw near” to God’s presence (vv.19-23) as a gathered body of believers (vv.24-25; Heb 12:18-29).

- b) If we forget the first aspect of worship, we may become “super-spiritual” and seek mainly emotional experiences rather than changed lives and service in the world.
- c) If we forget the second aspect of worship, we may become formal and lose the vital inner heart dynamic for our service in the world.

How do we worship?

- In Word and Spirit. Worship must be “in Spirit and in Truth” (John 4:23).
 - a) The purpose of worship is not simply to make the truth about God clear, but to make it real.
 - b) By the Spirit’s influence, truths that we have known intellectually may become fiery, powerful and affecting.
 - c) They thrill, comfort and empower (or even) disturb you in a way they did not before (cf. Eph 1:18-22; 3:14-21).
- In Word and Sacrament. Worship not just a time of teaching and inspiration.
 - a) It is a re-enactment of our union with Christ through the gospel.
 - b) God’s unmerited grace comes to us as a word to believe not as a deed to be performed. Therefore every worship service consists of hearing God’s word of grace followed by our response to it.
 - c) God’s word is read and we respond with confession of sin. God’s word is preached and we respond with song, or with an offering of our lives and substance.
 - d) But especially in the sacraments — in baptism and the Lord’s Supper — we see the gospel re-enacted. The bread and wine are tokens of Jesus’ self-offering on the cross, and we respond by giving ourselves to him as we partake of them.
 - e) In every case, the worship service is a covenant renewal ceremony, in which we renew and deepen our remembrance of what Jesus has done for us and of what we have promised him.
- Already but not yet. Worship is a foretaste of the coming future cosmic Sabbath of perfect peace, justice, and joy (Heb 4:1-16).
 - a) Weekly we rejoice in the coming kingdom of God and thereby are molded into a people whose daily life practice is shaped by the gospel of grace, peace, and hope rather than by our surrounding culture.

1. Which statements impressed you and why?**2. What are some more of the implications of the fact that Jesus fulfilled all the detailed worship regulations of the Old Testament?**

One of the main themes of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus has fulfilled every detail of the Mosaic worship regulations and ritual.

- He is the ultimate high priest (Heb 4:14) who brings the ultimate sacrifice for sin (Heb 7:27) and brings us into the ultimate Holy Place — the presence of God (Heb 10:19-22).
- He makes us acceptable to God in a way that the clean laws — various rules about food and ceremonial washings and behavior — could not (Heb 9:9-14).
- The spiritual rest we get when we believe in Jesus through the gospel, the ultimate Sabbath day (Heb 4:1-13).
- Jesus is the ultimate Moses — for he doesn't simply bring us in to God's house (the tabernacle) but rather he *is* God's house and makes *us* God's house when we believe in him (Heb 3:1-6), that is, through him the very Spirit and presence of God permanently indwells us, as it did in the tabernacle and temple of old.

What does all this mean to us today? Quite a lot!

1 – All of life is worship

We no longer go one day a week to the house of God to see the priests offering sacrifices to get us near to God. Rather we *are* the dwelling place of God (1 Peter 2:5; Eph 2:19-22), we *are* all priests and everything we do for our neighbor or for God is a "holy sacrifice" (Heb 13:15-16). The implications are quite important.

- We cannot fall into the dualism of separating our spiritual lives from our so-called secular lives.
 - a) Every part of our life — vocational, civic, family, recreational, and material — is now to be a “living sacrifice” to God (Rom 12:1ff).
 - b) We cannot conduct our business in the world with the same values and attitudes as everyone else, and then confine our spiritual life to the weekend and evenings.
- The “glory of God” means, at least, his ultimate importance. We are now called to worship — to respond to the glory of God — in absolutely every area of our lives. We must ask questions like, If God is the most important thing then:
 - a) How should I be conducting my business?
 - b) How should I be spending my money?
 - c) How should I live in my neighborhood and municipality?

2 – We now have a great deal of freedom in how we worship

In 1 Cor 14:26ff Paul speaks of how when early Christians gathered ‘*everyone has a hymn, a word of instruction...*’ This certainly describes a rather ‘free form’ worship service!

- Since Jesus fulfilled the detailed regulations of the Old Testament worship, there is now no book like Leviticus in the New Testament — a book giving an extremely detailed set of regulation for every facet of corporate worship. The Bible does not tell us, who live in the “Jesus Era,” whether:
 - a) Our music must be high and lofty or popular and accessible
 - b) We should pray through written forms or spontaneously
 - c) The people should shout and raise hands or be quiet and solemn through the sermon, and so on.
- Over the centuries this freedom has been very important to the spread of Christianity.
 - a) The church can worship with high liturgy and Bach or with a free-form informal service and bongo drums.
 - b) It can go into any culture with its worship.
- The problem is that Christians can get extremely attached to their particular form of worship and moralistically look down on the worship forms of others.

- In general, we should be tolerant of different worship approaches and forms. Jesus' coming has given us this freedom.

3 – We can expect more glorious, intimate worship than the people of God had in previous times

This certainly is the theme of Hebrews 12:18-29, in which we are told that there was awe and trembling at Mt Sinai, but in Jesus we come to the presence of God in a new way that brings far more joy and confidence.

- Because he has opened the way to God we should "draw near with full assurance of faith" (Heb 10:19-23).
- Paul, who also stresses the fact that in Jesus we are a 'holy temple,' indwelt by the Spirit (Eph 2:21-22), holds out the prospect of some enormously deep experiences of the glory, love and fullness of God (cf. Eph 1:17-20; Eph 3:14-20).

3. Discuss why the Lord's Supper is such an important part of worship's gospel re-enactment?

1 – The Lord's Supper helps Christian's grow in their relationship to God

In the Lord's Supper, the abstract concepts of Christ's propitiatory, vicarious and substitutionary death for us are translated into a palpable sign — the bread and the cup — that engages the physical senses of sight and touch, taste and smell. It brings the death of Christ into the concrete world.

- The symbol of *broken* bread and *poured out* wine vividly points to the brokenness and self-offering of Jesus on the cross, and yet the result is a meal with friends! A meal together is the best way to build community and enjoy others.
- The Lord's Supper then becomes not just a symbol of how the death of Jesus brings us together into fellowship with God and one another. At that very moment, we find that both personal interaction with God, and a sense of being a community with others, is profoundly enhanced and facilitated.
- So the Lord's Supper makes the gospel more 'real' to our hearts.

2 – The Lord's Supper helps non-believers come to faith in God

It is also what has been called a "converting ordinance."

- As attendees at Redeemer know, the minister distributing the elements is usually careful to invite Christians (only) to partake of the bread and the cup. This is clear from the Scripture — that it is a "Eucharist," a thanksgiving for salvation (1 Cor 11:24, 28-29).

- Thus, every subsequent Lord's Supper is a covenant *renewal* ceremony. We are to "remember" what he did for us; how he took the curse of the covenant so we could be in relationship with him by grace.

Over the years I have heard from scores of people that this "fencing the table" challenge often forced them to ask themselves: "Well, then, where do I stand? Am I a Christian? Do I really believe the gospel I've been hearing about in a new way here?" The average New Yorker who begins coming to Redeemer has some religious background but has been spiritually skeptical or at least drifting for years. She or he comes because they've been drawn by friends into a small group and/or worship, and this begins an exploration of Christianity in earnest. This goes on for some time. Then, one Sunday, the Lord's Supper is served, and the invitation is made and all the searching is brought to a head in a way that would not happen in an ordinary church service. That is why we always print a prayer of belief in the bulletin on those Sundays in order to help people take Jesus by faith in a decisive, life-changing way.

3 – The Lord's Supper helps worshippers to link their beliefs to their practices

Paul says in I Corinthians 11:18, 20, 29, *"I hear that when you come together as a church there are divisions among you... When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else... Anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the Body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself."*

- Paul insists, therefore, that during the Lord's Supper you are not only to think about your relationship with God, but with others "in the Body."
 - a) Are your relationships strong?
 - b) Are you a true member of this Christian community or are you just dropping in for information and inspiration in a (frankly) consumerist manner?
 - c) He expects that, in worship, we are examining our relationships in our hearts.
- Paul also insists, *"A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup"* (1 Corinthians 11:27-28). He is saying: "Don't take the Lord's Supper without thinking about yourself — your practice, your actual life patterns."

This is a sobering note and it is crucial that you keep it in balance. Obviously, the Lord's Supper is not for perfect people, but for repentant people. It is an expression of gratitude for free grace salvation (1 Cor 11:24). But that is just the point.

- The Lord's Supper forces us to keep linked our inner experience with out outward, actual behavior. It demands that we ask:
 - a) Am I truly living a life of gratitude?
 - b) Am I obeying God in my life as I should be if I really believed I was saved at the infinite cost of his only Son?
 - c) Do I love others sacrificially as I should if I really believed I was saved by sacrificial love?
- As we said above, the Lord's Supper is concrete — it is Jesus' loving self-donation made visible and palpable to the senses. Now are you making Jesus' loving self-donation visible and palpable to others in the way you actually live your life?
- So the Lord's Supper has ramifications beyond the enhancement of our individual relationship with Jesus. It unites facets of our lives that fragmented, modern, Western culture famously splits apart.

One of the greatest problems in particular of this modern era is that despite orthodox beliefs, the influence of our culture seals off our beliefs from really affecting the way we live.

- We may believe every word of the Bible formally but be more molded by the consumer mindset, the individualism, the materialism (etc) of our culture.
- But corporate worship in general, and the Lord's Supper in particular, can have such an effect that it molds us more than surrounding culture can, and thus makes us act very differently.

Summary

Every time you partake of the Lord's Supper God is calling you to:

- a) link your heart more deeply into his heart
- b) link your individual life more deeply into his people
- c) link your life and practice more deeply into your beliefs

It also builds:

- a) personal spirituality
- b) the church community
- c) Christian character and integrity

Most churches, including Redeemer, believe that Jesus has promised that he is spiritually present at his table in this food. He meets us in a special and real way and helps us uniquely when we seek to make these linkages in the sacrament. What an amazing spiritual regimen — ordained by Jesus himself for us!

BIBLE STUDY

Psalm 95

- 1. vv.1-2. These two verses seem very familiar but they are packed with facts about worship. What do we learn about worship and how we do it?**

1 – Worship is best done corporately

We learn this from the first verse — “Let us sing.” We are to do it with other believers.

- This is parallel to Jesus’ own instruction. When he gave us a model of prayer, he told us to pray, “Our Father who art in heaven.”
- Of course, there is ample evidence that the Bible calls us to deep, personal and individual prayer. But that is more of a means to the end of corporate worship. After all, in heaven the corporate nature of worship is the primary form.

2 – Worship engages the whole person

We learn of emotional engagement by the verbs, “sing for joy” and “shout aloud” and “extol with music.” But we learn of intellectual engagement by the nouns: “the LORD” (the covenant name “Yahweh”) and “the Rock of our salvation.”

- These terms are meaningless without knowledge of Biblical history and theology.
 - a) *Yahweh* is the name God gave to Moses in the burning bush as the name for those in a personal, committed, saving relationship with him.
 - b) “Rock” is a name that also goes back into the ministry of Moses (Exodus 17).
- So worship engages the whole person, head and heart.

3 – Worship involves music

It is often overlooked how often the Bible actually commands us to worship God with “music and song” as it does here. Intuitively, this makes perfect sense, but it is not easy to explain.

- Music has an inexplicable power over us. The very same words spoken and recited have a greatly enhanced power when they are sung to great music.

- This quote by C.S. Lewis cited near the end of last week's session is relevant again. *"I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment... the delight is incomplete until it is expressed... if one could really and fully praise [anything] to perfection — utterly 'get out' in poetry or music or paint the upsurge of appreciation which almost bursts you... then indeed the object would be fully appreciated and our delight would have attained perfect development..."* C.S.Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms
- Probably the reason that music is necessary is that we cannot truly enjoy/glorify God to the fullest extent of our capabilities if we do not use music.
 - a) Visual artists are often disappointed that there are not similar injunctions to "praise him with sculpture and painting" etc.
 - b) Of course, Christian artists are called to glorify God with their work, but while an entire congregation cannot participate in making a painting together, it can participate in making a song together.
- Thus music is such a good art form for worshipping:
 - a) corporate – everyone praising at once
 - b) engaging the whole person – heart and head being united in praise

4 – Worship is where we come before him — into his presence

This is critical to real worship. God is, in one sense, omnipresent (Ps.139). Yet there is another sense in which we can either be *"cast away from thy presence"* (Ps.51) or to seek his *"face"* and his presence, as we saw in Psalm 27. To *"come before him"* therefore has a couple of different meanings.

- It means to come before him as we do a king. It is to acknowledge his kingship and submit to him.
- It means to come before him as we do to a friend. When we want an intimate conversation, we meet face to face and look one another in the eye. This means that there is real personal interaction.
- To come into his presence means that the Holy Spirit works on our hearts to give us a sense of his reality and nearness.
- Therefore, in worship, we are seeking the same — both submission and intimacy and a sense of his reality.

2. vv.3-5. If the first two verses give us the “what” of worship, these next three verses give us the “why” of worship. (The word “for” or “because” at the beginning of v.3 shows us this.) Why are we to worship him?

Verses 3 to 5 give us at once both a specific and a general reason for worship.

1 – The specific reason we worship him is that he is the supreme Creator

Literally, everything there is belongs to him. He owns it because he created it. The two contrasts — *depths... peaks* and *sea... land* — are extremes, to show that God owns everything between as well.

- Why does the Psalmist bring out Creation as the ground of worship? Surely we can also worship him for other attributes — why not glory, wisdom, mercy, etc.? Well, of course we can, but the fact of creation underscores that nothing else can be worthy of worship. Whatever we make an ultimate, or a non-negotiable value, is what we worship.
- But everything except God is penultimate, finite, created. It is not only shaped by his hand (v.5) but held (up) in his hand (v.4). You can enjoy everything but you must not worship anything but God.
- We have been called “*homo religioso*”; we cannot live without giving something ultimate value or worship. The Psalmist says to worship only him.
- It can’t be an accident that God is called here “*King above all gods.*” Does this mean that the Psalmist is a polytheist who believes that there are other gods and the LORD is only the strongest one? No, rather, he knows that every created thing can be a god, and we must have a god.
- Therefore, worship is not really something we start with God, but rather is something we give or transfer to God. Something already has captured our imagination, our ultimate allegiance, our passion but only God is worthy of it.

2 – The general reason we worship him is that he has revealed himself in his Word

This is easily missed. Why are we to worship God? The Psalmist says: “*Because he is great... because he is our Maker... because he is our shepherd...*” But how does he know this? This is the truth about God that he revealed through the prophets.

- In other words, worship is not pure mysticism. It starts with and responds to the truth of God’s word. Over and over again we see this pattern in the Bible.

- a) God reveals his holiness to Isaiah and then the prophet leaps forward to offer himself in service (Is.6).
- b) God reveals himself to Jacob in a dream and Jacob wakes up and worships (Gen.28:10-22).
- There is, then, a rhythm to worship.
 - a) God reveals his worth (in his word we learn he is maker, shepherd)
 - b) We respond by giving him what he's worth (our praise, our talent, our sins, our hearts, our loyalty, our money, our selves).
- We see the rhythm even here. Ps. 95:1-2 is a "gift" offering of worship in response to the truths of vv.3-5. Thus, in nearly all historic forms of worship, a word of Scripture is read, sung, chanted, recited, sung, or expounded — and in response, the people pray, praise, give offerings, confess sins, receive pardon, observe sacraments, and so on. Every service usually follows this rhythm.

In summary, we worship God because he alone is 'big enough' for our worship-needing and worship-owing hearts, and he has revealed himself in his word.

**3. vv.6-7b. After the praise and rejoicing of the first 5 verses, a different note is struck. a) Compare and contrast the call of v.1 and v.6. Why the difference?
b) How does vv.6-7 follow naturally from vv.1-5?**

a) Compare and contrast the call of v.1 and v.6.

The call of v.1 is *"come let us sing for joy... let us shout aloud,"* while the call of v.5 is to *"come let us bow down, let us kneel."* The first verse is a call to exuberant rejoicing, but the second is a call to humble submission.

- Kidner says: *"Each of the three main verbs of verse 6 is concerned with getting low before God, since the standard [Hebrew] word for worship in Scripture means [literally] to prostrate oneself: e.g. Abraham in Genesis 18:2."* (DK, p. 345).
- Notice another difference. While the rejoicing of vv.1-2 is grounded in the truth of God as creator (vv.3-5), the humble submission of vv.6-7b is grounded in the truth of God as a shepherd (*"the flock under his care"*) and as a covenant-maker.
 - a) *"Our God"* v.7 is a term that God says may be only used by the people who have a personal covenant relationship with him (Exodus 6:7).
 - b) This, then, is remembering that he is *"our God"* of redemption and grace in history, while vv.1ff was celebrating that he is a *"great God"* of all creation.

Why the difference? Both notes — of adoration and repentance — must be struck. Without a sober remembering of our smallness and need of him and his mercy, *“the ‘joyful noise’ of the opening will be shrill and self-indulgent”* (DK, p. 345).

b) How does vv.6-7 follow from vv.1-5?

Actually, the note of confession and repentance will always follow naturally from real praise and adoration.

- In Isaiah 6, a revelation of God’s holiness leads Isaiah into repentance, crying *“I am a man of unclean lips”* (v.5) and into an assurance of pardon (v.7 – *“your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”*)
- In Luke 5, a revelation of Jesus’ power (through the miracle of the enormous catch of fish) leads Peter into repentance, crying *“Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”* (v.8)
- The closer we get to a source of great light, the easier it is to see ourselves. So the more we see what God truly is like, the more we see what we truly are like.

4. vv.7c-11. This passage of warning doesn’t seem to fit the rest of the Psalm. But think. a) What does it add about how we are supposed to worship? b) Imagine this is a third stage to an act of worship, after vv.1-5 (praise) and vv.6-7 (repentance). What is the third stage? c) What does the summons to rest have to do with worship and hearing God’s word in faith? (Read Heb.4:1-13)

a) What does this tell us about how to worship?

This tells us that *“hearing his voice”* (v.7c) is one of the main acts of worship.

- To drive the point home, notice that in v.7c there is a change of speaker and voice. This is God himself speaking to us now in the first person. It is an oracle from God.
- In the same way, we are to have during any worship service a time of sustained listening to God’s Word directly.
- These final verses are not really a change of subject as some have stated, unless you forget that listening and learning from the Word of God is one of the central components of worship.
- And Kidner reminds us that *“to ‘hear’ or ‘hearken to’ has often the added dimension in Hebrew of ‘obey,’ for which the Old Testament has virtually no other word”* (cf. 1 Sam.15:22).

- So we have here a direction that we must listen to God's word (v.7c), soften our hearts under it (v.8), and offer ourselves in obedience.

b) Imagine this as a third stage in worship; what is it?

We have already shown that Ps. 95:1-7 breaks into two stages of worship that are psychologically natural.

- The first stage is an act of entrance in which we consciously seek the presence of God and remind ourselves of his greatness and sing his praises loudly.
- The second stage is an act of renewal in which we bow low before him, remembering our need of mercy and all his redemptive actions in the past.
- The third stage is a time of listening to God's word carefully and then willingly offering ourselves to him in deeper obedience to it.
- So our three stages look like this:

Acts of Entrance: Look up.
(Psalm 95:1-5)

Praise and Adoration of his Greatness
Gaining perspective on who he is
Result: JOY

Acts of Renewal: Look in.
(Psalm 95:6-7b)
Result: HUMILITY

Repentance and Assurance of his Love
Gaining perspective on who we are

Acts of Offering: Look ahead.
(Psalm 95:7c-11)

Hearing and Acting on his Word
Gaining perspective on who we are in Him
Result: GOSPEL REST

c) What does the summons to "rest" and Hebrews 4:1-13 have to do with worship?

The references to "*Meribah*" and "*Massah*" are to times of crisis in the wilderness wanderings where either the people or Moses failed to trust God's promises (Exod.17:1-7; Num.20:1-13).

- The effect of their continued lack of faith was that they could not enter the rest of the Promised Land. God had to have the entire first generation of Israelites die off before he took their children into the land of rest (Number 14:1-45).
- In the same way, we are being warned here that we must respond with a soft, believing heart to the word of God. But what does "*rest*" mean to us, now?

"My rest' is pregnant with more than one meaning, as Hebrews 3 and 4 makes clear. In relation to the Exodus it meant God's land to settle in... But Hebrews 4:1-13 argues that the psalm still offers us, by its emphatic 'TODAY' (v.7c) a rest beyond anything that Joshua won, namely a share in God's own sabbath rest: the enjoyment of His finished work not merely of creation but of redemption. The quitters who turned back to the wilderness may be but pale shadows of ourselves, if we draw back from our great inheritance." (DK, p. 346).

Kidner is showing us that the final purpose of the worship service is to listen to the gospel that God's redemptive work is "Finished" (Jn. 19: 30).

- When we realize that God has saved us solely by grace through Christ's merits, then we "rest from our work" (Heb.4:10) — an image of God's Sabbath rest, when he "rested from his work."
- In every worship service, we enter into "rest" when we "re-remember" the finished work of Christ for us. Then we take our worship off of false gods (Ps.95:3) through which we seek to save ourselves, and we give our heart's worship to him alone.

READINGS

Read and mark "?" - question to raise "!" - insight or helpful to you

Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His Truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of the will to His purpose — and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin. Yes – worship in spirit and truth is the way to the solution of perplexity and to the liberation from sin.

– Archbishop William Temple¹

The message of the resurrection is that this present world matters; that the problems and pains of this present world matter; that the living God has made a decisive bridgehead into this present world with this healing and all-conquering love; and that, in the name of this strong love, all the evils, all the injustices and all the pains of the present world must now be addressed with the news that healing, justice, and love have won the day. That's why we pray *"thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven"*... Christianity [is not] simply a warmth-in-the-heart religion [but] a kingdom-on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven religion. It [is not] focused on me and my survival, my spirituality [but] on God's world that still needs the kingdom-message. The gospel is good news which warms our hearts *precisely because it isn't just about warming hearts*... That is why we who [worship] do so with material things: water (when people are baptized); bread and wine at the Eucharist... and above all, music. The world of creation has been reclaimed by the living and healing God.

– N.T. Wright²

[Why is Psalm 150—a psalm of pure praise put at the end of the prayer-book of the Bible, the Psalms?] "All [true] prayer, pursued far enough, becomes praise. Any prayer, no matter how desperate its origin, no matter how angry and fearful the experiences it traverses, ends up in praise. It does not always get there quickly or easily — the trip can take a lifetime — but the end is always praise... There are intimations of this throughout the Psalms. Not infrequently, even in the middle of a terrible lament, defying logic and without transition, praise erupts. Psalm 150 does not stand alone; four more hallelujah psalms are inserted in front of it so that it becomes the fifth of five psalms that conclude the Psalter. These five hallelujah psalms are extraordinarily robust. [This means]... no matter how much we suffer, no matter our doubts, no matter how angry we get, no matter how many times we have asked in desperation "How

long?," prayer develops finally into praise. Everything finds its way to the doorstep of praise. This is not to say that other prayers are inferior to praise, only that all prayer pursued far enough, becomes praise... Don't rush it. It may take years, decades even, before certain prayers arrive at the hallelujahs, at Psalm 146-150. Not every prayer is capped off with praise. In fact, most prayers, if the Psalter is a true guide, are not. But prayer is always reaching toward praise and will finally arrive there. So... our lives fill out in goodness. Earth and heaven meet in an extraordinary conjunction. Clashing cymbals announce the glory. Blessing. Amen. Hallelujah.

– Eugene Peterson³

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?**2. Consider the Temple quote. How well does this definition fit with the Biblical material on worship that we have looked at in this unit?**

This is one of the most famous of all definitions of worship. It is very eloquent and memorable, and it does a rather good job of filling out one of our (much less eloquent) definitions — *responding to all God is by giving him all we are*.

1 – He says that we are submitting *all* of our nature to God, and then he enumerates some aspects of what that means. It means:

- Giving him our consciences and letting him correct them.
- Giving him our intellects and letting him inform and fill them.
- Giving him our imagination — our “day-dream life,” — and letting him dominate them.
- Giving him our hearts and letting him be the central affection and comfort.
- Giving him our wills and letting him control them.

2 – He shows that we don’t simply give God these things through a naked act of the will or compliance to a command. All of these offerings are a *response* to the actual nature of God.

- His holiness sensitizes our consciences, his truth satisfies our minds, his beauty cleans out our imagination, his love quiets the heart, and his purpose captures our will.
- Temple says that it is only as we “see what he is worth” — his amazing attributes — that we are able and willing to give him all he’s worth.

3 – Temple spells out the basic mainspring for the character change that worship brings. He says the basic act of worship is adoration and praise. This heals us because it is the most direct antidote to the fundamental problem, our self-centeredness.

- Sin is playing God, being our own Savior and Lord. All our problems — a) a too weak conscience or a too strong and guilty a conscience! b) confused mind, c) addicted imagination, d) empty, insecure heart, e) stubborn will — come from the self-centeredness of trying to be our own gods and/or of trying to save ourselves through making something else a “god.”
- Nothing is as *pure* an antidote for our sin problem as praise and adoration of the true God! Even repentance/confession, thanksgiving, and supplication/petition are forms of prayer that are to some degree “about me.”
- But adoration is pure selflessness. It gets us focused on the beauty of God. Something is beautiful when it is satisfying and fulfilling in and of itself. Just seeing or hearing it is an end in itself. It gets us focused on the attributes of God.
- And as we adore him, our hearts take their clutches off of alternative gods of trust in our selves and they put their hopes squarely on him. That automatically brings liberation.

Temple says something quite radical when he says that worship is *the* way to liberation. Ultimately, what makes you what you are is what you worship.

- All our fears, bad habits, discouragements, unresolved grudges and deep insecurities come because something is more important to your significance and security than Jesus.
- So ultimately the only way to change deeply is to change what you worship. In adoration, this happens. That means you don’t engage in worship on Sunday and then go out into the world to try to change. You change *as*, and *only as*, you worship.

3. Consider the Wright quote. Why is his emphasis an important one to remember?

The Biblical teaching of worship is so rich that it is hard to keep the various aspects and themes of worship all together.

- On the one hand, worship is now “all of life.” We must not have such an other-worldly spirituality focusing on my inner states of consciousness that we forget that now the whole of our lives — our work, our play, our use of money, sex, and power, our civic life, as well as our church life — must be a “living sacrifice” to God (Rom 12:1f).

- On the other hand, we must not think of worship so much in terms of daily living and obedience that we lose the affective aspect. That is, worship is to be moving, delighting, transforming (see Temple's quote above and discussion).
- If we do not learn how to do individual and corporate adoration and have a genuine spiritual experience of God, then we won't have the dynamic necessary to "do all in life for the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). We can only live lives of integrity, justice, compassion and service if we are liberated from our false trusts and idols through worship.
- Having said this, it is probably right to say that Christians today are more likely to look to worship for personal spiritual fulfillment and ignore its purpose of transforming all of life. So Wright is on target when he warns against thinking of worship as simply a way to get our hearts warmed.
- Rather, worship is a way to remember, and prepare to be part of the redemption of *the entire* world, of all of creation.

Worship is a place where we "taste the powers of the age to come" (Heb 6:4).
In worship:

- We get joy and rest for our souls
- We see (hopefully) brothers and sisters of different races and cultures united in praise and at the Lord's table
- We see and hear art being created and used for the glory of God
- We give our material substance and our very selves as an offering to God.

All of this is a foretaste of the coming day when God's *shalom* will heal the world of all psychological, social, cultural and even physical brokenness.

- The Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:6-9; 21:1-2).
- The arts are a foretaste of the day in which the nations of the world will bring their cultural riches into the City of God (Rev 21:24).
- The racial unity is a foretaste of the day in which every tongue, tribe, people and nation will be one humanity in Christ (Rev 5:9-10; Eph 2:11-22).

- The peace that can come to us during corporate worship is a sign of the ultimate Sabbath rest of not just our souls but all of creation — rest from disease, injustice, disintegration, and death (Heb 4:1-14).

When we see this rich theology of worship — that it is a foretaste of the future — then we realize that we do not meet on Sunday simply for inspiration and information. Worship is about making God and his salvation visible to the world through us — the community of God's people.

¹This quote is cited so often that I have not been able to find its original source yet. Also, most of Archbishop Temple's writings appear to be out of print.

²N.T. Wright, *For All God's Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Eerdmans, 1997) pp. 65-67.

³Eugene Peterson, *Answering God*

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to other Christians?

Study 4 | Course 4

This week we will look at specific ways to build the community we discussed earlier.

KEY CONCEPT — MEMBERS

Read and put a "?" if you have a question; put an "!" if an insight is helpful to you.

The Apostle Paul says Christians are "*members of one another*" (Rom 12:5). This goes deeper than the modern concept of being a "member" of a club.

- The Greek word *melos* was the common word for a part of the human body. Paul is saying: "You are the limbs and organs of one another. You are the eyes, arms and heart of one another."
- Believers are profoundly interdependent. In ourselves we are radically incomplete. When Paul says: "*Do not lie, for we are members of one another*" (Eph 4:25), he means that, to tell a lie, and therefore cut yourself off from other believers, is like stabbing yourself in the vitals.
- The implications of this principle are spelled out practically in dozens of "one another" passages in the New Testament epistles. A summary follows:

AFFIRMING ONE ANOTHER

Affirming one another's strengths, abilities and gifts

- Romans 12:10 – *Honor* (praise the accomplishments of) *one another*
- James 5:9 – *Don't grumble* (groan and roll your eyes) *against one another*
- Romans 12:3-6 – *Confirm the gifts of one another*

Affirming one another's equal importance in Christ

- Romans 15:7 – *Accept* (welcome, appreciate, include) *one another as Christ accepted you*
- 1 Corinthians 12:25 – *Be equally anxious* (regardless of ability or socio-economic status) *for one another*
- 1 Peter 5:5 – *Gird yourselves with humility toward one another*
- James 2:1 – *Don't show favoritism*

Affirming one another through visible affection

- Romans 16:16 – *Greet one another with a holy kiss* (culturally appropriate, visible affection)
- James 1:19 – *Listen more than you speak*
- 1 Thessalonians 3:12 – *Abound exceedingly in love to one another*

SHARING WITH ONE ANOTHER*Sharing one another's space, goods and time*

- Romans 12:10 – *Show brotherly love* (treat one another as family)
- 1 Thessalonians 5:15 – *Do good* (meet the practical needs) *of one another*
- 1 Peter 4:9 – *Offer hospitality* (open your homes and share your food and goods) *to one another*

Sharing one another's needs and problems

- Galatians 6:2 – *Bear* (share the difficulty and pain of) *one another's burdens*
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 – *Encourage* (come alongside and strengthen) *one another*

Sharing one another's beliefs, thinking and spirituality

- Romans 12:16 – *Become of the same mind* (work to come to consensus) *with one another*
- Colossians 3:16 – *Teach the Bible to one another*
- 1 Corinthians 11:33 – *Wait for each other to take the sacrament together*
- Ephesians 5:19 – *Sing God's praises to and with one another*

SERVING ONE ANOTHER*Serving one another through accountability*

- James 5:16 – *Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another*
- Romans 15:14 – *Admonish* (lovingly confront) *one another*
- Hebrews 3:13 – *Exhort each other daily about your sin*
- Ephesians 4:25 – *Tell the truth to one another*

Serving one another through forgiveness and reconciliation

- Ephesians 4:2 – *Be completely humble, gentle, patient, putting up with one another*
- Ephesians 4:32 – *Forgive one another as Christ forgave you*
- Galatians 5:26 – *Don't provoke or envy one another*
- Romans 14:19 – *Don't condemn one another*
- James 4:11 – *Don't slander or attack one another*
- Matthew 5:23; 18:15 – *Re-establish broken relationships with one another*

Serving one another's interests rather than our own

- Romans 14:9 – *Edify one another*
- Hebrews 10:24 – *Consider how to stir one another up to love and good works*
- Galatians 5:13 – *Be servants (literally slaves) of one another.* (The goal of each interaction is the good and spiritual growth of the other person)
- Romans 15:1-2 – *Don't please yourself*

1. Which statements impressed or helped you and why?

2. These are nine categories of community-building practices urged upon us by the New Testament. Which of the behaviors do you have the most problem understanding? Discuss until your thinking is clarified.

HOW TO BE FRIENDS**1 – Affirming one another's strengths, abilities, and gifts**

This is a general mindset that loves to praise, appreciate and make supportive statements. It is to catch people being good and then to affirm them in it.

- More specifically, it is a deliberate practice of identifying in our friends:
 - a) where they are growing and making progress
 - b) what talents and gifts they have that benefit others
 - c) which sacrifices they are making to do the right thing (that others may not see)
- All of this is to “give honor” to others (Romans 12:10). When fruit, gifts and sacrifices are confirmed and affirmed in community, it greatly multiplies their growth.
- Note on specific texts:
 - a) Romans 12:1-8 taken as a whole indicates that we should appreciate one another's (very different) gifts and abilities, not despising those who are different.
 - b) The opposite of an affirming, honoring spirit is what James 5:9 alludes to. There the word “grumble” means literally to sigh or groan. You can show exasperation and disdain in a way that makes others feel, not simply critiqued, but belittled — made to feel small and marginal.

2 – Affirming one another's equal importance in Christ

This is a general mindset that refuses to be impressed with the world's status-ladders or pecking orders.

- In the world, some classes, races, vocations and cultures have more power than others. But the Bible calls us in numerable places to refuse to let those distinctions in the church control us within the church.
- Specifically, this is the deliberate practice of building relationships with other believers across traditional cultural barriers as a sign of the coming kingdom. (Many of today's efforts to do racial reconciliation are one form of this community-building practice.)
- Notes on specific texts:
 - a) Romans 15:7 is a remarkable verse that will repay sustained reflection. Think of how Christ accepted us. His acceptance is quite different than the modern notion of tolerance. Christ does not ignore our faults at all. He insists (out of love) that we change them all. His

directives to us, however, are put in the larger context of his absolute and unconditional commitment to us.

b) I Corinthians 12 admits the brute fact that many people have greater gifts (e.g. speaking ability, brilliance, leadership ability) that tend to attract greater honor in the world. But within the church, v.25 says, every member must be treated with (literally) "equal anxiety." We are to be as emotionally loving, accepting, welcoming and concerned for the less gifted as for the most gifted.

c) James 2:1-14 is a classic text that forbids favoring the rich over the poor.

3 – Affirming one another through visible affection

There are a number of directions in the New Testament to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom 16:16, 1 Cor 16:20, 2 Cor 13:12) or "with a kiss of love" (1 Peter 5:14).

- It is customary to skip over these verses with the thought that this was an ancient cultural greeting that we don't use any more. But even if we grant the need for some cultural translation to our own time, that does not remove our responsibility to obey the Biblical command.
- Σ The command is — communicate love and affection in a visible way.
 - a) Some cultures are more emotionally expressive than others, and, in general, women are more emotionally expressive than men.
 - b) It is appropriate for different people groups to choose different ways to communicate love and affection, but they must do it. We must communicate warmth.
- We must not be cold, clipped, abrupt, indifferent and harsh with one another. More than that, we must be willing to actually talk about our love for each other.
 - a) We say "so long" when we mean "I'll miss you a lot." If you will miss the person a lot, say so. It is a critically important part of friendship, and it is commanded in the Bible.
- Notes on specific texts: James 1:19 says one of the easiest ways to practice and show warmth is to listen very attentively to others more than to "hold forth."

HOW TO BE FAMILY**1 – Sharing one another’s space, goods, and time**

This is a willingness to share one’s physical material world with others, the way family members do. Specifically, this practice includes:

- *Sharing space with one another.* Unlike students who only share a classroom, or colleagues who only share an office, Christians are to invite one another into their living space. And they are not simply to do one thing (such as study) but all the life practices together. This means eating, studying, playing, praying (and so on) together.
- *Sharing one another’s goods.* In the most practical way, we help one another. It may mean doing practical errands, giving financial gifts, or providing for needs in other concrete ways.
- *Sharing common time together.* This means both being available to one another as well as a commitment to meeting together with regularity.
- All of these practices assume all the others. You can’t build community if you are too mobile. If you are constantly traveling and constantly moving you can’t share space, goods, and time with any one on a regular basis.
- Notes on specific texts: Any place that the text reads we are to “*do good*” to one another (cf. 1 Thess 5:15, Gal 6:10), it is speaking of very concrete material help. It means providing money, shelter, or other practical help for life-needs.

2 – Sharing one another’s needs and problems

Sharing resources and possessions is one way to become vulnerable to others in a community. But many who are willing to share resources are not willing to be transparent and open about their own problems, material, emotional and spiritual. Yet the Bible calls us to that as well.

- We are to let others in on our grief and weakness and allow them to give us their love and support.
- On the other hand, we are not to avoid sufferers for fear of the drain that it will cause us. We are to be willing to sniff out people who are hurting and offer whatever support they need.
- Notes on specific texts:
 - a) Galatians 6:2 text tells us to bear one another’s burdens. Picture how you help a person who is trying to carry a load which is too heavy. To “bear the burden” means to come under it and let some of its weight, responsibility, and pain come on to you.

- b) I Thess 5:11 and many other passages call us to “*encourage*” one another. The Greek word is the word *parakaleo*, a compound word that means to come along side, “*para*,” and to call, “*kaleo*.” It means to come very close and cheer and support the person in a journey.

3 – Sharing one another’s beliefs, thinking, and spirituality

Another category of community-building practices has to do with developing unity of mind and heart in the gospel. Christians are called to study and teach the Bible to one another, to pray and sing God’s praises with one another, and to take the sacrament together. All of this has the effect of creating unity of belief and heart in the gospel.

- This means on the one hand there is an intellectual component to Christian community. We are to constantly discuss and apply the Word to ourselves and in doing so we develop unity in the faith.
 - a) Romans 12:16 – *become of the same mind* means to work to come to consensus on issues. Compare this with Eph 4:14-15 – “*not blown about by every wind of human doctrine, but speaking the truth in love ...the whole body is joined and knit together.*”
- On the other hand, we must practice our unity in the majors of the gospel even when we disagree on other matters.
 - a) For example, Paul urges two women in the Phillipian church to “*agree with one another in the Lord*” (Phil 4:2). That does not sound like he is saying, “decide which of you is right” but “remember, despite your disagreement in the minors that you agree in the majors — the gospel of the Lord.”
- Of course, many communities are fractured because they can’t agree on what is major and what is minor! Determination of the difference between doctrinal majors and minors is important for community-building.
 - a) If a church draws the boundaries out too far (e.g. not insisting on any doctrinal unity at all) — the community of that church will be non-existent.
 - b) If, on the other hand, a church draws its boundaries too narrowly, making many rather minor things into majors (e.g. views of the end-times, political views, etc.), the community of that church will also constantly be interrupted through fighting. Unless it remains extremely tiny.

HOW TO BE SERVANTS**1 – Serving one another through accountability**

Above we mentioned that we must be willing to let others in the community know about our problems or needs. But more specifically, we must allow ourselves to be accountable to others to live as we should, even in the more private areas.

- In particular, we must be willing to admit where we have besetting sins and look to the Christian community to help us overcome them. This aspect of community-building is fraught with dangers on either side.
 - a) On the one hand, some churches have used this practice abusively, demanding that people make all sorts of sins and problems completely public. They have also held people accountable for the details of their lives, down to when a person is allowed to miss church and by traveling on a weekend!
 - b) On the other hand, most churches make no effort to hold members accountable for their behavior at all.
- A more balanced approach would be to have a believer voluntarily develop a circle of Christian friends to whom he or she is regularly accountable for areas of behavior that are especially difficult or in which self-deception is easy:
 - a) devotional life and level of spiritual experience
 - b) life balance (work, health, and rest)
 - c) use of money
 - d) sexuality
 - e) family relationships
- Another way to do this is to use John Wesley's questions that he developed for his own accountability groups called "band meetings:"
 - a) Have you had any spiritual failures since we met last?
 - b) Have you had any spiritual successes?
 - c) Have you been tempted but delivered? How did it happen?
 - d) Did you do anything that you are not sure was the right thing to do or not?
- Note on specific texts:
 - a) James 5:16 is the only place that we are told to confess our sins to others. Some have concluded (because of the context) that this is only for people who are seeking healing from physical illness.

- b) But Hebrews 3:13 tells us to exhort one another daily lest we be hardened by deceitful (i.e. hidden) sins. This certainly entails having a fairly intimate knowledge of one another's flaws!
- c) Rom 5:14 uses a word *noutheteo* which means to "admonish," to lovingly confront someone. If you place this with 1 Thess 5:15 (the call to encourage one another) and Col 3:16 (the call to teach one another) we see that we are directed to do peer counseling in the community.

2 – Serving one another through forgiveness and reconciliation

This community-building practice is so important that we will devote a whole session to it later in this series. In general, this is the mindset of never giving up on anyone in the Christian community. We must never tire of forgiving (and/or repenting!) and seeking to repair our relationships.

- Matthew 5:23 tells us we should go to someone if we know they have something against us. Matthew 18:15 says we should approach someone if we know that we have something against them. In short, it is always your move — to repair relationships in the community!
- Notes on the texts:
 - a) Eph 4:2 is a very general directive, telling us to "put up" with one another. This means we must be patient and forbearing over small irritations.
 - b) Gal 5:26 uses two words that have the opposite meaning. To *provoke* means basically to despise someone, to look down and disdain because someone has less (intelligence, appropriate views, proper behavior, looks, status) than you. To *envy* means to feel inferior to, to resent because someone has more (intelligence, education, looks, status, power) than you. Both kinds of attitudes breed conflicts and unreconciled relationships.
 - c) Romans 14:19 and James 4:11 forbid the kind of condemning, judgmental, harsh language and attitudes that continually break relationships and prevent their repair. Obviously, in light of Rom 15:14, this does not mean we can never criticize. Condemnation, however, is criticism which seeks to punish, marginalize and/or be rid of a person.

3 – Serving one another's interests rather than our own

This is a general mindset of putting the needs and interests of others in the community ahead of your own. This is the classic servant-heart.

- This means to deliberately look for needs around you, of all sorts, and find ways to meet them through loving deeds, seeking as little in the way of recognition as possible.
- Paul boldly tells us to be *douloi* of one another (Gal 5:13) — literally bond-slaves. Extending the metaphor, Paul says that we owe one another love as a kind of debt (Rom 13:8). Indentured servants, when they fell into debt, became bond-slaves of their creditors until the debt was paid.
 - a) Because Christ humbled himself and became a servant and met our needs even at the cost of his own life, now we are like indentured servants — but to one another! We owe everyone a debt of love.
- There is a sense in which this is not so much another community-building practice as it is the motive and dynamic beneath all the other practices.
- On the other hand, Hebrews 10:24 tells us that we should be giving deliberate consideration how to build up those around us into Christ-likeness. To edify our brothers and sisters is not simply to give them whatever they ask for. Rom 15:1-2 says we are to please them for their good, to build them up.

Summary:

- We are not to enter into community-building simply to make ourselves feel needed and connected. This is a hard balance to strike because our need for community is deep and natural. (Adam needed Eve by God's design — Gen 2.)
- But it is very possible to exploit others in Christian community. One way is by making ourselves so indispensable to others that we become dependent on others' dependence on us.
- Another way is by taking emotionally, materially and spiritually from the community and then not giving anything back.
- In Christ we should not be so proud that we don't need community, nor so empty and needy that we exploit others in the community.
- Practically speaking, Christians give each other some space. Claustrophobic, co-dependent (yes, there is such a thing!) relationships are to be avoided.
- Some years ago there was a popular book on how to make and keep friends. The author made the following suggestions:

- a) make your relationships a priority
- b) be transparent
- c) express warmth and affection
- d) keep a balance of giving and taking.
- Some people would call this common sense but many people cannot maintain friendships because they cannot supply one or more of these factors. Of course all of them (and some others) are part of the Biblical “one-another” principles of community-building and are empowered by the gospel.

BIBLE STUDY

Romans 12:9-21

1. v.9 What do the imperatives in this verse have in common? Why are these commands so important for setting up a lifestyle of love?

There are at least three imperatives — *“be sincere,” “hate... evil,” “cling to... good”* and they are about truth. This means:

- Our love must be truly what is in our heart. Literally, the word “sincere” in Greek is an-hypokritos (unhypocritical).
 - a) We are not to be phony in our dealings with people. We are not to be polite, helpful and apparently warm on the outside while on the inside despising them.
 - b) In the church a “culture of niceness” can develop in which a veneer of pleasantness covers over a spirit of backbiting, gossip, prejudice.
- Our love must be true to God’s will. We must hate what God calls evil and cling to what God calls good.

Why this emphasis on truth at the beginning of a paragraph on love? It is because when we love someone, it often distorts our view of good and evil.

- If you love someone, your heart is bound up with the heart of the other. Their distress becomes yours and their happiness becomes yours.
- Therein lies the temptation to give the loved one what creates emotional joy, rather than what is actually best for them in the long run.
- This is an extremely common problem in child rearing. Parents may not punish children consistently because they cannot bear their tears and anger. But the result of an undisciplined childhood is always disaster.

So why is truth so important for love?

“Real love is so passionately devoted to the beloved so that it hates every evil — which is [always] incompatible with his or her highest welfare.”
(Stott)

Without truth we would not know how to love. We would not know when to confront or displease the beloved for their own good.

- God’s Word reveals how our world and our souls were designed. Any love that is afraid to confront the beloved is really not love, but rather a kind of emotional hunger, a selfish desire to be loved.
- When you are afraid to do what is right (toward God and the beloved) if it risks losing the affection of the beloved — then you have made an idol out of the loved one. You are using and exploiting the person to feed your own emptiness.

- To say: "I'll do anything to keep him or her loving me!" is not truly loving the person. Rather, it is loving the love you get from the person. Any "love" that cuts corners morally or that fails to confront is not really love at all.

"Think of how we feel when we see someone we love ravaged by unwise actions or relationships... Real love stands against the deception, the lie, the sin that destroys. Nearly a century ago the theologian E.H.Gifford wrote: 'Human love here offers a true analogy: the more a father loves his son, the more he hates in him the drunkard, the liar, the traitor.' The fact is... anger isn't the opposite of love. Hate is, and the final form of hate is indifference."
– Becky Pippert, *Hope Has Its Reasons*

Note: Having said all this, refer to the second paragraph in the Readings below. It is possible to use "confrontation for your own good" abusively and selfishly as well. The motive must always be true service to the other.

2. v.9 How can we love unlovely persons who we do not like and yet still be "sincere?"

This does not mean that you should never do a loving deed unless you "feel" loving! It means rather, that *as* we do loving deeds despite how we feel, we must work on our hearts to put aside condescension, irritability, bias and selfishness. It is hypocritical to act loving when in your heart you despise someone. On the other hand it is unrealistic to insist that one's heart be warm and kindly disposed before we do kind actions of love.

So what is the solution? There is a third way.

A Christian should do loving actions while repenting, softening the heart through an inner discipline. How can Paul command us to "rejoice" and "weep" as he does in v.15? How can he command emotions?

- Christians are called here to a discipline (a very hard one) in which we stop and seek to understand the inner world of another person. That can be done by connecting it with your own joys and sorrows.
- It is hard and unpleasant work to remember our own experiences of grief, and it is work just as hard (though different) to enter into the joy of someone who is not you.

But there is an even more important discipline. We must remember Jesus' sacrifice for us when we try to love unlovely people (Rom.12:1-2). How does this work?

- The gospel is this: we are not loved because we are lovely, but rather in spite of our unloveliness. We are not loved because we have made ourselves worthy of love, but because Jesus died for us when we were unattractive in order to make us attractive.

- Now if Christians think of this as they are serving unattractive people, they will find a repentance growing. "Oh, lord! I was so much more unattractive to you than this person is to me. Yet you were tortured and killed — you gave up your life for me! And all I need to do is to give up some time and effort for this person."
- Now a person who does not understand the gospel cannot do this. A person who is just generally moral and nice cannot do this. They have to choose between the two inadequate alternatives, either phony love (niceness toward people you dislike) or sporadic love (kindness only toward people you like).
- But if you show love as you repent, your heart is softened as you serve, and your service is sincere toward God at that moment, and becomes more sincere toward the people as you go along.

3. v.10-16 Divide the 12-13 exhortations in these verses into 2-4 broad categories that help you get a grip on what love means practically.

Love means actions that put the needs of others ahead of our own.

- In v.10a we are told to be devoted to one another as if we were in the same family.
 - a) Even if our brothers, sisters, children or parents develop radically different values and lifestyles from us, there is a tie that stays. "He's still my brother" or "She's still my daughter" conveys this.
 - b) Now Paul is saying that Christians who share common values are to be as doggedly devoted to one another as family members.
- In v.10b we are told to honor one another above ourselves.
 - a) The word "honor" means to treat someone or something as valuable and precious. In v.16 we are essentially told the same thing. Real love is not self-centered. "Don't be proud... don't be conceited." "Be willing to associate yourself with people of low position."
- In v.13 we see that love consists largely in practical deeds that meet needs.
 - a) Paul calls us to share our homes, our money, and our things with those who need them.
- In summary, love is the opposite of self-centered, proud behavior. It is humbly putting the needs of others ahead of your own and meeting those needs.

Love means being patient, forgiving, empathetic, and affectionate toward others.

- Verses 11-12 seem to be only about our relationship to God, but we have to notice that they stand in the very middle of numerous directions about Christian relationships.
 - a) To be involved deeply in people's lives is hard spiritual work! (C.S. Lewis said that the only way to be sure not to have your heart broken is to never give it to anyone.)
 - b) Since as Christians we will and must give our hearts to others, we will often find our zeal (v.11) and our hope (v.12) flagging.
- In vv.14-19 we are told to bless and not curse. We are to forgive each other. To forgive means to not pay back.
- In v.15 we are told to be what is today called "empathetic." We are to do everything we can to put ourselves in the shoes of others and identify with them.
- In summary, love is not only an action, but must also be an inner attitude of good will, patience, forgiveness and warmth toward others.

Love means insisting on truth and what is best for the other. This has been discussed under questions #1 and #2 above. It is based on the exhortations in verse 9.

4. v.10-16 How does the gospel make each aspect of love possible?

Love is a sacrificing of our needs for the needs of the other.

- Recollect Jesus' death for us.
 - a) He honored us above himself. When Jesus was hanging on the cross for us, it was pretty clear that his heart was not overflowing with feelings of warmth and affection for us.
 - b) His love was a sheer act of the will at that moment. "Let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not my will but thine be done."

Love is a deep identification with the condition of the other.

- Recollect Jesus' incarnation for us.
 - a) He wept with those who wept.

Love is an insistence on truth and what is best for the other.

- Recollect Jesus' ascension and rule for us.
 - a) He hates evil and clings to good.

Only if Christ is our main joy will we be free to rejoice and weep with others.

- For example, if you are single and wish to be married, how can you rejoice for your friend who is getting married? It will be hard in any case, but if marriage is an idol it will be impossible to rejoice.
- On the other hand, unless Christ is your righteousness and peace, it will be hard to enter into the griefs of others. One reason you may not be able to weep is that you may have trouble sympathizing with a person you despise or feel better than. Or you may not be able to weep because you must convince yourself that life is good.
- If Christ is not your consolation, you will look to circumstances of life for it — and thus you need to deny how hard this life is.

5. v.10-16 Many think “sacrificial love” is unhealthy. How do the varied exhortations about love balance each other and prevent extremes?

The world does not understand the gospel or the forms of sin and self-righteousness, and therefore it cannot tell the difference between someone who is trying to serve others as a means of finding justification and salvation from someone who is trying to serve others as a response to having justification and salvation.

- Some use sacrifice as a way to feel worthwhile and valuable. If you don't feel acceptable in Christ, you may get that feeling of acceptability from the love of another person.
- In that case, you make an idol of the beloved, and cannot say “no” — you can't set boundaries. You may happily allow yourself to be abused.
- When this dynamic occurs, the problem looks like low self-esteem but the root cause is that you have not found your significance and self-worth in Christ.
- Therefore, v.9 serves as a boundary against any misinterpretation of v.10-16.
 - a) It is not loving to let the beloved sin against you. To allow or promote sin is never the best thing for anyone.
 - b) Also, “holding fast to what is good” means we must not sin against ourselves.
 - c) In other words, we must not love others in such a way as to disobey God and be poor stewards of our physical and emotional health or that of our families.

READINGS

Read and mark "?" - question to raise "!" - insight or helpful to you

Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. Christian brotherhood is a spiritual and not a human reality. In this it differs from all other communities.

– D. Bonhoeffer²

What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything else of that sort. Christians come together... because... they have all been loved by Jesus himself... They are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus' sake.

– D.A. Carson³

I must release the other person from every attempt of mine to regulate, coerce, and dominate him with my love. I must leave him his freedom to be Christ's [not mine.] Human love constructs its own image of the other person, of what he is and what he should become. It takes the life of the other person into its own hands. Spiritual love will meet the other person with the clear Word of God and be ready to leave him alone with this Word for a long time, willing to release him again in order that Christ may deal with him. Human love produces human dependence and constraint; spiritual love lives in the clear light of service and creates freedom. From the first moment when a man meets another person he is looking for a strategic position he can assume over against that person. It is vitally necessary that every Christian face this danger squarely and eradicate it.

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. As love to God begins with listening to his Word, so the beginning of love for others is learning to listen to them. It can be greater service than speaking. There's an impatient, inattentive listening that despises, only waiting for a chance to speak.

The second service is that of active helpfulness. This means, initially, simple assistance in trifling, external matters. We must allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions. We may pass them by, preoccupied with our more important tasks, as the priest passed the man who had fallen among thieves, perhaps reading the Bible.

We speak, third, of the service of bearing others. It is only in bearing with my brother that the great grace of God becomes wholly plain. To cherish no contempt for the sinner but rather to prize the privilege of bearing him means to be able to accept him, to preserve fellowship with him through forgiveness.

Where Christians live together the time must inevitably come when in some crisis one person will have to declare God's Word to another. It is unchristian consciously to deprive another of the one decisive service we can render to him... We admonish one another to go the way that Christ bids us to go. We are gentle and severe... "Confess your faults to one another" (James 5:16.) He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everyone must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship, living in lies and hypocrisy. But it is the grace of the Gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that says: "You're a sinner, a great desperate sinner. Now come, as the sinner that you are, to the God who loves you" ...A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person.

– D. Bonhoeffer⁴

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

The quotes are simply eloquent restatements of some of the nine categories of community-building practices that we studied above. In your discussion you may notice:

- The first paragraph of quotes by Bonhoeffer and Carson is a reference to “Affirming one another’s equal importance in Christ.”
- The second paragraph of quotes by Bonhoeffer is a reference to “Serving one another’s interests rather than our own.” When we enter relationships out of a desire to use others to build ourselves up rather than to serve others, then we fall into either the imbalance of being under-confrontational or over-confrontational. Why? Bonhoeffer wisely says that if we love others for their sake, we will grant them freedom. We will not try to control them either by telling them what they want to hear or by trying to make them exactly who we personally need them to be. If, on the other hand, we are possessive of them, if we are relating to them mainly to meet our own desperate love-needs, then we will be either too afraid to confront or too abusive and angry when we do so.
- The four services that Bonhoeffer mention:
 - a) The service of listening refers to “Affirming one another through visible affection.”
 - b) The service of active helpfulness refers to “Sharing one another’s space, goods, and time” and perhaps also to “Sharing one another’s needs.”
 - c) The service of bearing with others refers to “Serving one another through forgiveness and reconciliation.”
 - d) The service of declaring God’s Word refers to “Serving one another through accountability.” This is also the burden of the final paragraph on confessing sins.

2. Consider your own relationships with other believers.

a) Which of the 9 categories of community-building are you currently the best at? Why? Which of the 9 categories are you the worst at? Why?

b) In light of your analysis, choose 2 or 3 practical things you can do to improve your community-building practices.

3. Look at the following list from Romans 12.**a) In which of these are you the weakest?****b) In which of these are you now being (or about to be) tested?****c) What practical steps could you take to improve in your weak area?**

- Love honestly, speaking out against what is wrong. v.9
- Love even unattractive people doggedly because they are your brothers and sisters. v.10
- Love by making people feel honored and valuable. Listen and show consideration. v.10
- Love by being generous in a practical way with your home, money and time. v.13
- Love without bitterness. Don't pay back or hold resentment against others. v.14
- Love with empathy. Be willing to be emotionally involved with others. v.15
- Love with humility. Be willing to associate with people who are very different than you. v.16

¹The quotes from Bonhoeffer come from *Life Together*, a book written about and for an underground seminary for prospective Lutheran clergy in the late 1930's in Germany. Bonhoeffer taught in the seminary and lived with the students before the Nazis shut it down. Because all of the little underground community consisted of males, the language of the book almost exclusively used masculine pronouns.

²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (Harper, 1954), p.23, 25, 26.

³D.A. Carson, Love in *Hard Places* (Crossway, 2002) p.61.

⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (Harper, 1954).

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to my neighbor?

Study 5 | Course 2

According to the Bible, everyone is my “neighbor.” What is the implication of this?

KEY CONCEPT — JUSTICE

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

What do we owe our neighbor?

In the Old Testament, justice and love are closely linked.

- When God says “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” in Lev 19:18, he also says “*Do not defraud, pervert justice, show partiality against the poor, or do anything to endanger your neighbor’s life*” (vv.13-17).
- Justice, then, is love in action, and it is what we owe our neighbor.
- According to Jesus, God is still a God of justice and anyone who has a relationship with him will be concerned for justice as well (Luke 18:1-8).

Who is our neighbor?

It is typical for us to think of our neighbors as people of the same social class and means (cf. Luke 14:12).

- The Old Testament, however, called Israel to recognize the immigrant, the single-parent family, and the poor as neighbors, even if they were of another nation or race (cf. Lev 19:34).
- In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus goes further. He says that your neighbor is anyone you come into contact with who lacks resources, even someone of a hated race or of another religious faith.

What is ‘justice’?

According to the Old Testament, God’s justice means to share food, shelter, and other basic resources with those who have fewer of them (Is 58:6-10).

- Injustice happens when people are barred from fair wages and, therefore, from the same goods and opportunities afforded others (Lev. 19:13, Jer 22:13).
- Jesus tells us that God is still committed to justice and that those with a relationship with him will be as well (Luke 18:1-8).
- So meeting basic human needs such as food, safe housing, health and education is not simply a matter of *mercy* but also of *justice*.

Should we still be concerned about injustice today?

Consider the following example. Inner city children receive inferior schooling and often grow up in an environment extremely detrimental to learning.

- Conservatives argue that this is the parent's or the local sub-culture's fault while liberals argue it is the failure of government and/or the fruit of systemic racism.
- But no one argues that it is the children's fault. The reality is that some children, through no fault of their own, grow up with opportunities for academic and economic success vastly smaller than others.
- Why does this situation exist? Part of the sinful brokenness of the world is an unjust distribution of assets and opportunities.
- There is a Latin American prayer that captures the Christian attitude well: *"O God, to those who have hunger give bread; and to those who have bread the hunger for justice."*

Why should we do justice?

God tells Israel: *"The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God"* (Lev 19:34).

- The Israelites had been aliens and oppressed slaves in Egypt. They did not have the ability to free themselves — God liberated them by his grace and power.
- Now they're to treat all people with less power or fewer assets as neighbors, doing love and justice to them. So the basis for "doing justice" is salvation by grace!
- Christians may disagree about the particular political approach to the problems of injustice. But all Christians must be characterized by their passion for justice, and their personal commitment to ameliorate injustice through personal giving, sacrifice and generosity.

Summary

Christians do "gospel-neighboring" by sacrificially meeting needs and lovingly working for justice for those in our city with less of the world's goods.

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

It should be noted that Jesus and the Bible weave into a seamless cloth two things that we today would call personal morality — e.g. prohibitions against adultery, lust, lying — together with social justice. God calls Christians to be witnesses, to evangelize others, but also to be deeply concerned for the poor.

- In the West these two sets of concerns have been split off from one another into rival political parties for decades.
 - a) Conservatism stresses the importance of personal morality and approves of evangelism and calling people to conversion.
 - b) Liberalism stresses social justice and rejects any calls to others to convert.
 - c) But Jesus calls his disciples both to “gospel-messaging” (urging everyone to believe the gospel) and to “gospel-neighboring” (sacrificially meeting the needs of those around them whether they believe or not).

The two absolutely go together.

- First, they go together theologically.
 - a) The resurrection shows us that God not only *created* both body and spirit but will also *redeem* both body and spirit.
 - b) The salvation Jesus will eventually bring in its fullness will include liberation from all the effects of sin — not only spiritual but physical and material as well.
 - c) Jesus came both preaching the Word, and healing and feeding. The final kingdom will be one of justice for all. The only way for Christians to proclaim the gospel is through both our words and our deeds of compassion and justice, serving the material needs of people around us even as we call them to faith in Jesus.
- Secondly, they go together practically.
 - a) In some ways gospel-neighboring is gospel-messaging. Loving deeds regardless of a person’s race or faith is a very attractive testimony to the truth of the gospel.

2. Why is it important to recognize the motives of both mercy and justice as we meet concrete human needs of our neighbors?

Jesus provides a balance of motives for sharing our resources; he invokes both *compassion* (mercy) and justice. Helping the poor was motivated by a sense of simple justice (e.g. Luke 18:1-8 and a real concern to alleviate misery (e.g. Luke 10:25-37 “*mercy*”).

We should keep in mind that people who are motivated strictly by a sense of justice or strictly by a sense of compassion tend to lose the sense of God's grace as the root of our giving.

- Often conservative motivation to give to the poor is strictly mercy or compassion.
 - a) They think we need to help the pitiful poor out of the goodness of our hearts. This misses the fact that the "haves" have what we have to a great degree because of unjust distribution of opportunities and resources at birth.
 - b) It is simple justice to spread the wealth around.
- On the other hand, often liberal motivation to give to the poor is strictly concern for justice. Poverty is seen strictly in terms of structural inequities.
- While the conservative "compassion only" motivation leads to paternalism and patronizing, the liberal "justice only" motivation leads to great anger and rancor. Both views, ironically, become self-righteous.
- One tends to blame the poor for everything, the other to blame the rich for everything. One over-emphasizes individual responsibility, the other under-emphasizes it.
- Jesus had it right. Do both mercy and justice. A balanced motivation arises from a heart touched by grace, which has lost its superior feelings toward any class of people.

BIBLE STUDY #1

Isaiah 58:3-10

1. What is the connection between justice and worship? (Vv.3-6)

Fasting was a time of abstention from food for a period of intense individual or corporate prayer and worship. It was a practice of humility (e.g. bowing the head, wearing sackcloth, kneeling and lying prostrate on ashes, all mentioned in v.5). But the formal action of fasting was to be the expression of a truly humbled *heart*.

- Isaiah points out that if people fast and pray ritually but still show pride and haughtiness toward the poor and needy, then their humility has not truly penetrated their hearts.
- Isaiah says that true fasting (i.e. a heart *truly* humbled by God's grace) will always result in concrete change of actual behavior and social patterns.
- In short, if you look down at the poor and stay aloof from their suffering, you have not really experienced God's grace in worship.

Religious formalism — that is, religious practice without heart and life change — is, of course, a form of self-salvation or works-righteousness.

- These are people who *"expect their voices to be heard on high"* for their formal religiosity (v.4) but have not truly been transformed by grace.
- A heart changed by true worship will concretely *"loose the chains of injustice"* (v.6).

2. From the context, what does it mean to "loose the chains of injustice?"

Verse 6 famously calls us to *"set the oppressed free"* and to *"break every yoke."* But what does that mean specifically?

- In the text God tells them to stop paying their workers too little (v.3) and settling disputes with violence (v.4).
- He also tells them to begin sharing the food, shelter and clothing they have with others.
- This illustrates that "doing justice" consists of a rather broad range of practices. Some have more to do with changing social structure.
 - a) For example, it means working for fair wages and against domestic and civil violence.
 - b) But others have more to do with individual generosity.

- It is interesting God seems to say that it is not simply hard-hearted but unjust not to seek out the poor and share your resources with them. Verse 10 demonstrates that *"spending yourselves for the hungry and satisfying the needs of the oppressed"* is essentially the same thing.

Notice the vivid use of the image of fasting.

- God sees economically comfortable people temporarily fasting — "going without" food for a day or a period — for the motive of getting God's ear (vv.3-5).
- But God says that people changed by grace go on (as it were) a *permanent* fast. Self-indulgence and materialism are given up and replaced by sacrificial (*spend yourselves*) lifestyle of giving to those in need.
- Note: Most commentators believe *"your own flesh and blood"* in v.7 can not mean (as it often does) 'your own family' but rather 'other fellow human beings.'

3. What is the result of doing justice? (v.8-10)

At first glance it might seem that God is saying, "If you help the poor then I'll take you to heaven," but we should not read this text individualistically. Rather, we should see this as a promise of God to the corporate people of God to be present in their community with glory and power if they begin to 'do justice.'

- For example, when the early church was sacrificially involved in sharing their possessions with people in need, when *"no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own,"* then we are told *"with great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all"* (Acts 4:32-33).
- This is a direct fulfillment of the promise of Isaiah 58:8-10. The practical, sacrificial sharing of the community was a powerful proof of the transforming power of the gospel.
- Therefore there were many conversions everyday and a great sense of God's glory and presence lay on the whole church and especially on its gatherings for teaching and worship.

BIBLE STUDY #2

Matt 25:31-46

1. Jesus is expecting a particular kind of ministry from his followers. What kinds of people or needs are the focus of this ministry? List them.

- *"The hungry/thirsty"* (vv.35, 37, 43, 44) are given *"something to eat and drink."* This is very direct relief.
- *"The strangers"* are immigrants, refugees and aliens to a culture. They are (vv. 35, 38, 43, 44) *"invited in."* This means that they are welcomed and given the basics for pursuing a life in that country.
- *"Those needing clothes"* are probably pretty close to what we might call the *"homeless"* or the very poor (vv. 36, 38, 43, 44). They are *"clothed."*
- *"The sick"* (vv. 36, 39, 43, 44) are *"looked after."* This word *"episkopos"* (the noun form meant *"a bishop or overseer"*) means to give comprehensive care for someone.
- *"The prisoners"* (vv. 36, 39, 44, 45) are *"visited"* (v.36) which is a word that means just what it says — to simply *"be there,"* to just be present.

If we look over our list, we see that ministry includes providing food, shelter and medical treatment — emergency relief. But it also implies economic development (in the cases of the *"stranger"* and even of the *"sick"*) in which your ministry's goal is to give them the ability to be economically and socially self-sufficient. And ministry extends to love, support and simple friendship (*"I was in prison and you came to me"*).

2. Who is Jesus examining and why (vv.32-35)? How can God use this ministry to determine who goes to heaven or hell (v.46)? Does this deny the doctrine that we are saved by Christ's works, not ours?

In Matt 25:31-46 Jesus speaks in parabolic terms likening judgment day to the common task of shepherds who must distinguish and remove the *"goats"* (only nominal believers) from the *"sheep"* (real believers).

- The sign (not the cause — important note!!) of salvation is that the sheep have a heart for *"the least of these my brethren"* — defined as the hungry, immigrant, homeless, sick and imprisoned (vv.35-36).
- A helpful illustration is a tree and its fruit.
 - a) An apple tree that does not grow apples in season is dying or dead; an apple tree that grows apples in season is thriving and alive.
 - b) The apples don't give the tree life, but they are an absolutely necessary sign that the apple tree *has* life.

- So Jesus is saying that compassion for the poor is not the cause of salvation by grace, but it is an absolutely necessary sign that you *have* been saved by grace not by works.

There is a great deal of controversy over whether these are Christians (because of the word "*brethren*") or not.

- This does not matter much, since even if Jesus has in mind poor Christians in this passage, other passages (like the Good Samaritan parable) do not limit our concern to only believers.
- Here we see that anyone who experiences and understands the gospel of grace *will* care deeply for the poor. It is a sign that you are saved!
- A sensitive social conscience and a life poured out in deeds of mercy to the needy are the inevitable outcome and sign of true faith.
- By such deeds God can judge true love from lip service.

Though the Christian church must and will reach every class and group of people, Jesus had a clear emphasis on meeting the needs of social have-nots and outcasts.

- Our inclusion of them is a particularly clear sign that the gospel is not a religion of works for the able but an experience of free grace for sinners.
- The gospel is for the poor and the outcast (those who have often broken many of "the rules") because it offers hope for those who admit their weakness. The economic and social others and outcasts hear the gospel gladly.
- On the other hand, the gospel makes the non-poor finally see they are no better than the poor. It brings down the barrier of pride and self-righteousness.
- Σ This is why Jesus can so repeatedly say that love and respect for the poor is an inevitable and necessary sign that you have understood the gospel and experienced its grace.

BIBLE STUDY #3

Luke 10:25-37

1. How does Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan guard against and thwart what the law expert is trying to do?

What was Jesus' strategy? Why did he not say, "Receive me as your personal Savior" or something to that effect? Was he commending to the man the way of salvation by the performance of good deeds? Not at all. Instead, he had turned the tables on the law expert who *"wanted to justify himself"* (v.29) by his good works.

- Jesus is pointing him to the perfect righteousness the law demanded so that he could see he is powerless to fulfill it. He was seeking to convict the law expert of sin.
- Jesus says in effect: "My friend, I do take the law seriously, even more seriously than you do. See what it is really after. If you can do that, you will live. But if you see clearly, you will realize that the righteous requirement of the law must be fulfilled in some other way."
- Jesus is not telling us that we can be saved by imitating the Good Samaritan, even though he is clearly charging us to follow his pattern. Rather, Jesus is seeking to humble us with the love God requires, so we will be willing to receive the love God offers in the free salvation of Jesus.

It is very important to notice that when Jesus wants to illustrate a very basic principle, "love thy neighbor as thyself," he does not provide us with an example of mere sentimental love, but rather with an example of "holistic" ministry — providing very concrete financial and medical help.

- Jesus expects us to sacrificially meet the concrete human needs of our neighbors around us, whether they believe like we do or not (the Samaritan and the Jew were of two different religions.)
- Holistic ministry is, in Jesus' mind, not an option, but fundamental to what it means to love your neighbor as yourself.

2. On the basis of Jesus' teaching, who is your neighbor?

In effect, the law expert is saying to our Lord, "Come on, now. Be reasonable! You don't mean we have to love everyone like this, do you? Who is my neighbor?"

Jesus responds by making a Samaritan and a Jew the two main characters in his parable. They were extreme enemies, yet the Samaritan gives aid.

- It was extremely dangerous for the Samaritan to stop on a desolate road infested with robbers.
- It was very expensive for the Samaritan to give the innkeeper (essentially) a blank check to care for the man until he recovers.
- Jesus' answer is clear and devastating; it demolishes any limitations put on our mercy.
 - a) We are to help people of other races and religions, even from groups we have a historical reason to distrust.
 - b) We are to help even when it is risky and costly to us.
- In summary, we are to love in word and deed anyone you find in need, anyone you find in the road.

Many Christians may begin to ask if there is no limit at all to our helping of the needy. One question is: "Shouldn't we help members of our own family and of our own believing community first?"

- The answer is that it is certainly natural that our ministry involvement would be much deeper with family and usually with believers in the very same community (cf. Gal 6:10). But Jesus forbids us from being exclusive.
- The parable shows a priest and a Levite trying to get to the other side of the road from the needy man. They avoid walking directly over him physically, but, obviously, they are guilty of neglect — because he *is* in their road, even though they try to create the thin illusion that he is not!
- In the same way, everyone else in our city is "in our road." For example, 25% of NYC residents under age 18 live in poverty. They are "in our road." If we simply stay in our professional neighborhoods and we don't learn about or get involved in any way with their needs, we are as bad as the priest and the Levite in the parable.

Another question is: "Don't some people deserve it more than others? Aren't some people just irresponsible?"

- In general, we should make God's grace to us the model for our aid to people in need (cf. Luke 6:32-36 where we are told to "*do good*" to people just as God did good to us when we were "*wicked and ungrateful*").
- But sometimes within the context of gracious ministry, we will find patterns of irresponsible behavior that should not be subsidized with uncritical support.
 - a) Out of love we may withdraw some kinds of aid, but it is not revenge or self-defense that limits or changes our aid in such a case.

3. How does Jesus show us what the true motive should be for “doing justice and mercy” to our neighbor?

A remarkable twist that Jesus gives to his parable is when he puts the Jewish man in the story. Remember, Jesus is telling this story to a Jewish man.

- What if the parable had gone like this? “A Samaritan was beaten up and left half dead in a road. Then a man came along and saw him and had compassion and ministered to him.”
- The hearer would have said, “How stupid! I would never do such a thing! Samaritans hate us and we hate them. We’ve attacked them and they us! They are enemies. I’d just let him die!”
- But instead Jesus puts the hearer in the road as the victim. So the parable goes like this: “Imagine if you were beaten up and left half dead on the road. *What if your only hope was to get ministry from someone who not only did not owe you any ministry but who actually owed you the opposite. What if your only hope was to get free grace from someone who had every justification to trample you?*”
- Notice, when Jesus asked, “Who was the neighbor?” (Who is the hero of the story?) The law expert admits it was the Samaritan (v.37). The man realizes that, of course, he would want love from even an enemy.
- Then Jesus says: “*Go and do likewise.*” Jesus is saying, “If you drop your self-justifying spirit and see that you have been saved by grace, then your attitude toward others will be one of compassion.” That is the gospel.
- If you see that you have been saved graciously by someone who owes you the opposite, then you will look out into the world and do gospel-neighboring to others.
- After all, Jesus is the ultimate example of a Good Samaritan. We were dying but Jesus came into our world and, moved with compassion, he saved us, not just at the *risk* of his life, but at the *cost* of his life.
- Once we see that we have been given the ultimate, radical neighbor-love in Jesus, we can start to be good neighbors.

READINGS

Read and mark "?" - question to raise "!" - insight or helpful to you

Why do we not observe how the benevolence of Christians to strangers... has done the most to advance their cause? For it is disgraceful that... the impious Galileans [Christians] support not only *their* poor but *ours* as well, while everyone is able to see that our own people lack aid from us!

–Roman Emperor Julian (360 A.D.)¹

[During the great epidemic] most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead... The pagans behaved in the opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled even from their dearest, often throwing them into the roads before they were dead...

–Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria (260 A.D.)²

Raymond Fung, an evangelist in Hong Kong, tells of coming to know a textile worker in his early forties. At Fung's urging he came to church one Sunday at the cost of a day's wages. After the service they went to lunch. The worker said, "Well, the sermon hit me." It had been about sin. "What the preacher said was true of me — laziness, a violent temper, and addiction to cheap entertainment." Fung wrote, "I held my breath, trying to keep down my excitement. Had the message gotten through? "But nothing was said about my boss," he continued. "Nothing about how he employs child laborers, how he doesn't give us the legally required holidays, how he puts on false labels, how he forces us to do overtime..." My friend, the textile worker, agreed that he was a sinner, but he rejected the message of the church because he sensed its incompleteness... A gospel which ignores [the missing part] cannot possibly work among the overwhelming majority in Asia: the poor peasants and the workers.

– Harvie Conn³

"Christians should form communities that establish a voluntary consensus on minimum levels of income and resources below which people in the community should not be allowed to fall, and maximum levels of consumption and expenditure on self, above which people ought not be allowed to continue... Christians should focus on the creation of small local groups of a cross-section of major political, economic, and religious leaders of individual

communities, taking the needs of their local settings into their own hands, as an alternative both to the impersonal and often ruthless policies of multi-national corporations that dominate global capitalism and to the large interventionist and statist machines that often characterize western and particularly European governments."

– Craig Blomberg⁴

When the scriptural people of God seek redemption, they want something that goes far beyond personal salvation. In their eyes, God's redemption means justice is coming, the King of all the earth is coming! They want *"justice to roll down like waters"* (Amos 5:24). Do contemporary Christians bring the same passion to their hope of redemption as the people in the Bible did? When our earthly kingdoms have a good year, we don't necessarily long for [justice] to break in. But if you are a slave in Pharaoh's kingdom, or in a Mississippi cotton kingdom "your kingdom come" *means* "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

– Cornelius Plantinga⁵

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?**2. Consider the first two quotes from ancient writers. How does unselfish service to others and outsiders ultimately build up the Christian community?**

The quotes are cited by Rodney Stark, a historian and sociologist who studied the reasons why Christianity succeeded in the Roman Empire. The Greco-Roman world was struck by several huge plagues or epidemics. One occurred in 169 A.D. Another struck almost exactly 100 years later. We are not even sure of the nature of the disease, but the best estimates are that 1/3 of the populations died.⁶

- Stark traces out how the Christians' reaction to the plagues differed so widely from that of those who maintained faith in the traditional, polytheistic paganism.
- Because Christians had a much stronger assurance of salvation and a pattern of self-giving service in Christ's sacrifice on the cross, they did not abandon the sick nor flee the cities but cared for the sick, both Christian and pagan, though many died doing so.
- Since sick people who are given basic care (even without medication) recover at a much greater rate than those who were abandoned, many or most of the survivors owed their lives to the Christian church.
- The esteem of the church in the culture in general increased enormously, and many people listened to the gospel message and became converted. Stark concludes:

"If I am right, then in a sense paganism did indeed 'topple over dead' during these epidemics, falling victim to its relative inability to confront these crises socially or spiritually... My thesis – central doctrines of Christianity prompted and sustained attractive, liberating, and effective social relations and organizations."⁷

This is one of the most spectacular examples of a general principle, namely that evangelism — the declaration of the good news — must be through both word and deed.

- In the ministry of Christ, his preaching was always accompanied by his (miraculous) deeds that healed the sick, fed the hungry and raised the dead.
- The gospel is not simply the good news that we are spiritually forgiven by God's grace, but that the whole world will be renewed by God's grace. That is why deeds that alleviate suffering are so integral to the declaration of the gospel.
- Also, the gospel transforms hearts so that race, money, status and class are no longer idols, central things to our identity. The gospel, then, removes racism, greed, social exclusion.
- Then how better can we demonstrate the power of the gospel than through a community that shares its possessions and pours itself out for the poor?

In summary, in one sense, doing justice and mercy to our neighbor is a result of the gospel, because as converted people we live like this. But in another sense, doing justice and mercy to our neighbor is itself a gospel proclamation. It preaches the gospel through our actions.

3. Consider the quote by Harvie Conn. How could that church have altered its ministry so that it made more sense to the textile worker?

The textile worker recognized that the church viewed sin only in terms of individual private morality (e.g. drinking, sex, self-control) and not also in terms of unjust social relationships.

- For example, it isn't likely this particular church would preach on: "Woe to him who builds his palace by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor" (Jeremiah 22:13).
- This man needs to hear a gospel that explains how God's salvation not only brings forgiveness from sin and an individual life with God, but also a new heavens and a new earth, in which all brokenness is healed and justice reigns.
- He needs to see a church that ministers to the neighborhood not only in word (calling people to believe and be converted) but in deed (meeting human needs of their neighbors regardless of whether they believe or not).

It is only fair to mention that there are many churches that *do* preach against social injustice, but they are often very skittish about calling people to repent and be born again. Ironically, if you brought this textile worker to a church like that, he would probably not find the gospel life-changing there either, but for very different reasons!

Why do we tend to see this bifurcation? Why do so many conservative churches call people to be born again but seem to have little concern for justice and service in the world? Why do so many liberal churches care for social justice but cannot seem to bring people the powerful experience of conversion?

- The answer may be that both kinds of churches do not have as clear a grasp of the nature of the gospel of grace as they should.
 - a) Moralistic conservative people, who essentially think they are saved by being very good, tend to feel superior to people with fewer resources.
 - b) Many liberal churches, however, give people the impression that God simply loves everyone and will overlook everyone's flaws.
 - c) This, of course, does not produce the deep joy and wonder and changed lives that come from knowing that Jesus took the punishment we deserved.

4. Consider the quote from Craig Blomberg. This is an approach to doing justice that seeks to avoid both traditional western liberal and conservative approaches to justice. What do you think of it?

I put the quote here because I think it does serve to warn us about the simplistic Western political approaches to justice. The conservative approach believes that the free market is the most fair and just way have a free society, while the liberal approach sees the government as the main vehicle for just social arrangements. But the Bible does not support any existing economic system or even any current conventional analysis of poverty.

- On the one hand, the Bible strongly promotes hard work and frugality — qualities that virtually always lead to some degree of prosperity.
 - a) Also, it promotes and recognizes the importance of private ownership of property, and provides many safeguards against theft.
 - b) All these emphases have parallels in capitalistic and free enterprise systems.

- On the other hand, the Bible strongly promotes relative economic equality in society.
 - a) Hard work does not necessarily lead to material prosperity. Relative equality is sought partly through individual generosity, but not exclusively.
 - b) The gleaning laws and the Sabbath and Jubilee years were social structures that limited profit-taking and income production.
 - c) All these emphases have parallels in socialistic and centralized economies.

The prophetic denunciations against social injustice sound exactly like the analysis of Marxist and liberationist movements around the world (Amos 5:11-12; Ezek 22:29; Micah 2:2; Is 5:8).

- Biblical religion is hardly “the opiate of the people.” You won’t find Isaiah or Amos telling the poor to be content with misery and injustice!
- And yet Isaiah, for example has no hostility to wealth *per se*. It all depends on:
 - a) how it was acquired (Is. 3:14)
 - b) how much is spent on oneself vs. given away (5:8)
 - c) whether it is an alternative idol-security rather than the Lord (2:7-8)
- In addition, there is nothing in the Hebrew Bible that even suggests that violent revolution is the way to respond to unjust social arrangements.

Unlike many ancient cultures and some modern philosophies, the Bible does not see being poor as a curse from God, and yet poverty and material deprivation is in no way glamorized, seen as an intrinsic good, or something to just be accepted.

- Unlike many ancient cultures and some modern philosophies, the Bible does not see being wealthy as necessarily a blessing from God—it can be an enormous spiritual trap — and yet rich people are in no way demonized or seen as intrinsically oppressive.
- In the Bible, there is a *partial* alignment of poverty and spirituality, but never a direct equation of the two.
 - a) Poverty is not as likely to lead to pride and forgetting God as does riches.
 - b) Indeed, history shows that the gospel in general has thrived more among the common people than among the elites.
- But there is no direct equation. No one is saved or blessed simply because they are poor, nor is anyone condemned simply because they are rich.

The Biblical wisdom literature provides a remarkably balanced and nuanced view of the root causes of poverty. The Bible reveals at least three causal factors for poverty:

- Injustice and oppression – This refers to any unjust social condition or treatment that keeps a person in poverty. (Ps.82:1-8; Prov.14:31; Exod.22:21-27)
 - a) The main Hebrew word for the poor in the Old Testament means “the wrongfully oppressed.”
 - b) Examples of oppression in the Bible include social systems weighted in favor of the powerful (Lev.19:15), high-interest loans (Exod 22:25-27), and unjustly low wages (Eph 6:8-9).
- Circumstantial calamity – This refers to any natural disaster or circumstance that brings or keeps a person in poverty.
 - a) The Scripture is filled with examples such as famine (Gen.47), disabling injury, floods, fires, etc.
- Personal failure – Poverty can also be caused by one’s own personal sins and failures, such as indolence (Prov 6:6-7), and other problems with self-discipline (Prov 23:21).

These three factors are intertwined. They do not usually produce separate categories of poverty except in acute situations, such as a hurricane which leaves people homeless and in need of immediate short-term material care. Rather the three factors are usually inter-actively present.

- For example, a person raised in a racial/economic ghetto (factor #1) is likely to have poor health (factor #2) and also learn many habits that do not fit with material/social progress (factor #3).
- The Bible does not support the idea that the poor are simply undisciplined. A look at the list of current factors in world-poverty (above) shows how intertwined these factors are.

It is easy for promoters of one particular conventional human economic viewpoint to support their position from Scripture if they quote selectively from the Bible.

- Strong proponents of the free market try to write off the Sabbath/Jubilee principles as something strictly for Israel — not for us.
- This ignores how the prophets applied these basic themes in denouncing the surrounding nations and also the fact that the Bible did not only call for voluntary charity to meet the needs of the poor, but for social-structural supports for their needs.

- a) Strong proponents of socialist systems can look to the manna in the wilderness, the sharing of the early community (Acts 2 and 4), and the Jubilee.
- b) But it is difficult for them to account for how little the New Testament in particular calls for political solutions to systemic evil.
- The Bible cannot be used to give a free pass to any conventional human political-economic agenda. It sits in critical judgment on them all.

Ultimately, the Bible recognizes “*the depersonalization of both market forces and state-run societies*” (Blomberg, p.83). Instead of relying mainly on either market forces or centralized government to shape the socio-economic spectrum and distribution, the Bible relies on both radical personal generosity and involvement in local communities in order to be both generally accountable for one’s lifestyle level and specifically aware of the needs of others.

5. What are some of the practical ways that individual Christians and the church can go about doing justice and mercy in the city?

Direct Relief

This is direct aid to meet physical/material/social needs. The Good Samaritan provides physical protection, emergency medical treatment, and a rent subsidy (Luke 10:30-35).

- Common relief ministries are temporary shelter for the homeless, food and clothing services for people in dire need, medical services, crisis counseling, and so on.
- A more active form of relief is “advocacy,” in which people in need are given active assistance to get legal aid, help them find housing, and find other kinds of aid.
- In general, Christians are fairly open and active in these kinds of ministries. They are the most obvious, the most concrete and easy to define, provide the quickest emotional payoff, are the least expensive, and require the least effort and skill to carry out.

Community development

This moves beyond the simple development of individuals and looks at a neighborhood as a whole, as a series of systems. What is needed is to bring a person or community to self-sufficiency.

- Σ In the OT, when a slave’s debt was erased and he was released, God directed that his former master send him out with grain, tools, and resources for a new, self-sufficient economic life (Deut.15:13-14).
- “Economic development” includes education, job creation and training, housing development and ownership, capital investments in a community, and so on.

Traditional private charity and government bureaucracy tend to look on poor individuals as “cases,” people to be served. Both tend to simply put money into the hands of the needy.

- John Perkins wrote that simply putting welfare checks in the hands of the poor in small towns only ended up transferring capital into the accounts of the wealthy bankers and store owners on the other side of town.
- When Perkins helped people form farming co-ops, housing co-ops, and credit unions, they were able to develop their neighborhoods, keeping money, jobs and training in the neighborhood.
- Reweaving looks at a neighborhood systemically and aims to heal those broken systems and lift up the whole community.

Reform

Social reform moves beyond relief of immediate needs and dependency and seeks to change social conditions and structures which aggravate or cause that dependency.

- Job tells us that he not only clothed the naked, but he “*broke the fangs of the wicked and made them drop their victims*” (Job 29:17).
- The prophets denounced:
 - a) unfair wages (Jer.22:13)
 - b) corrupt business practices (Amos 8:2, 6)
 - c) legal systems weighted in favor of the rich and influential (Deut.24:17; Lev.19:15)
 - d) a system of lending capital that gouges the person of modest means (Lev.19:35-37; 25:37; Ex.22:25-27).
- Daniel calls a pagan government to account for its lack of mercy to the poor (Dan.4:27).
- This means that Christians should also work for a particular community to get better police protection, more just and fair banking practices, zoning practices, better laws, etc.

6. Who is your neighbor? Make a list of some people or groups of people who God has placed in your road and who you should be aiding. How can you be a neighbor to them?

¹ Quoted in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Harper, 1997), p.84.

² Quoted in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Harper, 1997), p.82.

³ Harvie Conn, *Bible Studies in Evangelization and Simple Lifestyle* (Paternoster, 1981) p.18.

⁴ Craig Blomberg, *Neither Riches nor Poverty* (Apollos, 1999) p. 26-27

⁵ Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World* (Eerdmans, 2002) p.103-104.

⁶ Stark, p. 76.

⁷ Stark, p. 94, 211.

⁸ John Perkins, *With Justice for All*, (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1982), pp. 146-166).

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to those who don't believe?

Study 6 | Course 2

How do people receive Christ and become children of God (John 1:12-13)?

KEY CONCEPT – EVANGELISM

Read and put a "?" if you have a question; put an "!" if an insight is helpful to you.

"Gospelizing" in the Book of Acts

- The word "*evangelizdomenoi*" means "to gospelize," to tell people the good news about what Jesus did for us. In the book of Acts:
 - a) Everyone does it. Not only the apostles (5:24) but every Christian (8:4) did evangelism — communicated the gospel. They did this endlessly (5:24).
 - b) Everyone does it differently. The gospel is not presented identically in every setting, but rather is adapted to different audiences. The gospel can be put in different nutshells. See the following passages:
 - i. 2 Corinthians 5:19-21
 - ii. Mark 1:14-15
 - iii. Romans 1:1-4, 16-17
 - iv. 1 Corinthians 15:1-5
 - v. Philippians 2:5-11
 - vi. 1 Timothy 2:5-6
 - vii. Titus 3:4-7
 - viii. 1 John 1:8-2:1
 - ix. 1 John 3:8b
 - x. 1 John 5:1
 - c) Yet the gospel has a definite content. Luke refers to *the* word, *the* message, *the* gospel (cf. 11:19; 13:26; 15:7; 20:32). When Cornelius' household "*received*" the message (11:1), the Holy Spirit fell on them (10:44). The gospel is a set of core truths which, when understood and received, converts and saves us.

The Gospel in the Book of Acts

- When the gospel is summed up in one or two words, it is usually said to be about:
 - a) salvation

- b) grace
- c) the Lord Jesus Christ
- It is also referred to as the:
 - a) "gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24)
 - b) "the word of his grace" (Acts 20:32)
 - c) "the good news about the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:20)
 - d) "the message of his grace" (Acts 14:3)
- Thus we see the essential message is that through Jesus we are saved by grace.
- Each gospel presentation in Acts has several core components. John Stott calls them the gospel *"events, witnesses, promises, conditions."*¹
 - a) The gospel events – Jesus' death, resurrection and return to renew the world in history
 - b) The gospel promises – pardon for past, freedom for present, hope for the future
 - c) The gospel witnesses – Biblical writers and eyewitnesses to the resurrection
 - d) The gospel conditions – requirements of repentance and faith, not good works

Household "Gospel" in the Book of Acts

- In Acts the main method of evangelism is not a program or a well-oiled scheme. Rather it is, literally, "household gospelizing" (10:2, 24; 16:15, 31; 18:8).
- "Oikos" is the Greek word for "household," but it means far more than the nuclear family. A Greco-Roman household contained not only several generations of the same family, but also servants, their families, friends and business associates.
- An *oikos* is a web of common:
 - a) kinship affinity (relatives)
 - b) geographical affinity (neighbors)
 - c) vocational affinity (co-workers)
 - d) associational affinities (special interest colleagues)
 - e) just plain friends

- *Oikos* evangelism is the most personally demanding of all methods, because it requires that you be a changed person, transformed by the gospel.
 - a) Your life is the main attractor and evidence for the truth of the faith.
 - b) In *oikos* evangelism, your life is under observation by those who don't believe. You can't run and you can't hide!
 - c) If your character is flawed (or even unexceptional), you won't be effective.
- *Oikos* evangelism is non-manipulative.
 - a) The person outside the faith is "in the driver's seat." He or she gets to raise questions and determines the speed of the process.
 - b) There is no canned presentation. He or she gets a very good view of how Christianity works in a life.
- In short, all the advantages of *oikos* evangelism are for the person who does not believe, not for the believer. No wonder it is so effective!

1. Which statements struck you and why?

2. Discuss the concept of "household gospeling." a) What is necessary for this to be effective? b) What practical things could you do to be better at this?

Essentially, the pre-requisite is that the gospel changes us. We don't have to be perfect, but unaccountably (apart from the gospel) different. Until that happens, we will be ineffective witnesses.

- The joyful effects of the gospel in our own lives must give us an enormous energy for witness. How can we keep our mouths closed about such a wonder? If that energy is not there, we must repent and seek God until it flows.
- The humbling nature of the gospel must lead us to approach non-believers without superiority and with lots of respect.
 - a) Since we are saved only by God's grace and not our goodness, we expect to often find wisdom and compassion in non-Christians which

at many points may exceed ours. Is that humility and respect there? If not, we will be ineffective.

- The love experience of the gospel must remove from us the fear of others' disapproval.
 - a) Is this boldness increasing? If not, we must repent and reflect on the gospel and God's acceptance with us until this fear diminishes.

These three character qualities are absolutely necessary. Put another way, if you are not effective in reaching others for Christ, it is because of a lack of joy, a lack of humility and gentleness, or a lack of boldness. Which is it?

If the gospel fills us with joy, humility and confidence, then we will not treat non-Christians as "evangelism cases" — people that we relate to, talk to, and care for only in order to win them over to our side. This objectifies and dehumanizes them, and, ironically, it is unwinsome.

- a) We should not love people in order to evangelize them. Rather, we should evangelize them in order to love them.
- b) The more these dynamics are present in our lives the more we will draw in new people like a magnet (Acts 2:47).

Here are some practical steps.

STEP 1

This is the most practical possible step. Make a list of four people that you will begin to pray for that fit these qualifications:

- a) We hit it off well together.
- b) We share some common interests.
- c) This person would probably enjoy our church or small group. Or at least a book or a tape.
- d) This person is open to me.

Make the list: _____

Now begin praying for them, and begin thinking of ways to strengthen your relationship with them. Note: they should probably live in the same place you live.

STEP 2

This step strengthens the relationships. Do more listening and serving. But the most important thing to remember is that you should be serving them, *not* simply to convert them, but just to love them. We must never love someone in order to evangelize them. We only evangelize someone because we love them.

STEP 3

This step talks about issues of faith, substance, and spirit. Remember, in this kind of evangelism, things should be natural. You would be glad and delighted if the person you are showing love to wants to talk about the gospel, but you never force it.

- It is always best when you only “speak when spoken to,” when you speak about your faith because you are asked. However, it is sometimes good to encourage a conversation with some questions.
 - a) It is critical to remember that these questions are only appropriate when a certain level of trust is reached! Some people have a warm gregarious temperament, and such questions are appropriate almost right away. Others need time.
 - b) If you ask the question and it is clearly too early, back off!
- Here are less direct questions, getting below the surface to world-view level convictions:
 - a) What do you like about your job/not like? [Eventually] What do you think a person really needs to be fulfilled?
 - b) How do you like living in the city (or your community)? [Eventually] What do you think is the real problem in society today?
 - c) Did you read about (some moral dilemma)? [Eventually] How do you decide what is right and wrong — what is your basis?
- Here are direct question for the person quite willing to talk about faith issues:
 - a) Where are you with Christianity? Would you say you are — [Put down the following four words on paper:]
 - i. Dissatisfied with it – Do you find Christianity, or aspects of it, very unacceptable, distasteful? What is your trouble with Christianity? What’s your beef?
 - ii. Indifferent to it – Do you find Christianity simply unappetizing or not very relevant to you? Where does it fail to challenge you? What would be relevant to you?

iii. Cautiously interested – Are you in a learning mode and gathering information? What still does not make sense to you? What doesn't seem credible to you?

iv. Actively seeking – Are you really searching for Christ? If so, what is blocking you or holding you back? Is there anything about becoming or being a Christian that worries you?

Note: You must listen very carefully and very openly. Write down each problem and then get a willingness to meet again and address the questions. The best way to do so is to give the person some reading material or a tape and then get back with them again.

STEP 4

This step discerns a theme of relevance for sharing the gospel with your friend or relative. On the basis of listening and serving, recognize which avenue to the heart would be the best way to talk about the need for, and the provision of, God's grace. Some possible themes:

- Relationship – Would you like to know God personally?
 - a) God designed us to know him personally. Our sin and guilt are barriers to that relationship. Christ's death opens the way, etc.
- Fulfillment – Why don't we find we are really getting satisfaction out of life?
 - a) God designed us for himself. Our sin leads us to worship the wrong things, which leads to lack of self-worth and emptiness. Through Christ's work we can know God's total love and presence which alone fulfills. See Lewis' Mere Christianity on "Hope."
- Justice – What hope do we have for justice and triumph of good?
 - a) If there is no judge, than human rights are an illusion and so is the prospect of justice. But if there is a judge, then there is hope for the world, but it makes us anxious and guilty. Christ is the judge who was judged, so he can be both judge and savior of those who believe. See Thomas V. Morris' chapter "The Folly of Indifference" in his book on Pascal's Pensees, Making Sense of it All.
- Meaning – What are you living for, why try to achieve it?
 - a) Analyze your life's problems in line with S.Covey's outline under his second "habit." What is your life centered on? Can you understand your problems in terms of an inadequate center?
- Strength/power – How do you get the energy to face your problems?
- Guilt – How do you deal with your conscience?
- Death – How do you face it?

Step 5

This step realizes and watches the process of inquiry and spiritual journey. In a Christianized society, people often make sudden and thorough commitments to Christ. But in our much more secular environment, people tend to become Christians in stages.

- Awareness – They learn what Christianity actually teaches and claims. Negative stereotypes and prejudices must be cut through.
a) Transition: “This makes some sense.”
- Relevance – They see how Christianity might be relevant to them, leading to exploration.
a) Transition: “It would be great if it were true.”
- Credibility – They come to see that there is a rational basis for Christianity and see the inconsistencies in their own beliefs.
a) Transition: “This probably is true.”
- Free Trial – They try Christianity on, talking like they were Christians and defending it to others.
- Commitment – They cross the line.
- Reinforcement – They typically experience period of uncertainty and ambiguity about what happened to them, seeking confirmation.

Note: These stages are really a series of mini-decisions. For example:

- Awareness decisions
 - a) “She’s OK; she’s very cheerful and accepting.”
 - b) “She’s religious, but surprisingly open-minded.”
 - c) “You can be a Christian and be intelligent!”
 - d) “The Bible isn’t so hard to understand after all.”
 - e) “A lot of things the Bible says really fit me.”
 - f) “I see the difference between Christianity and just being moral.”
- Relevance decisions
 - a) “There must be some advantages to being a firm Christian.”
 - b) “An awful lot of very normal people really like this church!”
 - c) “It would be nice if I could believe like she does, it would help.”
 - d) “Jesus seems to be the key: I wonder who he was.”

- Credibility decisions
 - a) "I see the Bible is historically reliable."
 - b) "You really can't use science to disprove the supernatural."
 - c) "There really were eyewitnesses to the resurrection."
 - d) "Jesus really is God."
 - e) "I see now why Jesus had to die — it is the only way."
- Commitment decisions
 - a) "I am a sinner."
 - b) "I need a Savior."
 - c) "Though there are lots of costs, I really must do what He says."
 - d) "I will believe in him and live for him."

3. The gospel is presented differently to different audiences. a) How would you explain the gospel to a person from a traditional, moral society? b) How would you explain the gospel to a person from a secular, relativistic society?

A SPIRITUAL DIVIDE

The difference between people we meet today is how and why they see their **need** for the gospel.

- People from traditional cultures and mindsets tend to have a belief in God, a strong sense of moral absolutes and the obligation to be "good."
 - a) This may be a sense of obligation to their family, their people, a general moral ethic, a tradition, a religion (including Christianity), and so on.
 - b) These folk respond well to a presentation that says, "Sin keeps you from ever being as good as you need to be, and it therefore separates you from God."
- People with more secular and post-modern mindsets tend to have only a vague belief in the divine if at all and have little sense of moral absolutes.
 - a) Therefore, they feel the obligation to be free and true to their own selves and dreams.
 - b) These folk respond well to a presentation that says, "Sin keeps you from being free as you need to be, and therefore it enslaves and de-humanizes you."

The Gospel as Forgiveness

- The way to show the traditional persons their need for the gospel is by saying, "Your sin makes you imperfect! You can't be righteous enough. You may think you are looking to God for salvation, but you are really trying to save yourself."
- Imperfection is the biggest nightmare of the "duty-worshipper." We say "you are not living up!" so they are threatened.
- This approach creates anxiety and relieves it by showing how Christ forgives us, covers our sins, and gives us a righteous record.

The Gospel as Freedom

- The way to show more deeply secularized persons their need for the gospel is by saying, "Your sin makes you a slave! You are actually being religious, though you don't know it — trying to be righteous in a destructive way."
- Slavery is the biggest nightmare of the "choice — worshipper." We say, "You are not really in control" so they are threatened.
- This approach creates anxiety and relieves it by showing how Christ redeems us, literally ransoms us from slavery, liberates us.

Each approach is Biblical, of course. The book of Romans tends to give the first approach (though see Romans 6-8). The book of Galatians tends to give the second approach. Paul insists that his pagan converts, if they go with the "Judaizers," will only be going back into bondage. Paul equates religious moralism and pagan hedonism as being essentially the same thing. Each of the two approaches assumes a piece of common grace, a certain insight about truth.

- The older cultures saw duty as the key of salvation. The gospel says: "But you AREN'T living up to your duty unless you come to God through the finished work of X."
- The newer culture sees freedom as the key of salvation. The gospel says: "But you AREN'T free unless you come to God through the finished work of X."
- Now in both situations, we must be careful.
 - a) The first approach to the gospel must be careful not to let the hearers think that the gospel is just a way to get a free pardon.
 - b) The second approach to the gospel must be careful not to let the hearers think that the gospel is just a way to get personal fulfillment.
- In former times, when churches were so filled with people who were traditional, we had to avoid preaching any "salvation through duty." Now churches are so filled with people who are therapized to seek fulfillment, we must avoid preaching any "salvation through discovery."

A GOSPEL FOR THE MORE TRADITIONAL*The condition that requires salvation*

- Sin is us substituting ourselves for God, putting ourselves where only God deserves to be — in charge of our lives.
- Because of our pride and self-centeredness, we will never live up to even the golden rule, the most basic, unavoidable rule of right behavior.

The Lord who provides salvation

- Salvation is God substituting himself for us, putting himself where only we deserve to be — dying on the cross.
- Jesus lived the life we should have lived and then died the death we should have died, in our place, paying the penalty for our sin.

The response that receives salvation

- To become a Christian is, first, to admit the problem: that you have been substituting yourself for God *either* by religion (trying to be your own savior by earning your salvation through morality) *or* by irreligion (trying to be your own lord by creating your own morality).
- And second, to accept the solution: asking God to accept you for Jesus' sake and know that you are loved and accepted because of his record, not yours.
- The gospel is not that we develop a righteousness and give it to Him, so that then he owes us, but that he developed a righteousness through Jesus Christ and gives it to us, so that then we owe him.

A GOSPEL FOR THE MORE SECULAR*The condition that requires salvation*

- We were built to live for God and build our lives on him, but instead we live for such things as love, work, achievement and morality to give us meaning and worth.
- Thus every person, religious or not, is building his or her identity on something or some things besides God.
- Σ These things enslave us with guilt (if we fail to attain them) or anger (if someone blocks them from us) or fear (if they are threatened) or driven-ness (since we must have them).
- As a fish is only free in water, we are only free when serving Jesus supremely. He is the only source of meaning — life-center — that will satisfy us totally if we get him, and will forgive us if we fail him.

The Lord who provides salvation

- Unless we are meaningless accidents, we are created. And if we were created, we owe God absolutely everything.
- Instead, we live as if we belonged to ourselves and created ourselves. This is quite a betrayal.
- Anyone who has been truly wronged knows that there is an emotional debt that either you can make the perpetrator pay or that you can absorb yourself.
- Forgiveness always entails great pain. On the cross we see God forgiving us for our betrayal of him — by suffering and paying the debt himself.

The response that receives salvation

- CHANGE NOT THE AMOUNT BUT THE LEVEL OF YOUR REPENTANCE.
 - a) You have to “repent,” but the repentance that receives Christ is not so much being sorry for specific sins (though it is that), but it is admitting that your main sin has been is your efforts of “self-salvation.”
 - b) Repent not just for doing wrong, but even for the reason you have done right things.
- CHANGE NOT THE AMOUNT, BUT THE OBJECT OF YOUR FAITH.
 - a) You have to “believe,” but the belief that receives Christ is not so much subscribing to a set of doctrines about Christ (though it is that), but transferring your trust from your own works and record to Christ’s work and record.
 - b) Read or recite John 1:12-13.
 - c) Ask directly for a new family relationship with God, for Jesus’ sake.

BIBLE STUDY

Acts 16:11-40

1. vv.11-15. What are we told about Lydia? How did she come to faith? What signs are we given that Lydia was truly converted?

Note: *"A place of prayer... on the Sabbath"* indicates that these were Jews and God-fearing Gentiles who met weekly for worship, but that there were not enough of them to have an official synagogue. What Paul and his friends went to was, essentially, a synagogue service of teaching/discussion of God's Word.

Lydia was a businesswoman, a dealer in dyed cloth.

- She came from Thyatira, a place that was well known for its dyes (an ancient inscription in that place refers to a guild or association of dyers that was centered in that city).
- Lydia was either a dyer herself or a trader who used her links to her home city.

Lydia was a *"worshipper of God"* (v.14).

- She was already a convert to Judaism, who respected the Old Testament Scriptures and who worshipped the one true God.

Here in v.14 we have a classic statement of how people become Christians. *"Whose heart the Lord opened to give heed to the things that were spoken by Paul"* (ASV).

- On the one hand, God did not call Lydia directly, but through the preaching of the gospel by a human being.
- On the other hand, neither Paul's words nor Lydia's heart were capable in themselves of making any connection. Her response was possible because her heart was opened by God.
- Without that intervention, the listeners' hearts are closed, and the speaker's words are ineffective against that closedness. This fits in with Acts 13:44, where we are told that *"as many as were appointed to eternal life believed"* — not that *"as many as believed were appointed to eternal life."*
- It is the same here. Lydia's heart was not opened because she responded to the gospel; she responded to the gospel because her heart was opened.

The evidence that she was converted was at least threefold.

- She believed the gospel – “responded to Paul’s message” (v.14). In other words, she found the gospel coherent, attractive and convicting.
- She brought her family to the Lord. We are told she was baptized together with “the members of her household” (v.15).
 - a) The word *oikos* (household), we have seen, was a far-reaching word. It certainly meant her servants and her children — and the word also was used to indicate infants. If Lydia was married, it would have included her husband.
 - b) It may mean, though we cannot be sure, that she led other adult members of her household network to Christ as well.
- She made her home a ministry center. She invited the missionary team to live and operate out of her home. Doubtless it became a house church.
 - a) Once the heart is opened to God, your resources — your wallet, possessions, and home — are open as well.

2. vv.16-19. Contrast the pre-Christian spiritual state of the slave-girl with that of Lydia. Contrast the ministry of Paul to Lydia with that of Paul to the slave-girl. What is Luke trying to show us?

The contrast between the very mainstream figure of Lydia and the extremely exotic figure of the slave girl could not be greater. *“They differ so much from one another that [Luke] might be thought to have deliberately selected them in order to show how the saving name of Jesus proved its power in the lives of the most diverse types”* (Bruce, p.332).

Who was the girl? The NIV says she “*had a spirit by which she predicted the future*” (v.16). But the Greek says, literally that she “*had the spirit of python.*”

- In ancient Greek culture, a “pythoness” was a person who was believed to be possessed by the spirit of the python which guarded the mythic temple of Apollo and the Delphic oracle.
- The Greeks called these people “ventriloquists” (see Bruce, p.332 n.35), because they uncontrollably made clairvoyant predictions and proclaimed prophecies and gnomic utterances in all sorts of strange and foreign voices.
- Since the society of that time considered them inspired by Apollo and the python, many people came to the masters of this slave girl and paid money to ask her questions and have her make statements to them (“*she earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling*” v.16).

- Instead of having any pity on her for her bizarre behavior and obvious torment, they used her to make money.

So the contrast between Lydia and the slave girl cannot be greater.

- Lydia is a very respectable business woman, a pillar of the community; but the slave girl is scarcely a member of human community at all. She is almost literally a piece of property in a freak show.
- Lydia is a very moral and religious person who loved and knew the Bible; but the slave girl is completely alienated from any moral sense or knowledge of the truth.
- Lydia has much to be proud of; but the slave girl is a completely marginalized non-person, without a shred of dignity.
- Lydia has a moderate amount of power, both social and economic; but the slave girl is completely powerless, without even any self-control.
- All this is to show, as F.F. Bruce said, that the gospel can address and transform absolutely any condition. It is not only for the cultured and the able, nor is it only for the helpless and the broken.
- The contrast extends to how Paul ministers to the two women. When Luke calls her a "pythoness," he is not buying in to all the superstition and mythology, but he recognizes her as being a demon possessed young girl, controlled by unseen masters and exploited by her human masters.
- With one stroke he breaks the power that both have over her. How?
 - a) Over a period of *days* we are told that Paul grew "*troubled*" (v.18), which probably means that he became deeply grieved and distressed for her.
 - b) Finally, he publicly challenged the demonic spirit in the name of Jesus, and it came out of her.
 - c) Even her masters saw that she had new peace of mind. She had become calm and "normal" and they were howling mad!
- Lydia had come to Christ very quietly, but the slave girl very noisily!
- Lydia had come to Christ in a Bible study, stressing how Christ fulfills the law and prophets; but the slave girl was brought to Christ through a power encounter.
- To Lydia, Jesus was presented as the Messiah of Israel; to the slave girl, he was presented as the bondage-breaker, the all-powerful liberator.

What does this show us? The fact is that that Jesus is also the liberator for Lydia, and he is also the fulfiller of the law for the slave-girl — but in their initial encounter, each was confronted with a different feature of Jesus' manifold glory. So we need to be flexible when presenting the gospel. We must consider how different a person's problems, needs and issues can be!

Again we see that the gospel is as much for moral and "nice" people as it is for broken and addicted people.

3. vv.19-40. a) What led the jailer to believe? b) Compare his pre-Christian spiritual condition with that of Lydia and the Pythoness. c) How does Paul lead him to Christ? d) Why does Paul insist on a public apology in v.37?

We have to gloss over the way that Paul and Silas found themselves in jail. The owners of the slave-girl were not interested at all in the fact that she was now liberated and at peace — they were just furious that their income from her was gone. They cleverly hid their true anger with Paul and Silas, and tried to arouse the populace's racist attitudes by talking about these "Jews" who were polluting the culture of "us Romans." Without any trial, the crowd began to beat them and the magistrates imprisoned them. Now follows the memorable account of the conversion of the Philippian jailer.

What led the jailer to believe?

- First, he must have been astounded that Paul and Silas, who would have been bruised and bleeding, were *praying and singing hymns to God at midnight* (v.25). (It is hard not to think about Elihu's assertion that God gives us "songs in the night" Job 35:10!)
- a) The Philippian jailer and all the prisoners (v.25) had a look at the way Christianity fortifies you to face the worst that life can send.
- Second, when the earthquake came, giving all the prisoners access to freedom, the jailer was shocked to find that Paul and Silas had restrained all the inmates. By doing so, they had saved his life.
- a) This act of service to him (and respect for the law) humbled him, and the view of their influence and leadership (over the prisoners) probably awed him as well. This led him to ask emotionally, "*What must I do to be saved?*"
- In summary, he was impressed with the character of Christians, and he was dramatically helped in a crisis by Christians.

Compare his pre-Christian spiritual condition

- The jailer was "in the middle" between the conditions of Lydia and the Pythoness.
- a) He was not a moral, Bible honoring person, but neither was he a person completely out of control and broken.

- b) Unlike Lydia, he did not come calmly and gently during a Bible study, knowing what he was doing. But neither was he confronted and pursued by the evangelists in a forceful way.
- It is doubtful that he knew exactly what he was asking for when he said *"What must I do to be saved?"* He could not have known very much about what "salvation" would mean (unlike Lydia).
- He was probably just deeply aware that these men had a power and character and peace that he completely lacked. He was probably asking: "What do you have that makes you so at peace? Without it, I can't survive!"

How Paul led him to Christ

- First, Paul summarized the gospel: *"Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your family"* v.31. (Paul does not mean that "if you believe, your family will be automatically saved," but "this is the way to be saved — not just for you, but for your whole family.") But this summary was not enough.
- Second, Paul *"then... spoke the word of the Lord to him..."* (v.32). This shows that a brief gospel summary is not enough. People need to know what "believe" means, who "the Lord Jesus Christ" really is.
- Third, Paul rather quickly insisted that this gospel instruction be done in a group! He asked the jailer to gather the family around him to hear the word. This is wise in so many ways.
 - a) If an individual converts without the rest of his/her family, it can lead to division and alienation within the family.
 - b) Also, it shows how people tend to come to Christ through natural relationship networks, not "cold turkey" evangelism.
- Fourth, they were baptized when they believed (v.33). Some other places in the New Testament indicate that the early church gave extensive instruction to converts before they were baptized — so no particular amount of time between belief and baptism can be said to be the "Biblical" one. It depended on the situation.
 - a) Here Paul thought it important to let the people show their commitment to Christ in a concrete way very quickly. He leads them to closure, to "nailing it down." The result was wonderful joy (v.34).

The public apology

- It is not like Paul to be a self-promoter or to try to humiliate an opponent. Rather, *"this may have been extremely important for the freedom of the church he left behind"* (Triton, quoted by Stott, p.268).

- It was illegal to beat and imprison a Roman citizen without a trial. The magistrates knew now that Paul could appeal and create great trouble for them. By showing them this power he had over them, he was probably guaranteeing that his new church at Philippi would not be harassed.

4. Surely there were many conversions at Philippi. Why do you think Luke chose three such disparate people to profile for readers?

As John Stott says, *"Racially, socially, and psychologically they were worlds apart. Yet all three were changed by the same gospel and were welcomed into the same church."* (p.268). Review the differences.

- Racially — Lydia was a foreigner from Asia Minor, the slave-girl probably native Greek, and the jailer probably a Roman.
- Socially — Lydia was probably wealthy, the slave girl was a non-person socially, and the jailer was a middle class civil servant.
- Psychologically/mentally — Lydia was very wise and "pulled together," the slave-girl was deranged, while the jailer was probably a retired soldier, a common "working man."
- Felt needs:
 - a) Lydia's was probably more intellectual, responding to a general dissatisfaction with her view of the world and meaning in life. After all, she had everything else — self-control, success, a family. And Paul responded with a gentle discussion.
 - b) The slave-girl's need was deep and emotional. She was an addict with a completely broken life. And Paul responded with a word of command.
 - c) The jailer's sense of need was more acute than Lydia's and yet less so than the slave-girl's. He seemed to realize that "he didn't have what it takes" to face life. And Paul responded to this man of action (probably not an intellectual) with a fairly direct presentation and then he called him to a decision.

What is most surprising (and maybe very deliberate) is that these three persons were the three persons that were the very opposite of what a Jewish male like Paul would have been. In fact, every Jewish head of a house would rise in the morning and thank God (in a very typical and common prayer) that he was not born a Gentile, a woman, or a slave. Yet here were these three kinds of people all now united with Paul as brothers and sisters, and now the new foundation of the new church! It is noteworthy that Luke ends the story referring to all the new Christians as their *"brethren"* (v.40). How important it is to show the world that, through Christ, people can become brothers and sisters who, outside the church, cannot even get along.

READINGS

Read and put a "?" if you have a question; put an "!" if an insight is helpful to you.

The famous story of the blind men and the elephant is often quoted to neutralize the affirmation of the great religions. None of the blind men are able to grasp the full reality of the elephant, and in the same way, no religion can get a hold of more than part of the truth. But the story can only be told from the point of view of [one] who is not blind and who sees the whole elephant. The story (then) is told by one who claims to see and know the full truth which all the world's religions are groping after... There is an appearance of humility in the protestation that the truth is much greater than any one of us can grasp, but if this is used to invalidate all claims to discern the truth, it is in fact an arrogant claim to a kind of knowledge which is superior to [all others]... We have to ask: "What is the vantage ground from which you claim to be able to relativize all the absolute claims which these different scriptures make?"²

Becky meets LS (law student) on the bus and introduces the subject of heroes.

LS I guess Karl Marx is my hero. [Editor's note: Remember, this was 1979!]

BP What makes him your hero?

LS I think his ideas were great — they haven't always been carried out rightly.

BP But what exactly is so great about his ideas?

LS He's my hero because of his passionate regard for the oppressed.

BP I agree with that concern, but I know Marx holds no belief in God.

LS Yes, he sees the universe as godless, and we have meaning only in a corporate sense of class. We are not significant as individuals.

BP Yet you admire his regard for the oppressed even though they are ultimately insignificant. It seems strange to value people so highly when they are random products of a universe. Why not manipulate them as you please?

LS I couldn't do that. I guess if my natural response is to feel [individuals] are significant then I need a philosophic system that says the same things. But I believe we are basically good. If we could just live in a classless society, we would be free of the things that weigh us down.

BP Listen, I know a guy who is one of the worst racists. If he lived with you for 50 years in your classless society, he would still think "nigger." How can Marx wipe out the ugliness and hatred of a bigot?

LS [Eyes glaring] We've been trying to change that for centuries. And all the rules and laws in the world can't... make you love me.

BP Look, you tell me you know individuals are significant, and you need a system that says so. Now you're saying that the real evil comes from within us. For external rules or laws can curb but cannot transform behavior. So you need a system that regards evil as internal and a solution that transforms radically not curbs superficially. Right? Well, that's the very kind of system I've found.

LS Hey, what kind of revolution are you into?

(Pippert) When I told her I followed Jesus, I think I had better not quote her exact words of response! But after she recovered from her shock she asked me how I knew it was true. For the rest of our trip she asked me to defend Christianity. She listened intently, and when we arrived she said, "I'd like to get together again... When I went home this weekend my younger sister came to see me, too. Then she told me she'd become a Christian. I told her it was anti-intellectual and unsubstantiated. In a furor, I packed my bags, walked out saying I never wanted to discuss it again. And here I got on a bus and sat down next to you." We do indeed worship the Hound of Heaven.³

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?**2. Modern people assume the story of the blind men and the elephant is true and therefore it is never right to try to convert someone else. How does this quote undermine that objection to evangelism?**

This is a common sense position in contemporary society today — that no one knows all the truth about spiritual reality and therefore it is unethical to try to evangelize or convert someone from his or her religious position to yours. But Newbigin's quote shows the fallacy of this position.

"No one could possibly know the truth."

If you say, "I don't know which religion is true" — that can be a statement of humility.

- But if instead you can say, "No one can know which religion is right," then you are making a very dogmatic assertion, presuming quite a bit of the very religious knowledge/certainty you just doubted that anyone had.
- If you go further and say, "No one has more truth than anyone else," you are assuming an enormous amount of religious knowledge yourself. How could you possibly know that?
- And the inconsistency is rather rank. You can't say, "No one religious view has more truth than any other" without assuming the amount of knowledge you just said can't exist.
- You are doing to me the very same thing you forbid me to do! You're putting forth a religious view and claiming it is better than mine! Why can you do what you forbid Christians to do?

"Lots of good and intelligent people differ with you, so it is arrogant to claim that your religious beliefs are more right than others."

Most damaging of all to this objection is how it boomerangs on the user because you are intellectually obliged to apply it to *any* assertions about religious or spiritual reality, not just those that are institutionally or formally religious.

- If “all insistent assertions about spiritual reality are arrogant” then that very statement would be arrogant and thus self-destructive. This objection is *also* a religious belief, and it is being put forward for adoption over traditional religious beliefs, and most people in the world don’t believe it, and plenty of those people are good and intelligent.
- Why isn’t it arrogant and “immoral” for the objector to hold his or her beliefs? The person who says, “It is arrogant to persuade others to your religious position — stop it” is actually doing the very thing he is forbidding — at the moment he is forbidding it. The Arrogance Objection de-constructs itself.

3. How does Becky Pippert uncover a theme of relevance for the law student? How does she uncover her belief position? How does she show the contradiction between the two? How does she adapt her gospel presentation to the theme of relevance?

All of life has a religious character. Everyone has implicit faith commitments. Their ways of decision-making, their making of moral choices, setting priorities, solving problems — all are based on values which are embraced by faith. An important part of sharing our faith in Christ is the ability to reveal these assumptions for what they are — religious beliefs and doctrines.

What is a religious doctrine? It is:

- a) a belief about the nature of things that is embraced by faith — it can’t be proven
- b) a belief you commit yourself to, betting your life that it is true
- c) a belief you promote to others as superior to other beliefs

Now let’s take a typical statement by a skeptical person: *“Nobody can really be sure if there is a God or whose religion is right. So you should not try to convert people from their religion to yours.”* The person speaking does not think of themselves as propagating religious doctrine — but they are!

- First, they assume that no one can be sure about religious truth or about God. That itself is a very definite post-Enlightenment view of reality, and it certainly can’t be proven! It is a tenet of faith.
 - Second, they are betting their whole eternal destiny on their belief that there is no God or (if there is) doctrinal beliefs make no difference to life after death.
 - Third, when they tell you “Don’t try to convert others,” they are promoting their relativistic view of spiritual truth as superior to your Christian view of truth. That is, of course, inconsistent.
- a) When a Christian or a Muslim tries to convert someone, they are consistent with their own principles.

b) But if someone says, "You shouldn't think your take on spiritual reality is better than that of anyone else," they are doing the very thing they are forbidding.

c) They are saying that their relativistic take on spiritual reality is better than the alternatives.

- So the person who thinks they are not being religious or dogmatic must be shown that they are making faith-statements that are stuffed full of religiously doctrinal assumptions. Until they see they already have a faith that is itself full of difficulties and inconsistencies, they will never be able to give Christianity a fair hearing.

In this reading, Becky Pippert does a great job of showing the law student her tacit belief positions.

- She draws out the student's main theme of relevance — her main hope and motivation in life, a passion for justice for the oppressed.
- She brings out that the law student is also secular — skeptical about the existence of God.
- Then, with the question, "If we are just products of chance cosmic forces and therefore insignificant — why not exploit people?" Becky reveals that the student's naturalistic beliefs about the universe really can't support her passion for justice.
- a) The student falls back on a very general belief that individual human beings basically have a good nature, but Becky questions that by reference to how deep-seated racism is in the human heart.
- Finally, Becky presents Jesus as a victim of injustice who came to do something about it.

We learn here three basic steps in sharing our faith:

First, uncover "belief positions" and "themes of relevance."

We can do this by asking the questions:

- ***What is really wrong with the world? With people? With society?*** ("What I think is basically wrong with people... What I think is the reason most people are unhappy...")
- ***What will put it right?*** ("I think that the way to determine right and wrong is..." "I think what would ultimately fulfill me...")

Second, show tension between their theme and their belief.

- The fundamental way to arouse interest in the gospel is to show a person the tension between their themes of relevance (which reveal

their primal understanding that there is a God) and their belief position (which expresses their conscious denial of the Biblical God).

Third, relate a brief presentation of the gospel to their theme.

- Once you have pointed out some tension between the person's concern or conviction and his or her belief position, make a brief presentation of the gospel in such a way that shows how it addresses the person's "theme."

Final Note:

You will discover two basic kinds of non-believers:

- Those who subscribe to the basic beliefs of the Christian faith but have not understood or grasped the gospel.
 - a) They are trying to save themselves by being good.
 - b) These people are not very secular and, generally, you can simply demonstrate the case for relevance with a personal testimony, and go immediately to the full content of the gospel.
 - c) There is seldom a need to make a case for credibility.
- But in NYC, most people will be more secular, and will reject most or all basic Christian doctrines.
 - a) Therefore you need to identify their belief position, and make the case for relevance.

¹ J.Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p.79-81

² L. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* p.9-10, 170.

³ This adapted from account of a conversation between Becky Pippert (BP) with a black female law student (LS) on a bus in Salem, Oregon. (in *Out of the Salt Shaker*, IVP, 1979, p.160ff.)

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to those who wrong me?

Study 7 | Course 2

KEY CONCEPT – FORGIVENESS

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

God’s Forgiveness and Ours

- When God reveals his glory to Moses he says he “*forgives wickedness*” yet “*does not leave the guilty unpunished*” (Exod 34:6-7).
 - a) Not until Jesus do we see how God can be both completely just and forgiving through his atonement (1 John 1:7-9).
- Jesus says: “*If you do not forgive men their sin, your heavenly Father will not forgive your sins*” (Matt 6:15).
 - a) This does not mean we can earn God’s forgiveness through our own forgiving, but that we can disqualify ourselves from it. No heart that is truly repenting toward God could be unforgiving toward others.
- God’s grace gives us the two prerequisites for a life of forgiveness:
 - a) *Emotional humility* – You can only stay bitter toward someone if you feel superior, if you feel that you “would never do anything like that!” Those who won’t forgive show they have not accepted their own sinfulness.
 - b) *Emotional wealth* – You can’t be gracious to someone if you are too needy and insecure. If you know God’s love and forgiveness then there is a limit to how deeply another person can hurt you. He or she can’t touch your real identity, wealth and significance. The more we rejoice in our own forgiveness, the quicker we will forgive others.

A Balance

If our forgiveness truly reflects God’s it must honor justice as did his.

- When people wrong us we must completely surrender the right to pay back or get even, yet at the same time we must never overlook injustice or serious wrongdoing.
 - a) It is never loving to let a person simply get away with sin. It is not loving:
 - i. to the perpetrator, who continues in the grip of the habit
 - ii. to others who will be wronged in the future
 - iii. to God who is grieved

- b) This is difficult, for the line is very thin between a moral outrage for God's sake and a self-righteous outrage because of hurt pride.
- The natural response to most wrongs is to say nothing on the outside and burn with resentment and ill-will on the inside.
- The gospel response is the very opposite. We must openly address wrong, but without any desire to pay back (Rom 12:14, 20-21).
 - a) Only if you have forgiven thoroughly on the inside can you confront non-abusively, without trying to make the person feel terrible.
 - b) Only if you have forgiven and wish the perpetrator well in every way will your words come without disdain and have any potential for changing the heart.

The Definition of Forgiveness

- Forgiveness is giving up the right to seek repayment from the one who harmed you.
 - a) Sins are "*debts*" (Matt 6:12) which you can either:
 - i. make the debtor pay by hurting them until you feel things are "even"
 - ii. you pay by forgiving and absorbing the pain within yourself
- How can you pay the debt yourself?
 - a) refuse to hurt the person directly
 - b) refuse to cut the person down in front of others
 - c) refuse to indulge in ill-will in your heart
 - d) instead of hoping for their pain, you pray positively for their growth
- Forgiveness is granted before it is felt.
 - a) It is a promise to perform the three refusals listed above and pray for the perpetrator as you remind yourself of God's grace to you.
 - b) Though it is extremely difficult and painful because you are bearing the cost of the sin yourself, forgiveness will:
 - i. deepen your character
 - ii. free you to talk to and help the person
 - iii. lead to love and peace rather than bitterness
- By bearing the cost of the sin, you are walking in the path of your Master (Col 3:13; Matt 18:21-35).

Which statements struck you and why?

BIBLE STUDY #1

Matthew 18:21-35

1. How does the parable in vv.23-35 answer Peter's question in v.21?

Peter's question implies that there is a limit to our forgiveness. He seems to assume that at some point we have a right to stop forgiving and may sustain active ill-will and hostility toward someone who has wronged us severely.

- Jesus' answer, "*Seventy times seven*," is a well-known metaphor that means there can be no limit to Christian forgiveness.
 - a) Since "*seven*" symbolized completeness, "*seventy times seven*" means an endless, infinite number.

Jesus' parable explains why God calls us to infinite endlessly forgive.

- A servant owed a king 10,000 talents. The size of this sum is absolutely enormous.
 - a) A talent represented a sum greater than ten years of salary of the average day-laborer — in today's currency well over a billion dollars.
 - b) It could have easily represented a major portion of the king's entire net worth.
- How could such an enormous debt occur?
 - a) This could not have been a simple loan. No king would loan a servant such an amount.
 - b) The implication is that there was some embezzlement or other form of wrongdoing.
- So Jesus' illustration depicts a man whose debt to the king was virtually infinite, many times greater than anything he could repay. He seems to be completely lost.
- But the king, in response to the man's pleas, has mercy on him and cancels the debt.
 - a) Of course, this means that the king absorbs the cost himself. He is out the billion dollars. It is an astounding act of mercy.
- The servant, the recipient of infinite mercy, refuses to forgive a much smaller debt, essentially just a few dollars. The king has just forgiven the servant far more than he could ever repay.
- The king responds justly and severely: "*Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?*" (v.33)

- This, of course, is a challenge to us! We are the servants of God, but we have taken God's gifts to us and used them as if they were our own.
 - a) We deserve to be punished, but God has forgiven us through Christ.
 - b) Now we are to have the following attitude toward all those who have wronged us: *"Lord, you did not exact payment from me for my debt to you, but rather you bore the cost of it with your very life. Now what right do I have to exact payment from them for these infinitely smaller debts to me?"*
 - c) And we must, therefore, live lives of infinite forgiveness. God's forgiveness of us was infinite, boundless.

Note: Jesus' strict warning in verse 35 parallels his warning in Matthew 6:12, 14-15 where he says that if we do not forgive we will not be forgiven. This is not to say that God's compassion is earned through our forgiving others. In the parable, the forgiveness of the servant by the king precedes his action with the second servant — a very important point. He is not forgiven because he forgives; he is forgiven because of the mercy of the king. But a hard, unforgiving heart is an unrepentant heart, and no one can be forgiven without repentance. A heart that is not dispensing forgiveness is not experiencing it; a heart that does not forgive others has not truly repented and therefore asked forgiveness of God.

2. How does the image of a monetary debt help us understand what it means to forgive all kinds of wrongs?

Think about how monetary debts work. If a friend breaks my lamp, and the lamp costs \$50 to replace, then the act of lamp-breaking incurs a debt of \$50.

- If I let him pay for and replace the lamp I get \$50.
- But if I forgive him for what he did, the debt does not somehow vanish into thin air.
 - a) When I forgive him I absorb the payment for the lamp.
 - i. Either I will pay the \$50 to replace it or I will lose the lighting in that room.
- To forgive is to cancel the debt by paying it or absorbing it yourself.
- Someone always pays every debt.

Now this is the case in non-monetary situations.

- When you are sinned against, you lose something whether it is happiness, reputation, peace of mind, a relationship, an opportunity, and so on.

- There are two things to do about a sin. Imagine for example that someone has hurt your reputation.
 - a) You can may try to restore it by paying the other person back, by vilifying him or her and ruining *their* reputation.
 - b) Or you can forgive them, refuse to pay them back, and therefore absorb the damage to your reputation. (You will have to restore it over time.)
- But in monetary or non-monetary situations, when wrong is done, there is always a debt, and there is no forgiveness without someone paying for it.

When God "*remembers our sins no more,*" it does not mean he loses consciousness of them.

- Rather, it means he no longer holds us liable for them, for he has absorbed them himself on the cross. This is the meaning of Jesus death.
- The cross was God's way to absorb the cost of forgiving us.
- Because of the cross, God no longer acts toward us as if we owe the debts.
 - a) To forgive means to absorb the cost and to not demand any further payment.
 - b) We treat the person as free from obligation to us.

BIBLE STUDY #2

Galatians 6:1-3; Romans 12:14-21

1. According to Galatians 6, when/how should you seek to correct someone?

In several places (Matthew 18, Luke 17) Jesus tells us that if we have been sinned against, we may need to go and speak to the offender. *"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him..."* (Luke 17:3-4).

- But when do we "rebuke"? Every time anyone wrongs us? I Peter 4:8 says famously that *"love covers a multitude of sins"* and Proverbs 10:12 backs this up.
 - a) This means we are not to be thin-skinned; it would be wrong to bring up every matter everytime we have been treated unjustly or insensitively.
 - b) But passages like Matthew 18 and Luke 17 show us that there are times in which we should make an appeal and complain. When do we do so?
- This is where Gal. 6 guides us but we should seek repentance under two conditions:
 - a) First, we should correct the sin when it is serious enough to rupture the relationship.
 - i. Matt.18:15 indicates that the purpose of such a rebuke is to *"win your brother,"* to rescue the relationship.
 - ii. This is implied in Gal. 6:2 when it tells us that correcting someone is a way of *"bearing one another's burdens"* It expresses an interdependent relationship.
 - b) Second, we should correct the other person when the sin against you is evidently part of a pattern of behavior.
 - i. Gal. 6:1 (*"if... caught in a trespass, you who are spiritual should restore"*). The image is of someone trapped in a pattern of behavior that will be harmful to the person and to others. In love it should be pointed out.
 - ii. So we do it for the person's sake, to restore them. Our concern is their growth.
- But how do we do it? *"If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently..."* (Gal. 6:1). This could not be more important.

- a) If the motive of the correction is the growth of the person, then we will be loving and gentle. Verses 2 and 3 indicate that we should do this very humbly.
 - i. We are making ourselves servants by doing the correction.
- b) Ultimately, any love that is afraid to confront the beloved is really not love, but a selfish desire to be loved.
 - i. Cowardice is always selfish, putting your own needs ahead of the needs of the other. A love that says, "I'll do anything to keep him or her loving and approving of me!" is not real love at all.
 - ii. It is not loving the person — it is loving the love you get from the person.
- c) True love is willing to confront, even to "lose" the beloved in the short run if there is a chance to help him or her.

2. According to Romans 12, how should we respond to those who are hostile to us? Why should we do so (i.e. what are our motives and reasons)?

What we should do

The basic principle laid down in summary in v.21 is to *"overcome evil with good."*

- The word "overcome" is a military word, and it means to "overpower." It is an extremely penetrating and radical insight.
- Paul says that to repay evil with evil is to immediately lose the battle to evil! The only way to defeat evil is by doing good to the one who has done harm.
- In other words, if you hate a person who has wronged you, that person has won! The only way to defeat the evil is to forgive and love the person.
- Another way to put it — when we identify "evil" too closely with the "evildoer," so to destroy evil is to destroy the evil doer, we unwittingly become a pawn of the evil force that is behind the evildoer.
 - a) In Lord of the Rings, any good person who uses the Ring of the evil Lord to put down the evil Lord would become evil in the process. It is the same temptation.
- So the secret of overcoming evil is for us to see "evil" as something above and distinct from the evil doer. Our basic goal is to forgive and love and show kindness to the evildoer.

- When we do that, there are two results:
 - a) The spread of evil is checked toward us. Its hatred and pride does not infect us.
 - b) The spread of evil may be checked in the evildoer. He or she may be softened and helped by our love.
 - i. Paul says that our good deeds and words could “*pour burning coals on his head*”; it is possible that repentance may occur. The hostile person may be lead to shame, alarm and remorse, rebuked by our kind life.

How to do it

- Don't avoid the hostile person – “As far as it depends on you, live at peace with all” (v.18).
 - a) It is common, when someone has wronged you, to simply avoid that person. You may say, “I am not paying them back, but I don't want to see them.”
 - b) But your avoidance could be a form of payback. To avoid the person does not overcome the evil! (See below for a qualification.)
- Express loving words and actions – “Bless” (v.14) “Feed... your enemy” (v.20)
 - a) Speak and act courteously and kindly to those who are hostile.
 - b) We must be careful here! For sometimes we may do kind things to a hostile person simply as a way to shame him or her to rub their noses in it. That is not the motive.
 - c) We thoughtfully find ways to wish the person well and do helpful things and speak respectfully to them.
- Forgive, and forego any repayment – “Never avenge yourselves” (v.19)

There are boundaries though.

- Verse 9 reminds us that we are not loving wisely or truly when we enable someone to sin or sin against us.
- There are great degrees of hostility. Enemies may be so dangerous that for you to have anything to do with them is to invite them to sin.
- In that case, the good you can do them is to stay away from them.
- See *Bold Love* by Dan Allendar and Tremper Longman which distinguishes between loving an “evil person,” a very “foolish person” and a “normal sinner.”

Why we should do it

Both the power and the model for this is, of course, the gospel. Christ died for us while we were his enemies (Romans 5:6-10).

- That action is not only the paradigm for us, but the thought of it becomes our power to follow through.
- That is why Paul here reminds us of something very powerful: *"Leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine...says the Lord'"* (v.19).
 - a) What we are being reminded of is that all resentment and vengeance is taking on God's role as judge. It is playing God. But:
 - i. Only God is qualified to be judge; we are imperfect and deserve judgment.
 - ii. Only God knows enough to be judge: we don't know all about the offender, what he/she has faced and deserves.
 - iii. Jesus took the judgment of God.
 - b) So Paul is saying: "Think this! Either these persons you are angry at will repent some day and Jesus will take their judgment, or they will not and God will deal with it. But in either process, you are not involved."

BIBLE STUDY #3

Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-17

1. On the basis of these two passages, when is it your move to seek reconciliation when a relationship needs repair?

- If we put the two passages together we see that it is always your move to initiate relationship-repair.
 - a) Matthew 5 says, "If your brother has something against you — go to him."
 - b) Matthew 18 says, "If you have something against your brother — go to him."
- So it doesn't matter who "started" it. God always holds you responsible to reach out to repair a tattered relationship. A Christian is responsible to begin the process of reconciliation, regardless of how the distance or the alienation began.

2. What are some practical ways to carry out Matthew 5 and Matthew 18?

We can look at Matthew 5 and 18 as two different approaches. Chapter 5 is what you do when you believe you have, or may have, wronged someone else, while chapter 18 is what you do when you believe someone has wronged you. But it is also possible to look at these passages as two stages of the normal reconciliation process. Seldom does just one party bear all the blame for a tattered relationship. Almost always, reconciliation is best done by *both* repenting *and* forgiving — by both admitting your own wrong and pointing out the wrong of the other. If we put these two approaches together, we can create a practical outline like the one that follows.

Stage #1 - Begin by confessing anything you may have done wrong ("Matthew 5:24" phase.)

When you go begin with yourself. Even if you believe that your own behavior is no more than 5% of the problem — *start with your 5%!* Look for what you have done wrong, and collect the criticism.

Start by listing whatever you think you have done wrong and by asking the other person to add to the list (of what he/she thinks you have done wrong or contributed to the breakdown in the relationship.)

- Example: "I'm here because I don't like what has happened to our relationship (or — if the term applies — 'our friendship.')
 It appears to

me you there is a problem between us; am I wrong?" Or "Here is what I believe I have contributed to the problem — where I've wronged you and contributed to the relationship problem. But where else have I wronged you or contributed to the relationship problem in your estimation?"

- If you are almost totally 'in the dark' about what went wrong, you may have to simply offer to listen. Example: "It appears to me that there is trouble between us and I have offended you. Am I right? Please tell me specific ways I have wronged you. I am really ready to listen. Honest."

Then, as you listen, work hard to distill the criticism of you into something clear and specific. Eventually (to do so too quickly may seem defensive), ask for as many specific examples as possible. If they say, "you are bullying" you need to discover what actual words or actions or tones of voice strike the other person as "bullying."

Practical Checklist:

- Pray silently, asking God to give you wisdom and to sense his love for you.
- Assume that he is speaking to you through this whole thing and is showing you ways you should be more careful or change.
- Assume he is speaking to you even through a very flawed person.
- Beware of being defensive. Don't explain yourself too quickly. Even if you have a good answer or can show the person he or she was mistaken. Be sure you don't interrupt or keep the person from expressing frustration. Show sympathy even if you were misunderstood.
- Always ask "is there anything else? I really want to know!" In stressful situations it is easy for someone to hold back some of their complaints or concerns. Get them all out on the table or you will be doing this again!
- Make it safe to criticize you — support individual criticisms with "that must have been hard; I see why you were concerned"
- Look for needs in the critic beneath the criticism that may be there which you can be concerned for.

Now respond to the criticism, do either one of the other or both of the following:

- Please, forgive me for _____. (This is your repentance, confession of sin.)
- Admit it without excuses and without blaming any other circumstances. Even if there are exaggerations, extract the real fault and confess it. Even if only 10% of the problem is you, admit it. Provide plans for changing behavior.

- Don't just 'apologize' but ask for forgiveness.
- If you can think of something — say, "and here is what I am going to do to change so I will not do such a thing again in the future." Ask him or her if there is anything to do to restore trust. (If you really cannot "see" any validity in any of the criticism at all — ask if you can get back later after checking with others about the criticism.)

Avoid:

- Over-expressions of just "how terrible I feel over what I've done!" Some confessions are designed to be painful catharsis that is a way to a) relieve one of guilt feelings (the confession is a kind of atonement/punishment), or b) get people to provide lots of sympathy.
- On the other hand avoid being dead-pan, light-hearted, or even flip. Confession can be done in such a way as to preserve pride, to technically fulfill the requirement, to force the other person to let you 'off the hook' but without showing any real contrition or emotional regret at all.
- Most of all, do not make a confession that is really an attack. "If I upset you, I am sorry." — is in this category. It means, "If you were a normal person you would not have been upset by what I did." Do not repent to the person of something that you are not going to repent to God for nor take concrete steps to change.
- Real repentance has three aspects:
 - a) confession to God
 - b) confession to the person wronged
 - c) the offering of a concrete plan for change that avoids the sin in the future (cf. Luke 3:7-14)
- After you have repented, then turn to those issues about which you honestly can't really repent of as sins and about which you have to say—

Please, accept my explanation for _____.

- "Here's how I see it. Can you see my motive or meaning was very different than what you inferred."
- "Can you understand my point of view? Can you accept that I could have perceived this very differently and had the motives I am describing?"
- Is there some way, since we see this issue so differently, that we can avoid hurting each other like this again?

Stage #2 - Now (if necessary) address any ways that the other person has wronged you. ("Matthew 18 phase.")

If you have done all of the above, very often you will find that this approach elicits a confession from the other without you having to ask for it or extract it! This is far and away the best way to get reconciliation!

If the other person is not forthcoming, Begin: " From my point of view, it looks to me like

- you did this_____
- and it effected me this way_____
- I think it would be far better for all concerned if instead you did this _____
- I am coming to ask you if my understanding is accurate or distorted. Correct me if I am wrong. Could you explain what happened?" Be sure your list of things he/she has done is specific, not vague.

If the other person offers an apology, grant forgiveness — but avoid using the term unless it is asked for! Say: "well, I won't hold this against you" or "let's put that in the past now" or "think no more of it". To say, "I forgive you" may sound tremendously humiliating.

General guidelines for this part of the process:

- Have a loving and humble tone. Tone of voice is extremely important. Overly controlled and nice and calm may sound patronizing and be as infuriating as fury. Don't resort to flattery and fawning syrupiness or fall into abusive or angry tones.
- Attack the problem not the person (e.g. Not "You are so thoughtless", but "you have forgotten this after making repeated promises that you would not.")
- Suggest alternatives and solutions for alternative courses of action or behavior. Make sure all criticism is specific and constructive. Never say, "don't do this" without saying "instead do this."
- In the heart of the discussion you may discover some more underlying goal or need that the other person is trying to meet that could be met in more constructive ways.
- Keep in mind differences in culture. One culture may consider your approach incredibly disrespectful and demeaning when you think you are being respectful.

READINGS

Read and put a "?" if you have a question; put an "!" if an insight is helpful to you.

Christians are called to abandon bitterness, to be forbearing, to have a forgiving stance even where the repentance of the offending party is conspicuous by its absence; on the other hand, their God-centered passion for justice, their concern for God's glory, ensure that the awful odium of sin is not glossed over.

– Don Carson¹

[Forgiveness] is to deal with our emotions... by denying ourselves the dark pleasures of venting them or fondling them in our minds... Once upon a time, I was engaged to a young woman who changed her mind. I forgave her... but in small sums over a year... done when I spoke to her and refrained from rehashing the past, done whenever I renounced jealousy and self-pity when seeing her with another man, done when I praised her to others when I wanted to slice away at her reputation. Those were the payments — but she never saw them. And her own payments were unseen by me... but I do know that she forgave me... (Forgiveness) is more than a matter of refusing to hate someone. It is also a matter of choosing to demonstrate love and acceptance to the offender... Pain is the consequence of sin; there is no easy way to deal with it. Wood, nails and pain are the currency of forgiveness, the love that heals.

– Dan Hamilton²

Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners. But no one can be in the presence of the God of the crucified Messiah for long without overcoming this double exclusion — without transposing the enemy from the sphere of monstrous inhumanity into the sphere of shared humanity and herself from the sphere of proud innocence into the sphere of common sinfulness. When one knows that the torturer will not eternally triumph over the victim, one is free to rediscover that person's humanity and imitate God's love for him. And when one knows that God's love is greater than all sin, one is free to see oneself... and so rediscover one's own sinfulness.

– Miroslav Volf³

"Why do we 'keep score'? First, it makes us feel superior to the person we resent. Also, it gives us an excuse for indulging in exquisite plots for revenge, such as hurting the person by withholding our ultimate treasure — personal friendship... Third... There is a sense in which we remember past wounds to hurt ourselves. [Why?]. We feel noble and worthy as the decent person who was wrongly hurt. They give us a chance to justify ourselves. But we do, in fact, also hate resentment... It depresses us, robs us of gratitude, sneaks into other relationships... If you cannot free people from their wrongs... you enslave yourself to your own painful past, and by fastening yourself to the past, you let your hate become your future. You can reverse your future only by releasing other people from their pasts.

– Lewis Smedes⁴

Forgiveness is not simply a one-time action... the practice of forgiveness involves us in a whole way of life. Its central goal is to reconcile and restore communion — with God, one another, and the whole creation. Forgiveness [is] to offer a future not bound by the past... forgiveness [is] yearning for the possibility of reconciliation. Forgiveness does not merely refer backward to the absolution of guilt; it also looks forward to the restoration of community. Sometimes reconciliation requires separation, particularly in abusive or oppressive situations where proximity threatens... but it also requires the struggle to learn to wish enemies well even when we cannot be in their presence, when they are impenitent, and even when we are appropriately angry. Boundaries are legitimate. Permanent hopeless boundaries are not.

– L. Gregory Jones⁵

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?**2. The first quote assumes that gospel forgiveness cannot oppose or preclude the seeking of justice. Why not? And how can both be pursued together?****Why not?**

Forgiveness does not preclude concern for fairness and justice because the Bible bases the practice of our forgiveness on God's forgiveness, and as indicated above, God's own forgiveness is a complex phenomenon that combines truth, justice and love.

- In Exodus 34:6-7, when God says he is a forgiving God, *"compassionate and gracious... forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin,"* and yet he is a just God who *"does not let the guilty go unpunished,"* there is no hint as to how these two traits could both be true simultaneously.
- Moses (who heard the words) could have wondered: does it mean there are some sins that God forgives and others that he does not? Or does it mean he punishes sins in the short run but in the long run forgives everyone?
- Apart from Jesus, all efforts to reconcile the two traits of God's love and justice are doomed to relativize the one in favor of the other.

The main word translated "to forgive" in the Old Testament is the word group with the root *kpr* which carries the notion of atonement. That, of course, is the answer — that God accepts atonement for sin.

- Sin can be paid for in a way that enables the sinner to go free. This is why in the Bible God's forgiveness is never taken for granted, as if it was an automatic given.
 - a) No Biblical writer had the attitude, "Well, of course, God forgives—that's his job, you know! He just loves and accepts everybody!"

- Rather we read Ps. 130:3-4 *"If you O Lord kept a record of sins, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness — therefore you are to be feared."* Remarkable!
 - a) The Psalmist finds it amazing and astounding that God forgives. This certainly shows that God's love does not simply swallow up God's justice.
 - b) The forgiving God is also a just God.

In the cross God satisfies both justice and love. God was so just and desirous to judge sin that Jesus *had* to die, but he was so loving and desirous of our salvation that Jesus *was glad* to die. But because God forgave us in a way that honored justice, so we should also forgive in a way that honors justice.

How can they both be pursued together?

- First, God requires forgiveness whether or not the offender has repented and has asked for forgiveness.
 - a) Mark 11:25: *"And when you stand praying if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him..."*
 - b) This does not say — "forgive him if he repents" but rather "forgive him right there — as you are praying."
- Second, God calls us to concern both for justice and for the repair of the relationship if possible (cf. Rom. 12:18 — *"as far as it depends on you, live at peace with all..."*)
 - a) That is why Jesus tells his disciples in Luke 17:3-4 to *"rebuke"* the wrong-doer and *"if he repents, forgive him."*
 - b) Many readers think that Jesus is saying that we can hold a grudge if the person doesn't repent, but we can't read Luke 17 to contradict Mark 11.
 - c) Jesus is calling us here not just to inner forgiveness but to rebuke and correct, though gently and humbly, in order to redress wrongs and restore the relationship (Gal. 6:1ff.)
- This is almost the very opposite of how we ordinarily operate. Ordinarily we do not seek justice on the outside (we don't confront or call people to change and make restoration) but meanwhile we stay hateful and bitter on the outside.
 - a) The Bible calls us to do the exact opposite. We are to deeply forgive on the inside so as to have no desire for vengeance, but then we are to speak openly about what has happened with a desire to help the person see what was done wrong.

- i. Only if you have forgiven inside can you correct unabusively without trying to make the person feel terrible.
 - ii. Only if you have forgiven already can your motive be to correct the person for God's sake, for justice's sake, for the community's sake, and for the person's sake.
 - iii. And only if you forgive on the inside will your speech have any hope of changing the perpetrator's heart.
- b) Otherwise it will be so filled with disdain and hostility that he or she will not listen to you.

3. The second quote gives some very practical "how to's" about the process of forgiveness. Make a list of them.

1. We must distinguish between granting and feeling forgiveness.

- It is obvious that the speaker did not simply stop the emotional desire for revenge.
 - a) Rather he denied himself "the dark pleasure of venting them or fondling them" in his mind.
 - b) He neither denied his feeling nor followed them.
- The granting of his forgiveness was an act of the will, though he was constantly working on his emotions, refusing to just give in to them.
- Notice that forgiveness was a process that took over a year.
 - a) If you grant forgiveness, eventually you will feel it. If you don't grant it, you probably will never feel it or it will take years and years to feel.

2. We must determine never to exact the price for the sin, but to pay the price ourselves.

- Notice the speaker thinks of the wrong as something that had to be paid. But instead of making her pay for the sin, he paid for it in "small sums."
- What does that mean? The speaker says that everytime he refrained or renounced making his former girlfriend pay for his loss, it was very painful for him.
- He likened it, in a small way, to the "wood, nails" of Jesus. He was paying for and absorbing the cost himself.
- He lays out three very distinct ways that he forgives:

a) He refuses to throw the wrong in her face. *"When I spoke to her and refrained from rehashing the past."* In other words, he did not try to make her pay for the wrong by trying to tell her off and hurt her in his direct dealings with her. The normal ways we try to exact payments in dealing with an offender is:

- i. We can make cutting remarks and drag out the past over and over.
- ii. We can be more demanding and controlling with the person than we are with others, all because we feel deep down that they still owe us.
- iii. We can punish them with self-righteous "mercy" that is really a way to make them feel small and justify ourselves.
- iv. We can avoid them and be cold to them in overt or more subtle ways.
- v. We can actively seek to hurt them, taking from them something that is valuable.

b) He refuses to cut her down to others. *"Whenever I praised her to others when I wanted to slice away at her reputation."* In other words, he did not try to harm her reputation and diminish her in the eyes of others. The normal ways we try to exact payments this way:

- i. We can run them down to others under the guise of warning people about them.
- ii. We can run them down to others under the guise of seeking sympathy and support and sharing our hurt.

c) He refuses to dwell on it in his own heart. *"Whenever I renounced jealousy and self-pity when seeing her with another man."* In other words, he also guarded the self-talk of his own heart. The normal way we try to exact payments this way:

- i. We continually re-play the "videotapes" of the wrong in your imagination, in order to keep the sense of loss and hurt fresh and real to you, so you can stay actively hostile to the person and feel virtuous yourself.
- ii. We can "root" for their failure or for someone else to hurt them even if we have decided not to seek revenge ourselves.

- Every time we refrain from exacting payment in these ways, and we seek to actively pray for and wish the other well, we are making painful payments ourselves.

3. We must actively will the good of the other.

- “Forgiveness is... a matter of choosing to demonstrate love to the offender.” When we identify evil too closely with the evil-doer, we get pulled into the same cycle of hurt pride and self-absorption and ill-treatment that the perpetrator is caught in.
- The secret of overcoming evil is to see “evil” as something you are trying to save the evil-doer from.
 - a) You may need to confront the person. (Forgiveness that is unwilling to ever confront is not loving at all — it is self-serving.)
 - b) You may even have to avoid a person if by seeing them you make it easy for them to abuse and sin against you. (It is never loving to make it easy for someone to sin against you.)
- Nevertheless, if your confrontation is done in order to help and not to revenge, then two things result:
 - a) The spread of evil is checked toward you. Its hatred and pride will not infect you.
 - i. The only way to truly “beat” the ill-will of the other is to forgive him or her so you don’t become like them. If you stay angry then the perpetrators are still controlling you.
 - ii. Even if you are reacting against them, you are still being dominated and affected by them.
 - iii. Only through forgiving a wrongdoer can you be free from and defeat him or her.
 - b) The spread of evil may be checked within the wrongdoer.
 - i. Through your confrontation the person may be softened and helped and awakened to the wrong.
 - ii. This often does not happen, but it almost certainly will not happen unless you have forgiven them in your heart and separated evil from the evil-doer.
 - iii. If your confrontation is really just a disguised way to make them feel bad, they will not listen to you.

4. The fifth quote talks about going beyond mere forgiveness to the restoration of a relationship. What are some ways we can do that after we are wronged? What do we do if the offender won’t be reconciled to us?

- Forgiveness entails a willingness to re-establish the relationship.

- a) If you have *really* forgiven someone you will want to see your relationship to the person restored. Reconciliation is not over when we have merely forgiven the offender, but we must also be willing to “*restore*” him or her (Gal. 6:1ff).
- b) Restoring the person in Galatians 6 and Matthew implies also restoring the relationship. Many say, “I forgive but I cannot forget.” That usually means, “I won’t actively seek to harm you now, but I will treat you with coldness and so on because you still owe me.”
- c) But forgiveness is canceling the debt — NOT merely making the person pay it back in smaller installments.
- If you are not even willing to have a restored relationship, then you have not really forgiven.
- On the other hand, “I forgive you” does not mean “I trust you.”
- a) Some people think they can’t forgive someone until they can completely re-trust the person. That is not the case. Forgiveness means a willingness to try to re-establish trust, but that re-establishment is always a process.
- b) The speed and degree of this restoration entails the re-creation of trust, and that takes time, depending on the nature and severity of the offenses involved.
 - i. Part of real repentance usually means asking, “What could I do that would make you trust me?” and being willing to accept the answer.
 - ii. Part of real forgiveness means being open to the possibility of lasting change in the offender and being truly unbiased and willing to offer more trust little by little.
- c) Until a person shows evidence of true change, we should not trust the person. To immediately re-trust a person with sinful habits could actually be enabling him to sin.
- Trust must be restored, and the speed at which this occurs depends on the behavior.
- What if the person won’t be reconciled to you? Christians are commanded to seek peace and reconciliation with “all people” (Heb. 2:14a; Rom. 12:18), not just Christians.
- a) However, non-Christians may not feel the same responsibility to live in reconciled relationships. Therefore, in general, you will find that non-Christians will not feel compelled to respond with forgiveness and repentance.

- b) If that occurs, you must take what you are given.
 - i. Romans 12:18ff gives you a lot of good ideas about how to stay gracious, kind, open and cordial to people who are still being stand-offish to you.
 - ii. A great book on relating to people who remain cold or even hostile to you is *Bold Love* by Dan Allendar and Tremper Longman.
- c) If the person you are seeking reconciliation with is a Christian, but a Christian from another region or another church, you should use the Matthew 18:15ff process as far as you can. See above (under the Bible studies) for an outline of this process.
- d) However, if you are not both members of the same church, it may not be possible to go to the final step of "telling it to the church." Again, you may have to take what you are given and live as cordially and as graciously as possible with someone who is not reconciled to you.
- It is usually harder to forgive someone who will not admit any wrong and who stays haughty. Internal forgiveness may be a longer process. Use all the spiritual resources we have in our faith:
 - a) By looking at God's commands to forgive. Our obligation.
 - b) By remembering God's forgiveness of us. We have no right to be bitter.
 - c) By remembering God's omniscience is necessary to be a just judge. We have insufficient knowledge to know what others deserve.
 - d) By remembering we are being defeated by evil when we allow the evil to keep us in bondage through bitterness! (Romans 12 says to overcome or defeat evil with forgiveness.)
 - e) By remembering that we undermine the glory of the gospel in the world's eyes when we fail to forgive.

¹ Don Carson, *Love in Hard Places* (Crossway, 2002) p.83

² Dan Hamilton, *Forgiveness* (Inter-Varsity, 1980) p.10ff

³ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Abingdon, 1996) p.124

⁴ Lewis Smedes, *Love Within Limits* (Eerdmans, 1989) p.74-44 and "Forgive and Forget"

⁵ L.Gregory Jones, "Forgiveness" in *Practicing our Faith*, D.Bass, editor, (Josex-Bass, 1997)

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to money?

Study 8 | Course 2

KEY CONCEPT – MONEY

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

A community for radical giving

“They share their table with all, but not their bed with all. They are poor and make many rich; they are short of everything and yet have plenty of things.” Letter to Diognetus, c.100-150 A.D.

Unlike their neighbors, Christians were promiscuous with their money, not their bodies. They shared their possessions in a proportion and with a joy that the surrounding materialistic culture had never seen. This radical generosity began immediately after the resurrection when *“selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need (Acts 2:45) ...they did not consider that any of their possessions were their own.” (Acts 4:32)*

The guidelines for radical giving

The tithe

The Old Testament called believers to tithe — give 10% of their income. The New Testament nowhere explicitly requires tithing, but in Mt 23:23 Jesus castigates the Pharisees for not being willing to go beyond the tithe when there are community needs.

- This means the while the church cannot require members to give any particular amount of money, Jesus assumes his followers will go beyond the tithe in giving.
- This is only reasonable. Since we have greater privileges, joy, knowledge, and power than our ancestors in the faith, how could we be expected to be less generous with our possessions?
- So the tithe is a minimum rule of thumb for Christians who want to give in a gospel way to the church, the poor, and others.

Surplus and sacrifice

Surplus — Jesus warns against “*storing up*” beyond what you truly need (Lk. 12:21).

- While there can never be a firm line between necessities and luxuries, it is sufficient to know that most middle class people in the U.S. should continually be pushing the percentage of their giving further and further beyond a tithe.

Sacrifice — There may be seasons of life in which you cannot tithe and still meet your other obligations. But more basic than tithing is the guideline of sacrifice.

- Paul tells us of a church who gave *“even beyond their abilities”* (2 Cor 8:3). Their giving entailed sacrifices in their daily lifestyle (how much they spent on clothes, travel, home, etc.).
- If we have tithed and it doesn’t cut in to the way we actually live, we need to give more. But if we have *not* tithed yet our giving *does* cut in to our daily lifestyle, our consciences can be at rest.

Community

Few people think they are materialistic, but many are self-deceived. How can we guard against it?

- The final guideline for giving is this: *“Exhort one another daily that you are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”* (Heb 3:13). We must share our income and spending patterns with at least some other Christians.
- You should discuss together lifestyle choices such as recreation, children’s activities, travel, etc. Without such discussion and accountability you won’t be able to be sure you are self-deceived.
- Greed *must* exist — but the Bible does not give any hard and fast definition. Its guidelines have to be applied across centuries, cultures, and economic systems.
- We must work the specifics out in community.

The dynamic for radical giving

Jesus said that your treasure goes where your heart is (Mt. 6:21).

- You always give most effortlessly to that which is your real salvation, your hope, your meaning in life.
- If Jesus is the one who saves you, your money flows out easily into his work and the lives of people.
- If your real hope is in your appearance, status, or comfort, your giving will flow more easily into those items and symbols, and giving will seem very difficult.
- Generosity is a test of the heart.

Which statements struck you and why?

BIBLE STUDY #3

Luke 11:37-42

1. What does Jesus affirm the Pharisees in doing? What does that mean for us?

In the OT, God prescribed the tithe, or a tenth of one's income, to be given to God (Lev. 27:30-33). It supported both the temple worship and the poor (Deut. 14:22-29).

- Since God is the owner of all things, and we are just the stewards of his wealth, this is an incredible deal by any standards!
 - a) Imagine being a stockbroker that can keep 90% of the dividends of the client and only him or her 10%?
 - b) Imagine renting a farm and only giving the owner 10% of the proceeds? But this is all God required of us.

What this means for us is that we do need to take the standard of the tithe seriously. If there was any place Jesus would criticize the tithe it would be here.

- The Pharisees were legalists, and Jesus seldom affirms anything they do, but here he does. It would be *wrong to leave [the tithe] undone*. Common sense would lead us in this direction even without this passage.
- In no area of ethical practice (forgiveness of enemies, sharing one's faith with others, etc.) are the moral requirements of Christian believers *lessened*. How could God want Jesus' followers to be less generous with their money than Old Testament believers?

Sum: Jesus sees the tithe, as a very concrete way by which we can tell if we are giving and investing for God in Biblical proportions.

2. What does Jesus condemn the Pharisees for not doing? What does that mean for us?

There are two things Jesus is (severely!) criticizing the Pharisees for.

1. He criticizes them because they are *only* giving as much as a tithe!

- Jesus pronounces a "woe" on the Pharisees because they tithe even

the herbs and spices they use in their homes but *"neglect justice and the love of God."* The appeal to *"justice and the love of God"* almost surely refers to the kind of radical giving Jesus speaks about in other places.

- When some members of the community fall into need, Jesus wants those whose basic needs are met to sell their possessions to meet those needs. Surely this is more than tithing!
- The Pharisees, however, seemed to think that once they had tithed they had fulfilled their obligation to the community.
- One writer said: *"The demand that the Christian tithe can... become a dangerous thing, for it permits the false conclusion that the problem of Mammon has been met and conquered."* That is perhaps the best interpretation of Jesus' teaching on the tithe.
- He is saying: "Of course you should tithe. That is a minimum! But don't fall into the trap of thinking that if you tithe you do not have to think about your giving any more! You must be very sensitive to the economic needs of your brothers and sisters and your neighbors, you must be sensitive to the needs of ministry. You must always be giving away in order to honor the justice and love of God."

2. He criticizes them because they do not give out of a generous heart.

- Jesus criticizes here how the Pharisees miss the importance of inner motives. They worry intensely over the *"outside of the cup,"* not the inside, the heart.
 - a) Jesus condemns them for giving with a heart devoid of *"the love of God"* (v.42) and *"full of greed."*
 - b) The Pharisees tithed not out of love for God or for the poor, but out of a desire for a great spiritual resume and record.
 - c) Their motivation was to satisfy all requirements; it was a part of their self-righteousness. That is why they never went beyond the tithe.
- Jesus implies here that our generosity should be out of a positive desire to mercifully end suffering and see a more just distribution of wealth. The Pharisees gave out of the negative motivation; they simply had to.
- God demands generosity but demands that it not be the response to a demand! It should be a response to grace (see more on this below).

I believe the only possible way to account for the New Testament's lack of mention of the tithe is that the early church expected giving beyond that percentage.

- The drumbeat of Jesus' directions to sell excess possessions, the example of the early church in Acts 4, and the teaching of the rest of the New Testament all indicate that.
- Craig Blomberg writes that the reason the New Testament does not lay out the tithe for all Christians across the board is that: *"The principles of generosity and sacrifice [in the New Testament] will suggest that different people should give varying percentages based on their varying circumstances. Those who are at least reasonably well off should give considerably more than a tenth of their gross income to God's work."*²

BIBLE STUDY #2

Luke 12:15-34; Mark 10:17-30

- 1. Luke 12. Jesus tells his listeners not to hoard their money but to give it generously (vv.15-21, 33) a) What possible response to this teaching does he address in vv.22-32? b) How does he address it?**

What response does he address?

- Jesus' call to radical giving naturally would evoke fear in the average listener. *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted..."* (12:32-33).
- This is remarkable. They would think: "What? We are to give to the poor (v.33) rather than storing up material goods for ourselves (v.21)? That's scary! What if something happens?"
- So from verse 22 (*do not worry about... what you will eat... or wear*) to verse 32 (*do not be afraid*) Jesus addresses the issue of worry and fear that our material needs won't be met.
- It is common for Jesus' teaching on worry to be taken out of context. The worry Jesus addresses here is not general anxiety but the specific fear that comes as a response to his call for radical generosity.
- Put another way — if you really understood how generous Jesus wanted you to be with your money, you'd be struggling with fear and worry.

How does he address it?

- Jesus begins with an appeal to the birds (v.24) and the lilies (v.27) that do not *"store or save up."* Then Jesus ends with a promise that to *"seek his kingdom, and these things* [i.e. food, clothing, and other material things] *will be given to you as well"* (v.31).
- This seems to be an assurance that God will provide in this life your material needs and wants. So Christians are to give radically to others rather than accruing surplus wealth in order to guarantee a financially secure future.
- We are to take excess wealth beyond our own basic needs and sell them off and distribute them to the poor. It is possible because we have the assurance that God's kingdom will provide for our needs.

- But how will this be? Most readers have read this passage as referring to God's providential care, the promise that if we are generous to others, somehow God will get us the money we need.
- But the next passage, Mark 10, spells out what Jesus really has in mind.

2. Mark 10. a) Why does Jesus (lovingly! v.21) call the man to give up his wealth? b) Does this mean we must live in poverty? c) What is the reason Jesus says we shouldn't fear to be generous (v.23-30)?

Why does Jesus call the man to give up his wealth?

Being converted to Jesus entails repentance — turning away from what we trust so we can trust in Jesus.

- Many people think they've trusted in Christ because they consent to his teaching but they do not examine carefully what their heart is already resting in.
- In other words, they try to trust in Christ as savior without consciously turning away from what their heart is already trusting in for its deepest meaning and hope. Jesus will not let the rich young ruler get away with that!
- Jesus contrasts *"follow me"* with *"sell all you have"* (v.21). In other words, we can either follow Christ or money.
- Also, many commentators believe Jesus is responding to the man's claim that he keeps all the commandments by starting with the first — *"no other gods before me"* — and proving that money is his god.
- In Luke 16:13 and Matt.6:24, Jesus says, *"You can serve either money or God, not both at once."* So Jesus says that money can be followed and served, it can master and control us. And he is saying that this is the case with this young man.

The reason that the disciples cry, *"If a rich man can't be saved, then who can?"* (10:23-24a) is because the common sense of the day was, "the richer you are, the more blessed you are by God! The richer you are, the godlier you probably are."

- But Jesus turns that on its head and says, *"How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom!"* (v.23) — i.e. "the richer you are, the harder it is to make spiritual progress."
- Why is Jesus making this point both to the young ruler and to his disciples? Works-righteousness religion will always look at wealth positively. It looks like the blessing of a person who earned it with hard work, savvy, or maybe a moral life.

- But the gospel tells us we can only be saved if we become as a little child, admitting our complete inadequacy and helplessness. That sense, of course, is deeply eroded by wealth.
- Thus, not only the doctrine of the fall, but the gospel of grace warns us about the spiritual dangers of wealth.
 - a) Money can make you physically secure and obscure your moment-by-moment dependence on God's protection and sustenance in history.
 - b) Money can make you relationally self-sufficient; there is less need for others or accountability to others.
 - c) Money can make you morally proud and obscure your sense of sin and lostness. Money has always been a key way for a person to feel "I'm smart, I'm living right, and I'm valuable."

So Jesus is challenging the man's whole understanding of salvation (and that of his disciples).

- If salvation is by grace, he should not be proud of his riches as a sign of his righteousness. He should be willing to part with it and trust Jesus.
- Money, then, was the basis of this man's identity rather than God. This is probably the reason for how categorical Jesus' call is to "*sell everything you have and follow me*" (v.21).
- Jesus seems to be saying: "Would you be willing to part with anything for me, even your precious status as a wealthy person? You must make me your ultimate trust, or you cannot be saved."

Does this call mean we must all live in poverty?

We must not make Jesus' call to the young man to "*sell everything*" into a legalistic principle of voluntary poverty, but as the way he is showing this particular man (and us) the spiritual dangers of wealth which can blind us to the gospel.

- Jesus is willing to accept Zacchaeus' offer to give away half of his wealth. If Jesus was laying down a formal rule for all disciples with the young ruler, why would he have accepted the 50% from Zacchaeus?
- No, Jesus perceives the spiritual power that wealth exerted over this young man's heart. That is why the call is so drastic.

However, we must not use this fact (that Jesus is not laying down a legalistic principle for us all to live in poverty) to duck the implications of the passage for our own attitude toward money.

- Jesus does not call him to throw his wealth off a bridge into the river, but to give it to the poor.
- Giving to those in need is a key mark of true discipleship. So we are to "sit loose" to all of our money and possessions.

- And we *need spiritually* to give generously in order to break the power of money over us.

Money itself may be an idol.

- Jesus is asking: "Are you willing to lose it all for me? Are you willing to let me have complete control of it? Are you willing to make me the new source of your meaning, and your identity and your security?"
- Jesus' point: only through radical giving can you *know* that you have broken the power of money over your heart and made Christ your functional salvation instead of wealth.

We need to give because even if money is not an idol, it is money that will show us where those idols are.

- In Matthew 6: 21, we read: "*For where your treasure is, there is your heart also.*" The principle: money is one of the best ways to identify the idols of your heart.
- You can always find out what your heart most loves and adores and worships and rests in for salvation — wherever you most effortlessly and easily and joyfully spend money.
- Often it is only as we seek to give in Biblical, radical proportions that we can discover things that our heart is enslaved to. Whoever cannot throw away a treasure at need is in fetters.

Sum: Christians need to give in order to be free for God.

What is the reason Jesus says we should not fear to be generous?

When Jesus tells the young man to "*go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven,*" he comes quite close to what he says to all his disciples in Luke 12:32-33.

- But it is not identical. He does not tell them all to sell "*everything,*" but he is clearly envisioning radical generosity.
- And again, in Mark 10, we have expressions of fear and concern by the hearers (Mark 10:24-28.) Again we are faced with the question: how can anyone do that? What about our material needs?

Jesus' answer in Mark 10:29-31 is more explicit in Mark 10:29-31 and extremely illuminating: "*I tell you the truth,*" Jesus replied, "*no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields — and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.*"

- Here is the answer to the question. Jesus promises that if his disciples lose any material thing — from homes and fields to brothers, sisters, and mothers — they will get new ones “in this present age” (v.30).
- How is that? Jesus is speaking of the new family, the family of God, the Christian community (see Mark 3:31-35.) And along *with* the new community comes new “homes and fields.”
- We must not read this term any differently than the words “brothers, sisters, and mothers.” When we become part of the new community, we not only acquire one another’s parents and siblings but also one another’s homes and possessions!
- The reason that individual Christians (in both Luke 12 and Mark 10) are freed to radically give away money when needs are evident is because it is assumed that they are now members of a community that will do the same for them should they be in want.
- The only way to be able to give and share as Jesus directs is to also be part of a community in which no one considers their possessions to be their own.

The commands of Mark 10:21 and Luke 12:32 make no sense without the assumption of a community as described in Mark 10:28-29. Acts 4:32-34 says: *“No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything... there was no needy person among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.”*

What Jesus spoke of (and what the early Christians practiced) does not seem to be an organized communalism.

- There is no mention that everyone every week brought their wages and put them into a common pool. Rather, the liquidation of property and assets was regular and especially linked to “need.”
- Nevertheless, even if this is not a rigidly organized commune but a voluntary society — it is radical! Craig Blomberg goes so far as to say, *“Serious application of this principle to contemporary churches would require such radical transformation of most Christian fellowships that few seem willing to even begin.”*³

Why is this kind of church community so rare? It flies in the face of our own cultural values.

- In our individualistic society we expect people to sock away most excess income during their prosperous seasons for themselves so that we won’t have to take care of them when they are in need, and we won’t have to go through the humiliation of asking for help when we are in need.

- But Jesus expects us to “save up” for one another — not just for ourselves. And he expects the gospel of grace to undermine that kind of pride and selfishness.

See how the individualism of our own culture affects how we read the Bible.

- Almost always we read the assurance “don’t worry, God will provide for your material needs” as a promise that somehow God will help us keep our job or money will somehow come in the mail at the right time.
- But if we look at the context of these promises we see that Jesus is really saying, “God will provide for you through the new kingdom community.”

Sum: Without this kind of radical Christian community we will not be able to give in the proportions mentioned immediately below. Craig Blomberg writes: *“The only way God’s people can consistently obey all the commands is as the entire Christian community worldwide, and any local expression of it, increasingly captures the vision of sharing its resources with the needy in its midst. [Only] when believers realize that others will care for them if they unexpectedly find themselves impoverished, can they then be freed to give more generously in times of plenty.”*⁴

BIBLE STUDY #3

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

1. (Verse 8) Why should Christians not need a command to give and to give generously?

In verse 8, Paul says basically: “Every call to give to the needs of others is not a command but a test of your love and faith.” Then immediately in verse 9, he explains what he means. *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who became poor so you could become rich.”*

- The word “*know*” here does not refer just to cognitive information but also to an experiential grasp of what Christ has done for you.
- If you know Christ’s grace — if you have thought through the implications of it and experienced it — you *will* be radically generous givers.

By the way, Paul is not saying that “If you are stingy, there is nothing you can do about it! You just don’t have the right feelings.” You can work on love.

- You can think of a loved one or what a loved one has done to you and means to you until your heart begins to warm and be moved.
- Again we see that Paul demands the love that cannot be just the response to a demand. If it does not flow naturally out of the heart, then you have to go back to and ask if you really understand that you have been saved by sheer grace through the costly love of Christ.
 - a) If you believe you’ve been accepted because of your moral record and good works, you will not have the deep sense that your salvation is a pure gift.
 - b) If you believe you’ve been accepted because of your moral record and good works, you may also look down at the poor or others with financial needs. You may think: “Why can’t they be more resourceful?”
 - c) But if you are sure that everything you have is a merciful, undeserved gift, then you will be more generous toward those with less.
- In short, a heart that really knows the grace of Christ will naturally be generous with its money and goods.

2. What practical guidance does the passage give to those who want to know “How much should I give?”

We see God is not interested so much in a percentage as in the level of sacrifice.

- Paul tells us that the impoverished Macedonians in verse 3, *“gave as much as they were able and beyond their abilities.”* This does not mean that they gave more than they had, but their giving really hurt. It probably diminished their already meager lifestyle.
- Jonathan Edwards, considering the phrase *“bear each other’s burdens”* in Galatians 6:1, answered the objection *“I cannot afford to give.”* He said, *“If we are never obliged to relieve others’ burdens, but when we can do it without burdening ourselves, how do we bear our neighbors burdens when we bear no burden at all?”*
- If your giving does not burden you to some extent, it is not sacrificial.

We see God wants us to take extremely close notice of the economic needs of others around us.

- We should not give strictly in response to a formal giving-goal, like 10% of our income. We should give in response to the actual needs around us.

Paul’s quoting of Exodus 16:18 is very instructive here.

- In the desert, God provided for the material needs of the people with manna that appeared in the mornings and which had to be gathered.
- Even though some were more able gatherers of manna than others, all manna was distributed equitably so no one received too much or too little for their needs (Ex 16:16-18). Any manna that was hoarded simply spoiled; it became rancid and full of maggots (v.19-21).

In 2 Cor. 8:13-15, Paul interprets this as an abiding principle for how we are to deal with God’s material provision for us. He likens our money to manna. This means:

- a) The money we have is as much a gift of God as the manna was a gift to the Israelites in the desert. Though some are more able gatherers, some are better at making money than others. The money you make is a gift of God.
- b) The money we make must be shared to build up community beyond what you personally need. Just as God clearly expected material provision beyond one’s personal *“needs”* (Exod 16:13) to be shared with others rather than kept for oneself, so wealthier believers must share with poorer ones, not only within a congregation but across congregations and borders (cf. 2 Cor 8:15 and context).
- c) To extend the metaphor — money that is hoarded for oneself rots the soul!

READINGS

Read and put a "?" if you have a question; put an "!" if an insight is helpful to you.

When we were first married more than eighteen years ago, my wife and I committed to begin with a tithe, based on the very modest income I had when I was a graduate student, and then to increase that percentage if God increased his annual provisions for us. Over the years God has blessed us... Our overall combined family income... puts us \$4,000 below the average household income for our affluent suburban community. Nevertheless, we are able to give over 30% of our income to our church and to para-church organizations and individuals involved in Christian ministry. This was our fifth consecutive year of topping 30%, following the principle of the graduated tithe. I must quickly confess that we live in a large, comfortable suburban home. It is true that our neighbors for the most part are working class or retired rather than professional and that our suburb is surrounded by considerably more affluent ones, to which most of my once professional neighbors have moved. We are happy to give nice gifts to our children so as to make them feel not too different from their peers socio-economically, and to enjoy recreational activities, cultural and sporting events, a meal out — though compared to our suburban friends we do these latter things considerably less frequently... We refuse to go into debt for anything but property and education, bought cars only that we could afford to pay cash for, bought goods in bulk, at discounts, at garage sales and thrift shops. We have not amassed the number or nature of clothes most Westerners seem compelled to accumulate. Nor is anything I have written meant to suggest that I believe savings, investments, insurance or pension schemes are wrong. I have all these and hope their earning continues to grow. While I know of others who, for a variety of reasons have adopted a much more radically simple lifestyle, God has not yet led me to follow them, even after considerable discussion, prayer, and soul-searching. In short I feel I have a very rewarding life, materially speaking, and am not a particularly exemplary model of sacrificial giving... but when the American Christian average of total giving per family is below 3% of per capita income, surely we can do considerably better!

– Craig Blomberg ⁵

By the gospel we must give aid even when we can't do it without suffering ourselves... how else will we bear one another's burdens? If we are never obliged to relieve others' burdens but when we can do it without burdening ourselves, then how do we bear our neighbor's burdens when we bear no burdens at all?"

– Jonathan Edwards ⁶

Personal Memorandum - December 1868

Thirty-three and an income of \$50,000 per annum. By this time two years I can so arrange all my business as to secure at least 50,000 per annum. Beyond this never earn — make no effort to increase fortune, but spend the surplus each year for benevolent purposes. Cast aside business forever except for others...

...Man must have an idol. The amassing of wealth is one of the worst species of idolatry. No idol more debasing than the worship of money. Whatever I engage in I must push inordinately therefore should I be careful to choose a life which will be the most elevating in character. To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares and with most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time, must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery. I will resign business at Thirty-five...

– Andrew Carnegie 7

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?**2. The long quote from Craig Blomberg demonstrates how it is possible in America to live a comfortable middle-class life and still give away 25% of your income or more. How does his example give you some insights about how to grow in your own generosity?**

Blomberg introduces the idea of the graduated tithe.

- The Old Testament gives us warrant to speak of something like this. The laws of Moses required regular animal offerings to God. This was a major donation of wealth, since one's livestock was analogous to our accumulated investments today.
- One of the spiritual purposes of such offerings was to loosen the heart's attachment to its wealth and to remind it that all it owned really belonged to the Lord.
- But when the law called for animal sacrifices, it did not require a flat offering, that is, it did not require the same kind of animal from every family. Instead it instituted a sliding scale for worshippers from different social classes.
 - a) The poor could offer a pigeon while the wealthy were to offer up sheep or a bullock.
 - b) Historical experts tell us that almost certainly a pigeon was *still* a more difficult gift for the poor to give than was a bullock for the rich.
 - c) In other words, a wealthy person could give a gift of 20% of their annual income and still not sacrifice any part of their ordinary daily living standards, while a poor person giving 5% of their income might have to make major sacrifices in the way they conduct their daily life.
 - d) The law of Moses recognized this and so there was a progressive scale of offerings.
- This practice (along with the recognition that in Christ our generosity should be greater than in the Old Testament era) leads us to conclude

that it would be myopic to stop our thinking about giving with a mere 10% tithe.

- a) If 10% is a minimum rule of thumb, and if Old Testament believers were required to give on something of a sliding scale, then it is right for believers to be constantly pushing ahead to try to give a greater percentage of their income away.
- This makes completely obsolete the often-asked question, “Does a tithe mean 10% of my income before or after taxes?” Obviously, you give away as much as you can!
 - a) If 10% before taxes is all you can afford right now and still meet the basic needs of the family (see below) then that is all you do.
 - b) The question implies that there is a figure or percentage that God will be satisfied with and where we can rest our conscience.
 - c) But your conscience should find its rest in the gospel not the tithe, and you should always be trying to push the envelope and give away more.

Blomberg shows some practical ways we can control our spending on ourselves and therefore increase giving.

First, there is the major issue of one's housing.

- As Blomberg's income increased he could have moved from a more blue-collar neighborhood into a nicer white-collar neighborhood but he did not.
- It is typical for a real estate agent to tell a family, “You can afford this much of a house on your income” but that agent is not assuming 10%-20% level of income sharing and generosity! The agent is working out of a different worldview.
- The Blomberg family avoided spending the normal percentage of income that most Americans spend on their housing. American Christians virtually never deliberately live in a neighborhood that is less affluent (thus less safe, attractive, status-desirable) simply in order to help the neighborhood thrive. They live where their own comfort, economic value, and status are best served.
- But the gospel should change such a mind-set. However, one could ask: “Are there to be no Christians living in wealthier communities?” But of course, we need Christians in every human community.
- But within the bracket of a particular community, Christians should be pressing to keep their costs as low as possible so they can give as much as possible.

- a) They should live in the humbler houses in the town; they should dress and live in simpler ways without falling out of the community itself.
- And the attitude of Christians within the wealthy community should be one of being resident aliens. They should have a clear sense of mission.
 - a) It is spiritually destructive to desire to live in affluent communities simply for the beauty, status, safety, and comfort of them — i.e. for their own sakes.
- There should be at least as many Christians in a region voluntarily living in communities that are less desirable, safe, and comfortable. In general, this should be the rule of thumb.
 - a) Few middle-class Christians should try to live among the very poor. Unless you are part of a very careful strategy, you will more likely help push them out through gentrification.
 - b) But on the other hand, you should not live in the most desirable place you can afford. To live in a community that has more needs means you will have more income to give away, since your living costs are lower, and you will contribute more to the common good of your needy neighborhood.

Second, there is the lifestyle spending level with regard to furnishings, recreation, travel, clothing and so on.

- A very strong theme in the Bible is this: you should not spend money on yourself beyond your basic needs (1 Tim 6:6-10).
- But what are they? As we have seen, this cannot mean the Bible forbids being wealthy and demands wealthy people actually divest themselves of all their investments and savings. There are too many rich believers — e.g. Abraham, Job — who are allowed to stay that way!
- But almost certainly this idea of basic needs is lower than the living-standard expectation of the average professional person in the U.S.
- So then how much to give away? The basic answer is to voluntarily choose a lifestyle down two notches from what you could afford (if you weren't giving your money away in gospel-proportions) and stay there. Then give the rest away.

Σ Some specific guidelines:

- a) You can't give away so much that you hurt your health. You are a steward of your body.

- b) You should not live in places or in such a way that you are running yourself into the ground, or where you are exposed to things that will erode your health, or that you don't have proper health and medical maintenance.
- c) You can't give away so much that you renege on your obligations. We are to pay our debts and keep our promises.
 - i. Many Christians become aware of the joys and responsibilities of radical generosity but when they do so they have high rent bills or mortgages or tuition.
 - ii. You cannot simply begin to give at such levels that you make it difficult or impossible to meet those obligations. It may be that you now determine that many of your obligations were unwise, but that does not mean you still don't have to fulfill them.
 - iii. It may take you years to bring yourself into a situation where you can give in Biblical proportions responsibly.
- d) You can't give away so much that you can't continue to give in the future. Sometimes wealth that is invested rather than immediately given all away will produce more giving in the long run.
 - i. It is easy to delude yourself with this reasoning. (It is easy to justify very little giving for years with the justification that some day you'll be able to really be generous.) Nevertheless, it is often valid.
- e) You can't simply impose your personal living-standard comfort level on everyone else in your family. It is especially difficult to raise children in a situation like Craig Blomberg's (see above) without creating resentment in them. You must persuade the others to live more simply rather than just legalistic impose it on them.

If you have been given the clarity and joy to live a much simpler lifestyle than other Christians in the same community, you must not try to bind consciences and insist that everyone else make your same choices.

- For example, if you decide to save tuition costs by sending your children to public schools, do not self-righteously insist that Christian parents who do private schooling are being self-indulgent.
- Your personal model (if not conducted arrogantly) will be a better lesson for other Christians than any effort to shame them or show them the error of their ways.

Note: It is natural to ask: "What difference does it make to the poor of the world if I spend less on myself?" Certainly it will make no difference if you merely spend less on yourself without a strategy for your giving. But we should not be blind to what *cumulative* impact there could be if the Bible's teaching was taken seriously by Christians.

- Ronsvalle and Ronsvalle (*The Midas Trap*) have demonstrated that if all American Christians would tithe, not only would all Christian ministries continue to be supported but theoretically there would be enough money, if distributed to all the poor of the world, to lift them all above the poverty line (p.45).
- Obviously, we have to use the word “theoretically” because the structural causes of poverty would continue to aggravate social injustice.
- Nevertheless, that very calculation shows what power could be unleashed in the world for good if Christians took the Biblical teaching seriously.

3. This remarkable note by Andrew Carnegie was written to himself when he was thirty-three. He wanted to get out of business within two years but he never did. What does this teach us?

A survey of what the Bible tells us about wealth and possessions reveals three principles.

1. The material world is an intrinsic *good*.

- Material goods and pleasures are not an illusion (Eastern religions) or a spiritually corrupting influence (western paganism, Hellenistic religions, and dualistic philosophies).
- The land and its produce are goods to be enjoyed and seen as blessings.
- There is nothing wrong with making money or with becoming wealthy.

2. However, sin leads to continual abuse of the material world.

- We are told that we must manage the material world as stewards and not as absolute owners.
- God wants those with more of his property to use it not for personal ends but for the protection of those with less — but because of sin this stewardship is seldom practiced.
- The widow, the poor, and the immigrant — the powerless — are now tests. Any society (and any individual with wealth) is to be judged by what happens to the marginalized neighbors.

3. God forms a people who are to model to the world a redeemed society in which wealth and possessions are used to build up community and not for personal fulfillment.

There will always be a tension between the first two of these principles. Wealth is a good thing, yet (now) it is a very dangerous thing.

- Making money is a good thing but riches will rot the individual soul and the community, unless they are used properly.
- Private property is right and is to be safeguarded, yet property rights are not absolute, because we are only stewards.
- Andrew Carnegie was caught between these two forces.
 - a) He saw the remarkable good that could be done with wealth, but he also recognized what it was doing to him on the inside.
 - b) The appalling way he treated many of the laborers who made him rich is a matter of historical record. He was never able to give up his idol.
- Carnegie, who was raised in a Christian home, eventually professed atheism. As a result, he did not have the gospel resources internally to displace money as an inordinate love and basis for his self-worth.
- He also did not have the Christian community around him, which seeks to remember both the goodness and the dangerous nature of material goods, as it seeks to model the “new society” of Jesus to the world, and as we seek to determine our own household economics and standard of living.

4. Consider the following exercise, if you have never done something similar:

- Estimate what percentage of your money is currently going to:
 - a) Christian ministry — church, Christian workers, other ministries
 - b) People outside your family with economic needs
- How close is this to 10% of your income?
- Develop a plan for regular giving:
 - a) Decide what percentage of your income you will give this year.
 - b) Make it a sacrificial level. Identify the sacrifices in your own mind that you will probably have to make.
 - c) Prayerfully determine how this giving portion will be distributed among causes you feel will honor him.
 - d) Decide at what intervals you will give and have a way to keep a record of how well you follow your plan.

¹ L. Vischer, *Tithing in the Early Church* (Fortress, 1966) p. 10.

² Craig Blomberg, *Neither Riches nor Poverty* (Apollos, 1999) p. 136.

³ Ibid, p.132.

⁴ Ibid, p.145.

⁵ Ibid, p.248-249.

⁶ Jonathan Edwards, "The Duty of Charity" in *Works* ed. by Edward Hickman, vol. 2, p.171 (Banner of Truth, 1974.)

⁷ Quoted in Os Guinness, *Doing Well and Doing Good: Money, Giving, and Caring in a Free Society* (Navpress, 2001), pp.281-282.

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to love and marriage?

Study 9 | Course 2

KEY CONCEPT – MARRIAGE

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

What are the purposes of marriage according to the Bible?

- To build kingdom-exhibiting community before the world (1 Cor 7)
Christians should choose partners not primarily for personal fulfillment or social status/security. Rather, we choose marriage and a partner to be a *sign* of the future kingdom.
 - a) We marry to show how God’s grace creates unity across the gender barrier and reunites humanity.
 - b) We marry to bear and disciple children, creating a new Christian community in which relationships of truth and love exist in interdependent balance.
- To be a vehicle for our spouse’s future-selves through sacrificial service (Eph 5)
Christians should choose marriage partners not just for what they are, but in view of what they can become. We are to develop a vision for ministry to our spouse. It is a life-long commitment to our spouse’s future beauty and glory.
 - a) We want to do whatever it takes to be a vehicle for that and so we develop strategies of service to our spouse that confront, affirm and forgive.
 - b) And of course, nothing will help your spouse grow more than if he or she is committed to your growth in the same way.
 - c) This view of marriage in the long run provides great personal fulfillment, but not in the sacrifice-less and superficial way that contemporary people want it to come.

What is the purpose of the single life according to the Bible?

- Christianity was the first major religion that held up the single life as a valid way to live. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 holds both marriage and singleness before his readers as options.
 - a) Traditional cultures tend to make an idol of marriage and family, so singleness is seen as aberrant.

- b) Contemporary Western culture tends to make an idol of individual freedom, so marriage is delayed or derided.
- c) Christianity does neither. The strongest ties are not those of blood, but of faith (Mark 3:31-35), so the church is our ultimate security and community.
- If through the gospel our security and hope is in Christ, we will neither fear nor over-desire marriage. This means that Christian singles should do seasonal marriage-seeking.
- a) While much of the time you may be passive, waiting to come across someone, there should be other times in which you deliberately look for prospective marriage partners among people that you may be overlooking.
- As Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 7, the advantages of the single life is the greater amount of discretionary time and money that can be given to others in ministry.

What is the purpose of sex according to the Bible?

- Sex is God's way for one person to say to another, "I belong completely, exclusively to you in every aspect: socially, legally, economically, spiritually and emotionally."
- a) In 1 Corinthians 6:17, Paul forbids sex between unmarried persons.¹ He insists it is radically dissonant to give your body to someone to whom you will not also commit your whole life.
- b) Sexual integrity means we should not split off the body from the rest of the life. Don't give your body if you aren't willing to give your whole life.
- When physical one-ness is an expression of whole life one-ness, then sex deepens the trust and love between two people.
- a) Sex outside marriage is asking for physical union without the willingness to give up your freedom.
- b) So sex is a way God invented to do "whole-life-entrustment" and self-giving. It mirrors the whole-life commitment we make to Christ (Eph 5:22ff).
- c) If you use sex for physical and emotional gratification instead, you weaken your ability to do this entrustment.

1. Which statements struck you and why?

2. What is wrong with wanting to marry for personal fulfillment or for social status and security?

Neither of these motives is wrong in themselves. The problem only comes when these motives are *primary*.

- Traditional societies tend to make an idol out of marriage because it makes an idol out of the family and tribe. In these cultures, the primary reason to choose a spouse is social status and security. You want to marry someone who brings your own family “up” in the world.
- On the other hand, contemporary societies tend to make an idol of independence because it makes an idol out of individual choice and happiness. In these cultures, the primary reason to choose a spouse is personal sexual and emotional fulfillment.
- Both of these motives — fulfillment and social security — are good and proper motives for choosing a mate. But they tend to become ultimate values if the gospel has not changed your mind and heart.
- In short, traditional societies are marked by an idolatry of family while contemporary cultures are marked by a fear of marriage.
- This is why in Manhattan physical beauty and money are absolute requisites in a partner, and why in traditional cultures (including parts of our own country) you are considered a freak if you aren’t married with children by the time you are thirty.

Contemporary culture is very cynical about marriage and avoids it and fears it, or at least puts it off, inordinately. Since we in NYC live in a very contemporary western society which idolizes independence and personal fulfillment, Christian singles are often affected by these worldly values in subtle ways. My experience in NYC is that at least as many Christian singles are infected by the contemporary idols (fear of marriage) as by traditional idols (over-desire for marriage). This view of marriage brings with it the following pathologies.

General Perfectionism

- One major fruit of the contemporary view of culture is that singles are extremely perfectionistic and impossible to satisfy as they look at prospective spouses.
 - a) They want extremely low-maintenance partners. They want partners who are extremely “together,” with great records and no obvious defects.

Specific Perfectionism: Looks and Money

- When contemporary singles say they want personal fulfillment in marriage, they usually mean sexual fulfillment and career or material fulfillment, not the fulfillment of character growth (Eph. 5:25-27) into love, peace, joy, and hope (Col. 1, Gal. 5, 1 Cor. 13).

- As a result, modern dating is a remarkably crass form of self-merchandising. You must look good and make money if you are to attract dates, a partner or a spouse.
- The reason you want a good looking or affluent partner is for your own self-esteem (i.e. personal fulfillment).

Imperfectionism

- Some people seeking fulfillment in marriage will want someone who is deeply flawed, imperfect, and needy who will always be dependent on them.
- Many people are personally fulfilled by being needed and always fixing others.

Paradoxically, both the traditional idolatry of family and the contemporary fear of marriage are rooted in the same basic problem.

- The deepest needs of our heart for love and acceptance can only be met through a gracious relationship with God.
- If we don't have that we will look to marriage to give it to us. This is a burden that no human relationship can bear.

In this broken world, marriage is only a partial help. It is not a panacea. No marriage will completely give us what we want or need. Even Christians married to Christians will do a terrible job of conducting their marriage if they don't have a deeply fulfilling love relationship with Christ now, and an ultimate hope in a perfect love relationship then.

- If we don't have that, married people will put too much pressure on their marriage to fulfill them, and that will always create pathology in their lives.
- And if singles don't have the same fulfilling love relationship with Jesus, they will put that pressure on their dream of marriage, and that will create pathology in their lives as well.
- But if singles do rest in and rejoice in their marriage to Christ, that means they will be able to handle single life without devastating loneliness.
- Singles must realize that the very same idolatry of marriage that is distorting their single lives would (or will) distort their married lives.

[Note: If your group consists mainly of married persons, you may do only Bible Study #'s 1, 3 or 4. If your group consists mainly of single persons, you may do only Bible Study #'s 1, 2 or 4.]

BIBLE STUDY #1

Genesis 2:18-24

1. Verse 21 says Adam did not have (literally) 'a help fit for him.' Consider the other uses of this word in Exod 18:4, Ps 121:1-3, Hos 13:9. What does this tell us about the woman?

One of the difficulties many people have with this text is that the English word "helper" is such a weak one. It connotes an "assistant," a secretary — someone who is not as able as you are and who therefore helps you with menial tasks. But this does not give us the true meaning of the term.

- The Hebrew word translated "help" here is "*ezer*," and it is used 17 times outside of this instance, and 14 of those times it is used to describe God.
- What then is a help or helper in the Bible? It is someone who has some strength or ability that you do not have and you need. In Hos. 13:9, God says that it is self-destructive to live without "*your helper*."

If the woman has some ability that the man does not have, then this must mean that she is his irreplaceable complement.

- The Bible never exactly spells out exactly in what ways women complement men. This is, of course, wise! In every culture, the "complementary otherness" will work its way out in very different ways.
- It is probably impossible, therefore, to make a list of feminine and masculine traits that fit everyone across cultures.

2. Verse 24 says "for this reason" a man shall unite with his wife. What is this "reason" referred to?

The words "*for this reason*" must refer back to what Adam has just said.

- In v.23, he sees the woman and perceives that she is both *like* him (he calls her "*bone of my bones*") as well as *unlike* him (he calls her "*woman*" not another man).
- The vivid image of Eve's being "taken out" of Adam's side again gets across the idea of complementary otherness which Adam perceives and sings about.

- (The words of Adam in v.23 constitute a poetic couplet. This is the first art that we see human beings producing — a hymn to the wonder of gender!)
- So what is the import of the word “*for this reason?*” The Genesis writer is saying that men and women marry because of their deep relatedness *yet* their otherness.
- In his wisdom, God created humanity in two parts — male and female. Marriage re-unites humanity.
- So the Bible teaches that the reason for marriage is the differences between the genders.

What does this mean theologically? It is significant, because it helps us understand salvation.

- It is extremely hard for male and female to become “one.” Marriage symbolizes how God is able to overcome all barriers to enter into a covenant relationship with us who are “other” than him.
- God is *constantly* using human marriage as a metaphor for his own saving relationship with his people. Jesus used the image of a wedding feast to describe the kingdom (Matt. 25) and his own ministry (Luke 14) calling himself the “bridegroom” (Matt 9:15ff).
- Paul of course likens Jesus’ salvation of us to his taking us as his spouse. In Christ especially, the gospel brings down the normal barriers between those who are different, and unites us in our otherness.

What does this mean practically?

- Does it mean that any single adult who is unmarried is incomplete? No. As we will see immediately below, that cannot be true.
- If it were true, Jesus (whose life was our perfect example of the righteousness God calls us to as human beings) would have been married.
- The gospel brings down barriers between male and female in Christian community as well, where we are able to give our help to each other.

BIBLE STUDY #2

1 Cor 7:27-31

1. Why does this passage seem so negative about marriage?

This passage is very confusing to readers on its surface.

- Paul seems to be saying “It’s not a sin to marry, but it is a boatload of difficulty!” This appears to be at profound variance with the exalted picture of Ephesians 5:21ff.
- Also, Paul’s view of marriage seems to have been conditioned by a conviction that Jesus was coming back any day (*“The time is short”*). Since that did not happen, readers often conclude, this passage seems to be obsolete. But that is not a proper reading of what Paul is saying.

2. In vv.29-31 Paul assumes that the kingdom of God is both partially here and not here yet. What is the practical effect of this belief on us?

Behind *“the time is short”* phrase is a sophisticated view of history. Paul (like Jesus) taught the overlap of the ages.

- The kingdom of God — God’s power to renew the whole of creation — has broken into the old world (aeon or age) through Christ’s first coming. The kingdom is here in a substantial but partial way (Rom 13:11-14).

What does this mean practically for our relationship with things in the world?

- On the one hand, it means that all the social and material concerns of this world still exist.
- But on the other hand, the gospel brings us an internal joy and peace and a hope in the future-of-God which relativizes and transforms all our earthly relationships. (cf. Rom 14:17 – *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*)
- Therefore we must not “over-invest” ourselves and our hearts in anything besides the kingdom. The future of God means radical freedom!

- a) We are neither too elated by success nor too cast down by disappointment because our true success is in God (Col. 3:1-4).
- b) Though we have possessions we should live as if they weren't really ours, for our real wealth is in God (Luke 16:1ff).
- c) We should "sit loose" to everything.
- Finally, Paul applies this principle to marriage and singleness. We are neither over-elated by getting married nor over-disappointed by not being so because Christ is the only spouse that can truly fulfill us, and God's family the only family that will truly embrace and satisfy us (Eph.5:21ff).

3. When Paul was writing there was no society in which single adulthood was an acceptable form of living. Why was that? Why did the gospel change that?

Christianity was the very first religion or worldview that held up single adulthood as a viable way of life. Jesus and Paul were single.

- *"One... clear difference between Christianity and Judaism [and all other traditional religions] is the former's entertainment of the idea of singleness as the paradigm way of life for its followers" (Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character p.174).*
- Nearly all religions and cultures made an absolute value of the family and of the bearing of children. There was no honor without family honor, and there was no real lasting significance or legacy without leaving heirs.
- By contrast, the early church not only did not pressure people to marry (as we see in Paul's letter) but it institutionally supported poor widows so they did not have to remarry.

"Should they be widowed, Christian women enjoyed substantial advantages. Pagan widows faced great social pressure to remarry; Augustus even had widows fined if they failed to marry within two years. In contrast, among Christians, widowhood was highly respected and remarriage was, if anything, mildly discouraged. The church stood ready to sustain poor widows, allowing them a choice as to whether or not to remarry. [Single widows were active in care-giving and good deeds in the neighborhood.] (Stark, The Rise of Christianity p.104).

Why? The Christian gospel and hope of the kingdom future de-idolized marriage.

"Singleness was legitimated, not because sex was questionable, but because the mission of the church is 'between the times' [the overlap of the ages]... We must remember that the 'sacrifice' made by singles was not [just in] 'giving up sex' but in giving up heirs. There could be no more radical act than that! This was a clear expression that one's future is not guaranteed by the family, but by the [kingdom of God and the] church..." (Hauerwas, p.190).

"[Now, in the overlap of the ages], both singleness and marriage are symbolic institutions for the constitution of the church's witness of the kingdom. Neither can be valid without the other. If singleness is a symbol of the church's confidence in God's power to convert lives for the growth of the church, marriage and procreation is the symbol of the church's hope for the world. For Christians do not place their hope in their children, but rather their children are a sign of their hope... that God has not abandoned this world..." (Hauerwas, p.191).

See how the gospel changes our view of marriage and singleness.

- Christians are to choose between marriage and singleness neither for the basic contemporary motive (idolatry) of personal fulfillment nor for the traditional motive (idolatry) that you aren't "anybody" unless you have a family and children.
- Rather, we marry (or not) on the basis of which state makes us best a *sign of the kingdom*.
- Hauerwas says that single Christian adults were a startling witness to the coming kingdom in that ancient world. They showed that their hope and significance was not in family or heirs but in the kingdom.
- But both then (and *especially* now — see below) being married is also a way to be a sign of the kingdom.

This is a key reason why the Bible forbids you to wittingly marry someone who doesn't share your faith.

- One of the main purposes of marriage is *to build kingdom-exhibiting community* — to show the world how Christ transforms everything, including marriage. You can't do that at all if both spouses aren't believers.
- A Christian who wittingly marries a non-believer shows that his or her motive is not mission or kingdom-exhibition. One of the main ways (and maybe *the* main way) that married Christians witness to Christ is to show the difference Christ makes in marriage.

This is why many single Christian adults do not marry even though they have a very deep desire to do so.

- If one non-negotiable reason for marriage is kingdom-exhibition, then that leaves out a lot of otherwise good prospects! If you can only marry “in the Lord,” your pool of candidates shrinks drastically.
- But if a single Christian remains single largely because he or she will not compromise here, then we are paying a price for the kingdom. We are promised to be blessed for that (1 Pet 4:13-14, 19).
- And God will use the Christian’s singleness to minister to others in ways that married people cannot (cf. 1 Cor 7:32-34).

The purpose of both singleness and marriage is to create communities which are a sign of the glory of the coming (and present) kingdom of God. But to do that, every church needs a combination of both Christian married couples and Christian singles.

- Both couples and singles can minister to each other (see point B). Paul’s statements show that there are advantages and disadvantages in ministry for both singles and marrieds.
- Hauerwas points out that singles and marrieds both point to the hope of Christ in different ways. The world needs to see both.

Practical implication for the Church

- The gospel-based community practices a view of singleness that is contrary to the idolatry of marriage often seen in traditional culture.
 - a) It frees singles from the shame of being unmarried.
 - b) It speaks realistically and not sentimentally about marriage.
 - c) It treats singles like equal members and leaders in the church.
- Unfortunately, many or most Christian churches imbibe more of the traditional-society view of marriage than a gospel-based marriage.
 - a) It is no exaggeration to say that most churches continue to make Christian single adults feel like freaks or else make them an object of well-meant but patronizing pity.
 - b) Churches do not take 1 Cor.7 seriously at all. They cannot fathom how or why Paul would speak so highly about singleness and so realistically about marriage.

BIBLE STUDY #3

Eph. 5:25-28

1. What, according to vv.26-27 is the goal of Christ for the church? What, then, according to v.28 should be the goal of each spouse in marriage?

The goal of Christ in the Real Marriage — the relationship of Jesus and his church — is to bring about our *“radiance,”* our cleansing from sin and all unholiness. Jesus has a vision of our future glory (Col. 1:27; 1 John 3:2-3). Everything he has and is and will do moves us toward that goal. Verse 28 directly links the purpose of every human marriage to the purpose of the Real Marriage. *“In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives...”* (All assume that the duty here is reciprocal for wives as well.)

The contemporary culture sees the purpose of marriage as basically “fulfillment.” Ephesians 5, however, holds out that at least one of the purposes of Christian marriage is “sanctification.”

- Marriage here is held out as one of the best possible ways to learn about our sins and grow out of them through speaking the truth in love with one another. This takes sacrifice on the part of the spouse. It is not an easy process, but often threatening and painful.
- None of this fits into the contemporary model of marriage as fulfillment. Of course, in the long run this makes for an extremely fulfilling marriage if both partners enter the covenant relationship with this as the end-goal.
- But few people do so. As much as possible, contemporary singles want a partner who is already a “together” person, one who is low maintenance and will not require lots of rearranging of your life. No wonder it is so hard to find candidates like this!

2. How does this purpose of marriage speak to people who are afraid to get married?

There are many sociological explanations for why singles today put off marriage and are so slow to move into commitment.

- One reason given is that, because so many younger adults are now the product of divorce, they are suspicious of prospective partners. Another reason given is that in the past it was hard to “get sex” without being married, but that is no problem now.

- These are certainly factors, and yet I know many Christian singles who are celibate and who have come from intact homes who are having as much trouble moving into committed relationships as everyone else.
- I propose that the reason for the perfectionism goes deeper. While there have been many happy exceptions, Christian singles in most cities operate in pretty much the same way as the surrounding culture. Most candidates are immediately eliminated from consideration on the basis of looks, polish and material/social status. This is simply another way in which Christian singles are being affected by the culture's "far idol" of personal fulfillment and "near idols" of sexual beauty and money. They are looking for someone already beautiful in the most superficial way.
- Instead, we should realize that marriage is a vehicle for helping our spouses become their future-selves through sacrificial service.
 - a) We are to fall in love with the glorious thing God is doing in our spouse's life.
 - b) We become committed to our spouse's future glory.
 - c) We want to do whatever it takes to be a vehicle for that.
- Ironically, this view of marriage eventually does provide unbelievable personal fulfillment, but not in the sacrifice-less and superficial way that contemporary people want it to come.

Sum: Ephesians 5 tells us that marriage is not ultimately about sex or social stability or personal fulfillment. Marriage was created to be a reflection on the human level of our ultimate love relationship and union with the Lord.

BIBLE STUDY #4

Matthew 5:27-30

1. How does Jesus' teaching here subvert the classic double standard of male and female sexual mores?

In many communities in the world today there is a double standard in which husbands who stray sexually are winked at or treated much more leniently than wives. But this double standard is deeply rooted in a view that saw wives as husband's property.

"In the ancient world generally it was held that a married man could have sexual adventures as long as they did not involve a married woman (which would mean violating the rights of her husband). A woman, however, was expected to have no such relations; she should be chaste before marriage and faithful after it... Because of the nature of marriage [in those cultures] adultery was not so much evidence of moral depravity as the violation of a husband's right to have sole sexual possession of his wife... It was not seen as adultery, for example, to have intercourse with a female servant or a Gentile woman. 'Adultery' was infringing on the rights of another Israelite male." (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, p. 117)

In this passage, Jesus radically subverts the double standard. His command makes no distinction. He insists that the seventh commandment, "*Do not commit adultery*," is a universal statement that does not provide separate clauses for men and women. Jesus specifically says that any man who wants to have sex with a woman (notice he does not say "*someone's wife*") is moving into adultery. Jesus is thus speaking to a culture that sees sexual immorality as mainly a matter of theft and insisting that it is mainly a matter of purity.

2. What does Jesus urge us not to do? What does he urge us to do?

What he urges us not to do.

Jesus urges us not to look "*lustfully*." It is important to know that this is not a word that means sexual desire but inordinate desire — *epithumia*. This word is used some 60 times in the New Testament but only two other times in connection with sex. What does that mean?

It means that Jesus is not forbidding sexual desire *per se* as being somehow intrinsically "dirty."

- The Bible is often so celebratory of sexuality that it embarrasses modern readers. Look at the naked Adam singing with rapturous delight at his first sight of the naked Eve who God brings to him (Gen. 2:23-24).

- Look at a man singing for joy about taking hold of his wife's breasts in the Song of Solomon 7:7-9 and Prov. 5:19.

"The role of the woman throughout the Song of Solomon is truly astounding, especially in light of its ancient origins. It is the woman, not the man, who is the dominant voice throughout the poems that make up the Song. She is the one who seeks, pursues, initiates. In Song 5:10-16, she boldly exclaims her physical attraction... ['His abdomen is like a polished ivory tusk, decorated with sapphires...' (v.14) Most English translations hesitate in this verse. The Hebrew is quite erotic, and most translators cannot bring themselves to bring out the obvious meaning... This is a prelude to their love-making. There is no shy, shamed, mechanical movement under the sheets. Rather, the two stand before each other, aroused, feeling no shame, but only joy in each other's sexuality..." (T.Longman, *Intimate Allies*, p.254)

Obviously, the Bible does not see sexual desire *per se* as anything wrong in itself! So what is Jesus talking about? The word "*epi-thumia*" means inappropriately magnified desire. We must put this in context of the purpose of marriage (see Eph 5:22ff. and the first page of this study). Sex is to be a way to give yourself to someone to whom you've committed your whole life. It is a way of delighting the person whose future greatness and glory is your mission.

- "Lust" then, is seeking to take rather than to give. It is seeking to take sexual pleasure without giving your whole self and life to someone.
- "Lust" is not just sexual desire *per se*. There is plenty of arousal, pleasure taking and giving in "whole-life-committing-sexual union!" "Lust" is wanting the person's body without wanting the whole person; lust is giving your body without giving your whole person.
- Generally, lust is sexual desire in order to fill a void.

"We regard love not as the search for a mate, but as the search for an orgasm more apocalyptic than the last one. For [us]... God is located in the senses of the body — not the God of the churches, but the unachievable whisper of mystery within sex — the paradise of limitless energy and perception just beyond the next wave of orgasm."

– Norman Mailer, in "The Beat Generation"

This quote expresses the essence of what Jesus calls "lust" — inordinate desire!

- Mailer does not seek sex as a way to give himself and serve another person, but as a way to find some fulfillment which he admits he can never quite find.
- He also demonstrates that Freud was wrong. Spiritual longings are not just unfulfilled sexual desires. Uncontrollable sexual longings are really unfulfilled spiritual desires.

- Of course, Mailer is much, much more self-conscious and analytical about his sexual desires than most people. Most people tell themselves they simply want relief, or some joy, or some comfort.
- But in any case, lust is seeking to receive rather than give.

What he urges us to do.

What do we do about inordinate sexual longing? Jesus' statement is shocking; it is meant to be. He does not mean to be taken literally, since obviously lust is not actually a function of the physical eye, but of the heart. So what does he mean? Jesus is saying that we must deal radically with lust. What does this mean in practice?

"Jesus says: 'If your eye causes you to sin because temptation comes to you through your eyes (objects you see) then pluck out your eyes — that is, don't look! Behave as if you had actually plucked out your eyes. And if your hand or foot causes you to sin because temptation comes to you through your hand (things you do) or feet (places you visit) then cut them off. That is: don't do it! Don't go! Behave as if you had actually cut them off and flung them away... One wonders if there has ever been a generation in which this teaching of Jesus were more needed... In saying this, I am very far from wishing to lay down any law or make any man-made rules about which books and magazines Christians may read, which plays and films they may go see... Our temperaments and therefore our temptations vary. So we have no right to stand in judgment on others regarding what they feel able to permit themselves. What we do have liberty to say is only this (for this is what Jesus said): *if* your eye causes you to sin, don't look; *if* your foot causes you to sin, don't go; and *if* your hand causes you to sin, don't do it."

– John Stott, *The Sermon on the Mount*, (pp.89-91)

READINGS

Read and put a "?" if you have a question; put an "!" if an insight is helpful to you.

Immediate erotic thrill is the most superficial benefit of the sex act. The bodily exposure that arouses and accompanies it can be both profoundly symbolic and powerfully healing. It is the healing, concrete sign of what is happening in the whole relationship — the uncovering of our inner selves, our deepest fears and yearnings. As I look tenderly on the body of another — and as I experience what it is to feel the tenderness of another's caress — then the one who accepts and touches my most intimate body and caresses it with tenderness caresses also my inmost being — or so it seems when all is right... So it only makes sense that sexual relations be confined to marriage. For mutual disclosure and tender acceptance is not the activity of a moment, but the delicate fabric of a lifetime's weaving. Each time sex springs from casual encounter—physical disclosure and touching — some of its life-giving and healing nature is destroyed.

– John White ²

The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union. The Christian attitude does not mean there is anything wrong about sexual pleasure, any more than about the pleasure of eating. It means you must not isolate that pleasure and try to get it by itself, any more than you ought to try to get the pleasures of tasting without swallowing and digesting, by chewing things and spitting them out again. ³

We use an unfortunate idiom when we say of a man prowling the streets, that "he wants a woman." Strictly speaking, a woman is what he does not want. He wants a pleasure for which a woman happens to be a necessary apparatus... [Real love] makes a man really want, not [even] a woman, but one particular woman. In some mysterious fashion, the lover desires the Beloved herself, not the pleasure she can give. ⁴

Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one... avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe... But in that casket — safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, and irredeemable. ⁵

It is probably impossible to love any human being simply “too much.” We may love him too much *in proportion* to our love for God; but it is the smallness of our love for God, not the greatness of our love for the man, that constitutes the inordinacy.

Being in love is a good thing, but it is not the best thing... Love in a second sense — love as distinct from “being in love” is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit, reinforced (in Christian marriages) by the grace... from God. They have this love for each other even at those moments when they do not like each other... It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run; being in love was the explosion that started it. ⁷

We must not attempt to find an absolute in the flesh. Banish play and laughter from the bed of love and you may let in a false goddess... We are under no obligation at all to sing all our love-duets in the throbbing world-without-end, heart-breaking manner of Tristan and Isolde; let us often sin like Papageno and Papagena instead. ⁸

– C.S.Lewis

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?**2. The first quotes speak of the Christian principle that sexual intercourse is only for marriage. How (on the basis of what we've studied) would you respond to some of the following typical objections to this principle?***"Why can't Christians have sex outside of marriage?"*

- I Cor. 6:16 mentions that sex with a prostitute makes you "one with her." The Bible sees physical oneness to be a monstrosity without emotional, social, economic and personal oneness as well!
- To be physically naked with someone, without making yourself legally, emotionally and socially naked (by marrying him/her) is inconsistent, selfish and unjust.
- Sex is only for a relationship in which each partner becomes totally vulnerable and committed to the other. If you will not marry, you have not really committed, have not really made yourself vulnerable to the other; you have kept control of your life.

"But isn't that a negative view of sex?"

- Not at all. Of course, the Christian view of sex has a very clear, guarded boundary (in marriage and no where else). But that is based on a very lofty and high view of sex.
- In the same way, piles of pure gold are not just left lying around. They are usually surrounded by bars and guards. Why? Not because we value gold so little, but because we value it so much.
- Many people who want no boundaries on sex see it as simply an appetite or a source of pleasure. Christianity sees it as an enormously potent way to enrich, build up and complete a person. But unless it is used properly, it can harm us.

"What's so harmful about it?"

The Christian view is that sex is a "commitment apparatus"—it literally makes you committed and vulnerable to the other, enabling you to trust the other and give yourself.

- When you use it outside of marriage, you may find yourself very quickly feeling very married and feeling completely given and obligated to someone emotionally. Yet that other person has no legal, social, or moral obligation to stay with you one more day.
- It seems monstrously incongruous to sleep with someone and have that someone available sexually to others. So this incongruity leads to far more jealousy and hurt feelings and obsessiveness than would be true if you were dating without sex. (Since you are both having sex without being married, you know that the other person could easily be having sex with someone else besides you.)
- It makes breaking up vastly harder than it should be. It leads many people to stay trapped in relationships that are not good because of a feeling of having (somehow) obligated themselves.
- Lewis, in the *Screwtape Letters*, puts it as follows. (Remember, he is speaking from a "diabolical" point of view.)

"The Enemy [Christ] described it... as 'one flesh'... You can make humans forget that the man they call Paul did not confine it to married couples. Mere copulation, for him, makes 'one flesh'... The truth is that wherever a man lies with a woman, there, whether they like it or not, a transcendental relation is set up between them which must be eternally enjoyed or eternally endured... This transcendental relation was intended to produce — and if obediently entered into, too often will produce — affection and the family." (Letter 18)

I don't believe that Lewis was saying that every act of sex makes you married in God's eyes in a mechanical way, but rather is saying that there is a spiritual/emotional bonding that was meant to be the basis of an unconditional lifetime commitment.

Therefore, if you have sex outside marriage, it won't be long until you will have to fight against the natural tendency to feel closure and commitment.

- You will have to harden yourself against the power of sex to soften your heart and make you more trusting. The problem is that, eventually, sex will no longer have a covenant-renewing power.
- Even after getting married, it may not have much power in that regard.
- Ironically, then, sex outside of marriage eventually works backward, making you *less* able to commit to and trust another person.

"Sex is a private matter — no one's business but mine."

But that is not true for a Christian.

- Your character and witness is a very public matter. God expects you to witness to the reality of the kingdom.
- And you are contradicting the way God gave himself to you in Christ (unconditionally) and the way he calls you to give yourself to him (unconditionally). God does not offer or ask for intimacy without complete whole life commitment and the surrender of your independence.
- Can you imagine him giving his love to us if we do not first give ourselves permanently and exclusively to him, as he has given himself totally and exclusively and permanently to us?
- If you demand intimacy yet keep control of your life, you are a living contradiction of both the way God relates to you and the way we are to relate to each other in the Christian community.

3. The third quote has to do with the power of sexual desires and urges. What are some practical ways single Christians can embrace chastity?

First need — spousal love of Jesus

Sex is for fully committed relationships because it is to be a foretaste of the ecstasy of joy that comes from being in complete union with God. The most rapturous love between a man and woman on earth is only a hint of what that is like (Rom 7:1-6; Eph. 5:22ff).

- This is a practical point. On the one hand, this analogy shows that sex can be a super-sacred experience! Meeting God face-to-face will be enormous joy, and so its earthly analogy will be enormous joy.
- But on the other hand, this teaches us that sex here can not completely fill the cosmic need for closure that our soul seeks in sex. Only the beatific vision will bring the end to loneliness.
- Paul is realistic that not everyone has the gift for life-long celibacy, but virtually everyone is called to celibacy at some point; many are called to do so in marriage itself, for various reasons. The only way through is:
 - a) Negatively, to realize that much of our "burning" comes from being brainwashed by the romanticist or realist views of the world.
 - i. They make sex an idol. We then deal with it like any other idol.
 - ii. Remind yourself that sex as a god always becomes a demon.

- iii. Remind yourself that people with great sex lives find it is *not* enough to give them joy and fulfillment and identity.
- b) Positively, we are called to really experience the spousal love of Jesus, available in prayer. Single people are often unaware that they have greater flexibility and freedom with their time; they have a practical opportunity for a very deep prayer life.
- In short, chastity is not simply a turning away from sex, but it is a turning toward God in a special way.

Second need — a community practicing a new sex ethic

It is typical for Christians to think of Christian sex ethics in purely individualistic terms, but that is not the right way to read the Scripture. Richard Hays, in his commentary responds:

“1 Corinthians 6:9-11 has provided the launching pad for countless moralistic sermons that decry the types of sinners listed here. In fact... the concern of the passage is...that the Corinthians act as a community... and to assert the transformed identity of the baptized... The Corinthians are to stop seeing themselves as participants in the ‘normal’ social and economic structures of their city and to imagine themselves as members of the eschatological people of God, acting corporately in a way that will pre-figure and proclaim the kingdom of God... Paul is seeking to resocialize them into a new way of doing business, a new community consciousness...”

Hays notices that Paul is calling them not just to individual moral behavior, but to be a kingdom community in which the world’s values do not hold.

- Notice that Paul lumps broken sexuality and greed together. Moderns see sex as a medium of exchange for fun and convenience while money is seen as something very sacred, something to sacrifice for, something you don’t share.
- Christians are the reverse. Money is merely exchange, a way to get to other things. Money is nothing sacred or special. We should share it promiscuously. But sex is sacred; it is to be enjoyed for itself because it points us toward the eternal.
- Paul, then, is calling Christians not just to individual moral behavior but to form a community in which consumerism (of either the sexual kind or the materialistic kind) is rejected.

This is critical for us to ponder. Christians will fall prey to the world’s views of sex unless we create a community, an alternate city.

- In this alternate city, singles on the basis of their new identity and kingdom mission — not on the basis of condemnation and guilt — practice sexual abstinence joyfully.

- They live in community with Christian families who do not make family an idol or make Christian singles feel like freaks.
- One of the reasons that it is hard to practice the discipline of sex-free romantic involvement is because we don't have a sufficiently large community of people who are doing it together.

Third need — some practical handles.

- Distinguish between sexual thoughts and sexual fantasies. Luther: "Birds flying around head don't have to make nests in your hair." Etc.
- Distinguish between sexual fasting vs. sexual deprivation. It is like dieting and exercise.
 - a) If you want to eat and someone is just keeping you away from food, it feels unbearable.
 - b) If you are voluntarily dieting/fasting, there is an initial hard period or exhaustion, as your body gets used to it. Eventually you feel a new burst of energy and a lack of craving all the time.
 - c) The same thing can happen with sexual thoughts. If you eschew self-pity and make a decision to do it, and get some others to hold you accountable, you can go on a "thought fast" or "thought diet."
- Use the gospel to overcome your guilt for past abuses of sex. Often it is past memories and past shame that stir up present fantasies.

3. How active (or passive) should a single Christian be in seeking marriage?

There are many times or seasons in which active dating and marriage-seeking do not have to be pursued. Anyone who always needs to have somebody is probably into marriage-idolatry.

- Anyone who is never marriage-seeking is naive about their own sinful fears and perfectionism.
- Paul refers to his singleness as a "gift" in 1 Cor 7:7. Since he almost immediately afterwards says, "*but if they cannot control themselves they should marry*" (v.8), Paul probably means that a single gift consists of a very low felt need for a romantic relationship or marriage.
- We need to make a few cautionary remarks here, however:
 - a) It is possible that a low need for relationships is not from God but is a sign of a deep idolatry of personal freedom. Or it may be an inability to create deep relationships in general.

- i. Don't mistake a selfish spirit or an inability to keep friendships or a fear/disdain of the opposite sex as a single gift! In other words, we should not be too quick to accept a lack of romantic desire as a gift from God.
- ii. Unless you've done some serious dating and made a true effort, you can't be sure about your own heart in this regard.
- b) It is possible that a gift like this is not a permanent condition but rather something given for a definite period of time. It must be re-evaluated periodically.
- c) It is not possible for a man or woman to be so sure of God's calling that they ever totally close off the possibility of marriage. You should stay open to God by allowing yourself to be in a more passive mode for dating. Don't seek but don't refuse.
- But sans a season or a gift you should be actively dating and marriage-seeking. Why?
 - a) To affirm people of the opposite sex within the Christian community
 - b) To help one another learn the intricacies of cross-gender communication, discernment and relationship
 - c) To stay open to God's own leading about whether you should be married or not
 - d) To avoid the contemporary idols that make dating and marriage very threatening
 - e) To avoid "avoiding." Dating and marriage-seeking is a process of self-discovery as well as understanding cross-gender relationships. Don't procrastinate.

4. On the basis of what we've studied, how can we know when we should marry someone?

Do not allow yourself deep emotional involvement with a non-believing person

2 Cor. 6:14ff is invoked for this rule and rightly so, though the many prohibitions in the Old Testament against Jews marrying non-Jews teach the same thing. These were not prohibitions against marrying outside of one's race, but of one's *faith* as can be seen in Numbers 12.

What is the logic behind this?

- a) If your partner doesn't share your faith, then he or she doesn't understand it. And if Jesus is central to you, then that means that your partner doesn't understand you. He/she doesn't understand the mainspring of your life, the ground motive of all you do.

- b) Over and over you will make decisions that your partner can't fathom. Now the essence of intimacy in marriage is that finally you have someone who really understands you and accepts you as you are. Finally, you have someone that you don't have to hide from or always be "spinning," who "gets" you.
 - c) But if the person is not a believer, he or she can't understand your very essence and heart.
 - If you marry someone who does not share your faith, there is only two ways to go.
 - a) One is that you will more and more have to lose your transparency. In the normal, healthy Christian life, you relate Christ and the gospel to everything.
 - i. You will think of Christ when watching a movie.
 - ii. You will base decisions on Christian principles.
 - iii. You will think about what you read in the Bible that day.
- But if you are natural and transparent about all of these thoughts, your partner will find it at least tedious or appalling and even offensive. Your partner will almost have to think that the normal Christian is obsessed. He or she will say, "I had no idea you were this overboard about this."
- b) The other possibility is that you simply move Christ out of such a central place in your consciousness. You may even have to let your heart-ardor for Christ cool. Why? Because if you keep him central you will feel isolated from your spouse.
 - No, there is nothing in the Bible forbidding you to date a non-Christian, since there is nothing in the Bible about dating at all! But there is a clear rule against marrying outside the faith.
 - Wisdom dictates then that you don't get serious with someone who doesn't believe. You must consider that, as a Christian, you know what it is like to be both inside and outside of Christ, while your partner does not.
 - That puts the responsibility on you. He or she will never understand why you think the difference is such a big deal. (He/she will think it is something like a Democrat marrying a Republican or at most like two people of different races marrying one another.)
 - That means if you get involved deeply, the other person will never really understand why you want to break up. That will be enormously painful.

Feel attraction in the most comprehensive sense

- Yes, physical attraction is something that must definitely grow between marriage partners and it will come easily if you have the deeper attraction I'm speaking of.
- Comprehensive attraction is something that you can begin to sense with people if you deliberately disable the default "looks-polish" screening mode (mentioned above). What is comprehensive attraction? (In fact, you may find to your horror you are feeling it with people who directly violate your old screening policy.)
 - a) Part of it is being attracted to the person's character or spiritual fruit (Gal 5:22ff). Jonathan Edwards said that true virtue in any person — the contentment, peace and joy from the gospel — is beautiful.
 - b) Part of it is being attracted to "mission in life" or spiritual gifts. What is his or her deepest mission in life? What part of the work of the kingdom does he or she have a passion for?
- On the basis of both of these, you must become attracted to the person's future self.
 - a) Ephesians 5 tells us that the purpose of marriage is to help one another become the glorious, unique persons God is making us.
 - b) Marriage partners can say, "I see what you are becoming and what you will be (even though, frankly, you aren't there yet). The flashes of your future attract me."
- Ultimately, your marriage partner should be part of your "mythos." C.S. Lewis spoke of a "secret thread" that united every person's favorite books, music, places, or past-times.
 - a) Certain things arouse in you an inconsolable longing that gets you in touch with the Joy that is God. Bernstein said that Beethoven's Fifth always made him sure (despite his intellectual atheism) that there was a God. Beethoven doesn't do that for me.
 - b) Everyone has something that moves you so that you long for heaven or the future kingdom of God.
 - c) Sometimes you will meet a person who shares to a great degree the same mythos thread. Often the person is part of the thread him or herself. This is very hard to describe, obviously.
- Semi-tragic note. An awful lot of married people do not know what this whole comprehensive attraction is. Many people choose their marriage partner on the basis of looks/polish/money and not on the basis of character, mission, future-self and mythos. Often the person they married is not really attractive to them at all in the comprehensive way.

Get and submit to community input

- Courtship assumed that experienced married people (in your extended family) would give you major input in the selection of a spouse. Many people are now insisting that we return to the old requirement of getting the father's consent or even of arranged marriages.
- But that is seldom practical, especially for singles who have been away from home for years and single Christians whose parents have little understanding of the gospel.
- However, the basic principle is right and important. Marriage is not simply an individual decision. The Christian community has a deep investment in you and a deep interest in healthy and happy marriages.
- Also, the community has many married people in it who have much wisdom for the singles. Singles should get community input at every step of the way in their marriage seeking.

So what are the requirements for getting married?

- BOTH CHRISTIANS
Both Christians, both on the same page which means spirituality is at least complementary, not too far ahead or behind, not too opposed, both growing.
- ABLE TO SOLVE PROBLEMS
Moving through and making changes without one person always getting their way. Not working on the very same problems over and over, but themes.
- ATTRACTION
(Comprehensive sense). Yes, physical attraction eventually but not the main factor. "Mythos." Why some music or some places move you deeply and get in touch with joy and fulfill longings.

5. For marrieds: How do the last four quotes give us practical guidance that could improve our marriages?

"Love anything..." reminds us of the risks of marriage and the inevitability of having your heart wrung or broken, often by getting married.

- But the quote is valuable in pressing home the fact that, while the costs of commitment are very great, the costs of *non*-commitment are even greater.
- If we are afraid of ever making commitments and becoming vulnerable then we are even in a more dangerous spiritual condition than if we have made a commitment and now find it painful and difficult.

"It is probably impossible..." reminds us that the single most important factor for success in our marriage is the strength of our relationship to God.

- If we have a difficult spouse, we will only be able to face it (and be compensated) by a strong, growing love relationship to God. If, however, we have an excellent marriage, there is the danger of idolatry.
- We build so much on the other person that we become a slave to fear, should anything happen to him or her.
- Again, then, the key to avoiding idolatry is a strong, growing love relationship to God.

"Being in love is a good thing, but not the best thing..." reminds us that our feelings are not the main component in a good marital relationship.

- As Lewis indicates, strong feelings of love and passion get us started, but the only way to move forward is to be a servant to your spouse over the long haul.
- This does not mean that feelings are left behind. In general, the more you act in sacrificial love for your spouse, the more regular you will *feel* love.
- If, when you do not feel loving you then, in response, do not act in love, your feelings of love will fade even further. That will lead to more cold and selfish behavior which will atrophy your feelings more and so on.
- Of course, your spouse should be doing the same thing. When that happens, the relationship grows very solid and deep.

"We must not attempt to find..." reminds us not to take ourselves too seriously.

- The marital relationship should not always be intense and serious. If it is, someone is making it into an idol.

¹ Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Eerdmans, 2000) p.474. "Do you not know that a person who is united in intimacy with a prostitute is one body with her? For as it is said, 'The two shall become one flesh.'...Keep away from sexual immorality... for you do not belong to yourselves. You were bought with a price. Show forth God's glory, then, in how you live your bodily life. [1 Cor 6:17, 18, 20.] Genesis 2:24 – "the two shall become one flesh" refers to marital union, but Paul takes it to cover all sexual union... Hence, far from devaluing sex, the very opposite comes about. In this area, Paul was far ahead of first century cultural assumptions in perceiving the sexual act as one of intimacy and self-commitment which involved the whole person; not merely the manipulation of some peripheral function of the body. In the context... the issue becomes one of fully giving oneself to the one to whom one belongs." (The quote from 1 Corinthians 6 is Thiselton's translation.)

² John White, *Eros Defiled* (IVP, 1977) pp.18-19.

³ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, bk. 3, chp. 6.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, chapter 5.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, chapter 6.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, chapter 6.

⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, bk. 3, chp 6

⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, chapter 5

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to my work?

Study 10 | Course 2

KEY CONCEPT – WORK

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

God’s creation and our work

The importance of work

- Human beings were put into paradise and given work to do (Genesis 2:15) before the Fall, before sin and before anything was wrong with the world.
- Therefore work is not a curse — it is something we were designed to do. Without work there is a sense of significant inner loss or emptiness.
- Though sin makes work often frustrating and difficult (Gen 3:17ff.), it is intrinsically good.

The goodness of all kinds of work

- Human work means being partners with God in *his* work. That is the obvious implication of Genesis 1-2.
- Since God’s Spirit does not simply save souls but also sustains, cultivates, and renews the material world by his Holy Spirit (Psalm 104:30; 145, 147) then making clothes, practicing law, tilling fields, mending broken bodies, advancing science, or nurturing children all participate in God’s work. God does not only send ministers to give the world sermons, but doctors to give medicine, teachers to impart wisdom, and so on.
- The view, then, that an artist or a banker is doing secular work while a minister is doing spiritual work does not fit with the Biblical understanding. God is also an artist and an investor in the material world. And in Gen 1 God’s hands are literally in the dust — he is also a manual laborer. So all work has dignity.

The limits of work

- The fact that God himself rested after work (Gen 2:2) proves that work is not everything — it is not all there is.
- You will not have a meaningful life without work, but you must not make your work the meaning of your life. To make any work — even ministry — your meaning in life is to create an idol.

Jesus' redemption and our work

- Both ancient Greek and modern thought tend to separate faith-beliefs from the public world and life. This has been called dualism.
- But the Bible does not support a sacred vs. secular distinction. We cannot separate our heart faith from our work and our life in the public sphere.
- Every part of our lives — work, family, civic involvement, recreation — is now to be done for God's glory (1 Cor 10:31).
- The glory of God means his ultimate importance, so in every area of life we must ask: "If God is the most important thing then how should I be conducting my business? How should I be spending my money? How should I live in my neighborhood and municipality?"

Work and Rest

One of the key themes of the Bible is *Sabbath*.

- Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28) — the Lord of Rest! Jesus urges us to come to him because "*I will give you rest.*" (Matt 11:28-30) and no one else will.
- The Sabbath means to regularly cease from, and to enjoy the results of, your work.
 - a) In Deut. 5:12-15, God ties the Sabbath to freedom from slavery. Anyone who cannot rest from work is a slave — to your own need for success, your materialistic culture, exploitative employers, or to all of the above.
 - b) They will use and abuse you if you are not disciplined in the practice of Sabbath. Sabbath is a declaration of freedom.
- External rest of the body, however, is impossible without inner rest from anxiety and strain. It takes the deep rest in Christ's finished work for your salvation (Heb 4:1-10) to avoid over-work. Only then will you be able to regularly walk away and rest from your vocational work.

1. Which statements struck you and why?

2. What are some of the practical implications of the Biblical teaching that all work is good and has dignity and we must not separate God from our work?

All work matters to God

- The ancient Greeks saw the material world (and therefore manual work-for-pay) as demeaning and degrading. A work-less, contemplative life was considered the most humanizing, ennobling, and ideal. Work was seen as an unmixed burden and curse.
 - a) For example, Sparta forbade any of its citizen-soldiers to do manual labor. Think how counter-cultural it was for a tent-maker [Paul] to tell slaves (Christians) to work cheerfully, as if they were working for Jesus (a carpenter!)
- Unfortunately, a strong strain of this thinking has come down to us in Western culture. This view created a hierarchy for all work from the “nobler” work of the philosopher down through the helping professions and on down through the businessman or woman and finally all the way down to domestics and people who push brooms.
- Today, we find our dignity or identity in doing work that is high-status and high-paying. Many people take jobs that they don’t like and/or aren’t good at simply because they are higher status jobs.
- This thinking has even invaded the church. In many churches it is either implicitly or explicitly stated that full-time ministry is the way to really please God, while all other jobs are just “secular work.”
 - b) Young people who want to go into mission work or ministry are celebrated while those who want to go off to the big city to do business or art are simply warned about all the dangers.
 - c) Lay persons who spend an enormous amount of time at church are celebrated while those who are more immersed in more absorbing careers are not.
 - d) Churches make no effort to deliver pastoral support and Christian instruction to the busy professionals who often cannot make it to a weekly week-night class.
- All this has greatly undermined the influence of the Christian faith in the world.
 - a) The widespread belief that the only way to truly serve God is through direct ministry has effectively removed Christians from places of cultural influence for generations.
 - b) It sees the church and its activities as good and untainted, while the secular world is bad and polluting.

- But the Biblical view of the dignity of all work should put a stop to that. We should be as excited about a young Christian who wants to be a lawyer or filmmaker as we are about one who wants to be a minister.

God matters to all our work

- The Bible tells us that Jesus has to be Lord of every area of life, not just of our private lives. The gospel shapes and affects the motives, manner, and methods with which we carry out every task in life, including our vocation.

“Dualism” is a term that refers to the separation of spiritual life/faith-beliefs from the rest of life. It originally had roots in Hellenistic thought that viewed the material world as bad and the spiritual world as good.

- The philosopher Immanuel Kant accentuated it, because he drew a sharp distinction between the public world of objective facts and a private world of moral values. Religion is often seen then as a means of individual spiritual peace and strength and not as a comprehensive interpretation of reality that affects everything we do.
- Dualism is expressed popularly in statements like “religion should be kept separate from your public work — it should be personal and private.”
- But Christianity is not simply a set of beliefs to be held in order to save my individual soul. It is also an interpretation of (and a distinct way of understanding) everything in the world, in life.
- It brings a distinct perspective on human nature, right and wrong, justice, beauty, and character.
 - a) If you believe the universe happened by accident (rather than believing it was created, entered, and redeemed by a personal, Triune Creator God) then you will have to have a different view of every one of these fundamental issues.
 - b) And these issues determine how you live your daily life.

The fact is, then, that all work must be done out of some worldview. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote: *“There is hardly any human action that does not originate in some... idea of the Deity, his relationship to mankind, of the nature of their own souls, of their duty to fellow creatures.”*

- For example, if you believe that this world is all there is, and therefore all moral values are relative and there is no afterlife — this will have an effect on how you do business.

- Making money will be the number one priority, and you will do it any way possible, as long as it does not lead to arrest.
- Plenty of people in New York City go about their business in exactly that way. Why? They are doing their work in accord with their worldview.

The problem comes for Christians when they enter in to a work-world that is operating on the basis of different worldviews. As we just said, the business environment in a place like New York City is a culture with values and policies that are deeply affected by non-Christian views of things.

- The temptation for Christians is to simply plunge into vocational fields dominated by these worldviews and conduct their vocational lives in accordance with the reigning paradigms rather than thinking out the implications of the gospel for how they can do their work with Christian distinctiveness.
- This is true of everything from the method-acting approach for actors to the latest leadership theories being touted at Harvard Business School.
- Are you thinking “worldviewishly” about your work? Are you asking questions like:
 - a) What worldview(s) are predominant in my profession?
 - b) What are the underlying assumptions about meaning, morality, origin and destiny?
 - c) What are the idols? What are the bogeymen? What are the hopes? What’s the story line of the culture in which I live?
 - d) How do those worldviews affect both the form and content of my work? How can I not just work with excellence but with Christian distinctiveness in my work?
 - e) What parts of the dominant views/theories are basically in line with the gospel and which I can agree with and use?
 - f) What parts of the dominant views/theories are basically irresolvable without Christ? How can Christ “finish the story”? Where, in other words, must I challenge my culture?
 - g) What opportunities are there in my profession for serving people and society, and for witnessing to Christ?

These are difficult questions and must be worked out in community over an entire lifetime.

BIBLE STUDY #1

Eph 5:21, 6:5-9

1. Verse 21 is a governing principle for all the relationships that follow — wives and husbands, parents and children, masters and servants. What is the implication of this for relationships at work?

The modern reader winces at the word “*slaves*” (v.5) and “*masters*” (v.9) to a great degree because we immediately think only of the modern African slave trade but slavery in the ancient world existed in many forms.

- Slavery in Israel as outlined in the Mosaic legislation was more like indentured servanthood and probably would not be something we today would recognize as slavery. It was usually a way of working off indebtedness and was never allowed to last longer than seven years.
- Slaves in Rome, however, were people who had been captured by the army in its vast campaigns of conquests.
- When Paul speaks to Christians in Ephesians 6 he is not denouncing the institution of slavery per se, which would have been useless in imperial Rome. He is speaking directly to individual Christians within the institution about how to conduct themselves, and what he says is quite revolutionary.
- He tells masters that *they* are slaves too — of Christ (v.9). That is an extraordinary and radical thing to say to a highly hierarchical culture. He is saying, “Conduct yourself among your servants as if you are a fellow-slave!”
- And on top of that, we have Eph 5:21 that commentators agree is a governing, introductory verse to the whole section. Masters are to “*submit to*” their servants in the sense of serving their best interests and servants are also to truly work hard to serve their master’s interests as well.
- This kind of mutual respect and self-denying support of the master and servant was absolutely unheard of. As the scholar F. F. Bruce says about Paul’s brief statements to slaves and masters in Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon, “*What [Paul’s letters] do is to bring us into an atmosphere in which the institution of slavery could only wilt and die.*” (F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, p.407.)
- That is quite right. Slavery was an accepted institution in all cultures and societies of the world from time immemorial. Only within Christianity did the idea eventually arise that slavery was an abominable institution to be abolished.

- Why? Largely because of the implications of the gospel, laid out by Paul. All Christians are “slaves” of Christ, who himself came as a “*doulos*” or servant (Phil 2:7).
- For more on how Christianity gave the world the idea that slavery was wrong, see Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God* (Princeton, 2003) chapter 4 “God’s Justice.”

2. What practical guidelines are given here working and for managing workers?

For workers

- Workers are told to be whole-hearted in their work (*with sincerity of heart* v.5). They are not to do only the minimum work necessary to avoid penalty, nor are they to work only when and in ways that can be observed, nor are they to work in a distracted, mindless way.
- Instead Christians are to be at work as whole persons, giving their mind and heart fully to doing the best job possible on the task at hand. Why?
- Christian workers can be this way because they have a new motive for their work. They work (literally) “*as unto the Lord*” (v.5). What this means is that because they will have an unimaginable reward in Christ (v.8) their work does not have to be overly tied to the amount of reward (or lack of it) that they get from their masters.
- The parallel passage in Colossians 3:24 reads, “*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.*” (NIV translation) The Greek word “*an*” should really be translated “*the inheritance*.” Paul is talking about the bliss of the world to come.
- What this means is that Christians have been set free to enjoy working.
 - a) If we work primarily for money, or for approval, or for advancement, or for status, work will constantly be frustrating or heart-breaking.
 - b) Many tasks before us will be useless for advancement or money and so we will have drudgery to do.
 - c) Often we will find that others who are far better at showing themselves off or at political maneuvering will get the promotion.
- But if instead we have Christ’s salvation, and if he becomes our main source of significance and security, then these other motives should lose their power over us.
 - a) If we begin to “work as unto the Lord,” we will be freed both from over-work and under-work.
 - b) Neither the prospect nor the lack of it for money and acclaim will be the controlling consideration.

- Work is no longer primarily a grinding necessity or a path to self-worth and fulfillment. It is a way to please God and do good in the world for his name's sake.

For managing workers

- *"Do not threaten them"* means that masters are not supposed to primarily use guilt and coercion to motivate people.
 - a) We cannot assume that every servant addressed in this letter had Christian masters or that the masters had Christian slaves. So these masters could not assume that their servants were "working as unto the Lord."
 - b) Nevertheless, employers are told here not to rely primarily on fear as a motivation for work.
- *"Treat your slaves in the same way"* is outrageous in the context of the ancient world. It means, "You should also be looking for ways to further the interests of your servants even as I just charged them to listen to you."
- Paul reminds them that they are also slaves and that God shows no *"partiality."* This is a bold reminder that class distinctions make no difference to God, and therefore they should not make much difference to us.
 - a) Masters are not to be condescending, demeaning, or haughty. It was nothing short of revolutionary for Paul to call masters to essentially treat servants as equals.
 - b) The passage shows that this does not mean that masters could exercise no authority, but that they should do so with an attitude of humility and warmth toward those over whom they have power.

At first glance we might wonder whether these directions, spoken to such a different cultural situation, are applicable to us.

- But after reflection we see that if slave owners are told they must not manage workers in pride and through fear, how much more should this be true of employers today?
- And if slaves are told it is possible to find satisfaction and meaning in their work, how much more should this be true of workers today?

BIBLE STUDY #2

Exod 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15

1. Each of the two statements of the command to rest ties the observance to a different event in history. What does each event tell us about the reason we must rest?

Exodus 20 ties the observance of a Sabbath day to creation. *"For God rested on the seventh day."* Since God rested in the midst of his creation, we must also rest. What does this mean practically?

- It means that a rhythm of work and rest is not something only for believers but for everyone. It is part of our created nature.
- It means that over-work or under-work violates that nature and leads to break down.
 - a) To rest is actually a way to both enjoy and honor the goodness of God's creation. To violate the rhythm of work and rest (again, in either direction) leads to chaos in our life and in the natural world.
 - b) We must regularly and rhythmically cease from ordinary work and enjoy the results of our work and the goodness of God's work of creation (in nature) and redemption (through worship).

Deuteronomy 5, however, ties the observance of a Sabbath to God's redemption. Verse 15 says, *"Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day."*

- God sees the Sabbath day as a re-enactment of emancipation from slavery. It is a reminder that he delivered them from a condition in which they were not human beings, but simply a "means to an end" in the brick quota system of Pharaoh.
- Anyone who is not disciplined in the Sabbath is a slave, even if this is self-imposed. Your own heart, or our materialistic culture, or an exploitative company, or all of the above will be using you and abusing you if you don't have the ability to be disciplined in your practice of Sabbath.
- Sabbath is therefore a declaration of freedom. It means you are not a cog in a machine.
 - a) The Sabbath day and Sabbath year legislation in Israel was unique at that time among world cultures. It limited work, profit-taking, income and economic production.

- b) Every seventh day, no work in the fields could be done, and every seventh year the field was to remain fallow and not be cultivated at all. This surely meant that in the short run Israel was less economically productive and prosperous than its neighbors.
- c) But it was a land of free people. In the long run, of course, a deeply rested people are far more productive.

2. What practical guidance do we get from these two passages for our inner attitude during Sabbath time?

Ceasing from exertion is of course directly beneficial simply as a respite and time of rejuvenation. But to practice Sabbath clearly means to get some *internal* peace and freedom from stress and work as well. The only way to do that is to understand the actual *meaning* of the Sabbath—understand what it is a sign of, what it points to. The Biblical passages show us:

- We must think of Sabbath as an *act of liberation*. God appointed the Sabbath to remind the Israelites they were no longer slaves. Slaves can't take a day off!
 - a) But this is quite relevant to us today. Take your Sabbath with a note of triumph. Say, "I am not a slave — not to my culture's expectations, my family's hopes, my company's exploitations, or my own insecurities. I will not be defined by my job"
 - b) This is very important "self-talk," otherwise you can feel guilty for taking time off, or you can simply keep your mind on your work during your supposed rest.
- We must think of Sabbath as an *act of trust*. God appointed the Sabbath to remind us that he is working and resting.
 - a) To practice Sabbath is a disciplined way to remember that it is not you who is keeping the world running! It is not really you who has provided for your needs or your family. It is not you keeping your work going. Entrepreneurs especially find it difficult to believe this.
 - b) But Jesus' famous discourse against worry is tied up with work (Matt 6:25-34). He chides us that the plants of the field are cared for though "*they do not labor or spin*" (v.28.) He says that they are obviously of more value to God than plants — so don't run after material things through work (v.32).
 - c) In short, you are not practicing Sabbath (nor practicing the doctrine that you are not God!) if you worry during your "time off." Sabbath is a time to meditate on passages like Matthew 6 until Sabbath rest begins to grip you.

- We must think of Sabbath as *a declaration of satisfaction*. As we mentioned above, God rested when his work was *finished*. This seems extremely difficult for us. The work “never seems to be done.”
 - a) Above we mentioned how we must get a deep rest from work in the sense that through the gospel we don’t feel that we have to accomplish anything else in life to prove ourselves.
 - b) But at another level, it is important to the actual practice of Sabbath to not think of the future (un-done) work but to remind yourself of the past (things you have accomplished). It has gotten easier to rest the older I get because on any given day off I look back and consider the many things that are done and finished. It makes it easier to shake my mind free and relax. Why?
 - i. Looking at past accomplishments reminds me that things do get done, and so will the “works-in-process” now.
 - ii. Looking at the past reminds me of how little I have rested in the past and how I don’t want to keep sinning like that!

BIBLE STUDY #3

Luke 5:4-11; Matthew 11:28-30

1. Luke 5. All indications are that the disciples continued to work their trade, but now their attitude toward their work was very different. How does this passage show us how our own relationship to our work is changed by Jesus?

Though each gospel says that the disciples “*left their nets*,” it is quite likely that they continued their trade of fishing even after they became apostles (see John 21). We even see that Paul continued to work as a tent-maker even while he worked as an evangelist. So we do not actually have here a picture of men who meet Christ and stop their secular work.

Instead, what forever changed was the disciples’ relationship to their work. Jesus gave them the “big picture.” Jesus very deliberately offers them “fishing beyond their fishing” (v.11).

- In other words, he was coming to redeem and heal the world, and he invited his disciples to be part of it. Now they had an identity and significance tied not simply to their job or financial status.
- Their work no longer controlled them in the same way. They could walk away from it (if that was called for) or pick it up again or use it in a different way than before.
- There is a new freedom both from and in their work. Keep in mind that Jesus calls them to follow him at the moment of great financial success — the huge catch of fish. But they can! They are not controlled by their work.

A fascinating example of this comes from 2 Kings 5.

- After Naaman, the prime minister (to use a modern analogy) of Syria is converted to faith in Israel’s God, he does not abandon his job. Instead he takes a load of dirt from Israel to kneel on whenever he does his state-duty of accompanying the king of Syria into the temple of Rimmon, the Syrian deity.
- Rimmon was basically a divinized version of Syria itself. So Naaman is saying, “I will still *serve* my nation, but I will no longer *worship* my nation. Syria’s national interests are important to me, but no longer my ultimate value or god.” He continued his work, but the ultimate value of his vocational field had been transformed.

2. Matthew 11. Jesus promises to “give us rest.” How can the deep rest Jesus gives us in the gospel change our relationship to our work?

To get a deeper picture of what happens to our work in Christ, we look at Matt 11:28-30.

- When Jesus calls all people to himself, he says that he knows we are “*weary and burdened*” and that we need “*rest*” (Matt 11:28).
- But counter-intuitively, Jesus offers his cure — a “*burden*” (v.30) and even a “*yoke*” (v.29)! This was, of course, the harness put on a beast of burden, so it was a symbol of slavery, grinding work and toil.
- How could a *yoke* be a solution to the problem of deep weariness? Jesus says that it is *his* yoke and *his* burden — and it is the only yoke and burden that is “*light*.” Why? “*For I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*” (v.29).
- Jesus directly claims that he is the only “boss” who will not drive you into the ground. Only when we have an identity, meaning, and significance based in Jesus — something *beyond* our work — will we get deep rest for our souls that will abide with us in our work.
- Only when we begin to experience Jesus’ saving work do we begin to experience the deeper rest of soul which is the pre-requisite for the more practical outworkings of Sabbath and rest from work in our lives.
- Why? Only Jesus offers you a finished work to rest in. In fact, the very definition of a Christian is not just someone who admires Jesus, emulates Jesus, or obeys Jesus. A Christian is someone who “rests in his finished work” instead of your own.
- Remember, God was only able to rest in Gen 2:1-3 because his work was finished. A Christian is someone who knows that it would be quite all right if he or she died tonight. You’ve already finished your work — everything that actually *has* to happen within your life-time has happened. The rest is gravy, icing. Gravy and icing is quite tasty, of course — but not absolutely necessary.

This is the deep spiritual rest that we must have or else we will have a weariness that vacations can’t cure! If you don’t have the “REM of the soul” — deep rest from your good works — all other work will be crushing.

- You won’t be able to relax, even when you are supposed to be resting. You won’t ever be able to “walk away from your nets” even for an evening.

- The classic example of this is in *Chariots of Fire* in which one man runs literally “to justify my existence,” while another man has such a deep rest in Christ that he takes off Sundays, even if it means missing a gold medal.
- The former *has* to have the gold medal. It is the deep work of worth and significance that is unfinished in his life. (The problem is, as we know, that the gold medal won’t be enough to finish it.) The latter can take time off.
- Modern people put enormous pressure on work to be satisfying, profitable, fulfilling. Only if we get the deep rest of the gospel will we be able to live a life happily in the 99% of the jobs in the world that are neither very fulfilling nor very lucrative.

Sum: Learn to see the signs of a deeper weariness that time off and vacation is not healing. Ask yourself these questions:

- Are you making work too important — an idol?
- Are you making money (as a means to freedom, leisure/pleasure, or just significance) too important — an idol?
- Are you doing work that you are not gifted/able to do? Why did you take it?

But don’t be too quick to see the problem as being your entire fault? Maybe you need a new job!

- Are sins in others (such as greed, pride, bitterness, fear) making this particular work environment crushing and probably not fixable?
- Are you just new to the work and job and not yet accustomed to it? Will you hit your stride eventually?

READINGS

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

The church... has no blueprints for proper economic behavior in the world. Rather it communicates its core religious and moral vision to its members and allows them to draw the implications of that vision for their own lives in the world. Christian notions of calling, of gratitude, of modesty and humility, of compassion and justice, of covenantal existence, of respect for the natural world, and, above all, of justification by grace and not by economic works — are pregnant with meaning for life in the modern economic world.

– Robert Benne¹

My mood would darken every weekend, until by Saturday afternoon I’d be unresponsive and morose. My normal routine, which involved brunch with friends and swapping tales of misadventure in the relentless quest for romance and professional success, made me feel impossibly restless. After a while I got lonely and did something that, as a teenager profoundly put off by her religious education, I could never have imagined wanting to do. I began dropping in on a nearby synagogue... Finally I developed a theory for my condition. I was suffering from the lack [of a Sabbath.]... There is ample evidence that our relationship to work is out of whack. Let me argue on behalf of an institution that has kept workaholism in reasonable check for thousands of years. Most people mistakenly believe that all you have to do to stop working is not work. The inventors of the Sabbath understood that it was a much more complicated undertaking. You cannot downshift casually and easily. This is why the Puritan and Jewish Sabbaths were so exactly intentional. The rules did not exist to torture the faithful. Interrupting the ceaseless round of striving requires a surprisingly strenuous act of will, one that has to be bolstered by habit as well as by social sanction.

– Judith Shulevitz²

It is commonly agreed that Sabbath... becomes decisive for Israel’s faith in the exile. The imperial pressure of Babylon was endlessly demanding of productivity but this counter-provision for regular rest was a visible, public assertion that people of faith would not have their lives defined by [economic] expectation. Thus Sabbath is an act of refusal and resistance, a vigorous assertion of a different identity grounded in God’s freedom and enacted as socio economic freedom from every production system and every commodity ideology.

– Walter Brueggemann³

The gospel of Jesus points us and indeed urges us to be at the leading edge of the whole culture, articulating in story and music and art and philosophy and education and poetry and politics and theology a worldview that will mount the historically rooted Christian challenge to both modernity and post-modernity, leading the way into the post-postmodern world with joy and humor and gentleness and good judgment and true wisdom. I believe we face the question: if not now, then when? And if we are grasped by this vision, we may also hear the question: if not us, then who? And if the gospel of Jesus is not the key to this task, then what is?

– N.T. Wright⁴

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?**2. Look at the first quote. Benne says that the Christian gospel, especially the gospel of grace itself, has many applications to the work life. Brainstorm some of them.**

Robert Benne says that the church does not have an exact blueprint for the economic life of the world. Rather, it gives a unique worldview, its gospel-vision, to its members and then encourages them to draw the implications of that vision out for their own lives and work in the world.

To be a Christian in business then means much more than just being honest or not sleeping with your co-workers. It even means more than personal witnessing and holding a Bible study at the office. Rather, it means thinking out the implications of the gospel and God's kingship for your whole work-life.

So how does the gospel vision affect economic life through its members? Below are just one list of possible implications and applications. There are certainly many more. Christians will be:

1. Choosing jobs and careers that promote the common good and are congruent with our gifts, not just our own personal affluence.
2. Working with more job satisfaction because the job/career is not an idol. Neither money nor recognition is the main driving force.
3. Exhibiting honesty and integrity in work and economic life. No cutting of corners in such a way that benefits you but not other employees, customers, or the community.
4. Working with a commitment to delayed gratification. Self-control and discipline in work. Looking to long-term benefits for all, not just short-term benefits for you.
5. Displaying attitudes toward economic justice. Not assessing persons in pure economic terms. Not paying people as little as the market will bear. Desiring to promote the whole welfare of workers so they flourish not only professionally but personally.

6. Being reserved and honest in advertising and promotion. Not only honesty in presenting yourself, but seeking to cater to the best desires in customers, not worse.
7. Producing products that actually benefit people and communities. Desiring to help the company's broader community and neighborhood flourish.
8. Neither over-works nor under-works.
9. Engages in savings and generosity, rather than luxury consumption.

From the outside there might not be immediately noticeable differences between a company run according to these kingdom values and some other very well-run company. But inside the company, the differences would be quite noticeable. Good stewardship means efficiency, but there would be:

- a) a noticeable lack of adversarial relationships
- b) a lack of any sense of being exploited
- c) an extremely strong emphasis on product quality
- d) an ethical environment that goes "all the way down," even when high ethics mean a loss of money.

3. Look at the second quote. It explains that rhythmic rest will not work without a great deal of intentionality and discipline. Brainstorm the kind of habits and practices that can practically help us observe Sabbath.

What follows is a varied portfolio of Sabbath practices. Again, this is just illustrative.

DETERMINING HOW MUCH TIME

What is the ideal amount of time off from work? My guess is:

- A full day off each week in which no more than half of the day is given to ministry/church plus the equivalent of a second full day off. (Three evenings free after 6pm count as a full day.)
- For example, if your work-day/commute takes up every weekday almost completely, but you have a full Saturday and Sunday off, with normal Sunday commitments, then that is sufficient Sabbath.
- If you are a church staff member who cannot count Sundays at all, then you need to take off one full day a week and be sure to be off at least three weeknights. This still allows quite a lot of hours for work during the week.

DETERMINING WHAT TO DO WITH THE TIME

Take some sheer inactivity time.

- Almost everyone needs some time every week that is so un-planned and unstructured that you do whatever you spontaneously feel like doing.
- a) If your Sabbath time is simply a very busy time filled with scheduled activities of recreation and ministry, it will not suffice. There must be some “cessation” from exertion. (This is analogous to Israel’s Sabbath year practice of letting a field lie fallow to produce whatever happens to ‘come up.’)

Take some avocational activity time.

- An avocation is something that is sheer pleasure to you but that takes some exertion and time and usually is something that others do for a living. (This is analogous to occasionally planting a different crop in the field in order to replenish the nutrients and make the soil more fertile for its normal crop.) Variations:
 - a) You need some contemplative rest. Prayer and worship is a critical part of Sabbath, from any perspective. It is not only the basis for the “Inner Rest,” but it also takes time away from the more exhausting exertions of life.
 - b) You need some recreational rest. The Puritans and others were rightly skeptical of recreations that forced you or others to spend a great deal of money and time and exertion. Be careful that recreation really refreshes.
 - c) You need to include aesthetic rest. You need to expose yourselves to works of God’s creation that refresh and energize you and that you find beautiful. This may mean outdoor things. This may also mean art — music, drama, visual art.
 - d) When planning avocational time, consider whether you are an introvert or an extrovert. Introverts are people who tend to spend energy when out with people and recharge their batteries by being alone. Extroverts are people who tend to spend energy in personal work and recharge their batteries by getting out with people. Don’t try to imitate an introvert’s Sabbath rhythms if you are an extrovert! For example, some avocational activities take you into solitude and some take you out into society.
 - e) Do a realistic self-assessment of just how family time affects you. When families are young and children are very high-maintenance, it may not be realistic to count all family time as Sabbath-restoration. Parents of young families have to be sure that they don’t let all of

their regular Sabbath time be taken up with parental responsibilities. (Introverts especially will need time away from the kids.) Unfortunately, when family relationships are strained, family time is important but it also may not count as Sabbath time.

Honor both macro and micro-rhythms and seasons in your rest.

- Israel's Sabbath cycles of rest-and-work included not only Sabbath days but Sabbath years and even a Jubilee, the seventh Sabbath year. This is a crucial insight for workers in today's world.
- a) It is possible to voluntarily take on a very high energy, long hours, insufficient-weekly-Sabbath-time season of work. If you want to be a doctor, you are going to have to be a resident.
- b) Many other careers in finance, government and law simply demand the same sort of initial time of a heavy work-week. Also, some times going into business for yourself or doing some major project (like making a movie) require something similar.
- c) Christians can, I think, enter a season like this if it is not longer than 2 or 3 years at the most. Be accountable to someone for this or you will get locked into an "under-Sabbathed" life-style and you will burn out. During the "under-Sabbathed" time do not let rhythms of prayer, Bible study and worship die. Be very creative, but get it in.

INJECTING SABBATH INTO THE REST OF THE WORK WEEK

I have come to see that if you develop the "Foundation" and "Inner Rest" of Sabbath, it will not simply make you more disciplined about taking time off. It will also lead you to be less frantic and driven in the rest of your work.

- Associated with the Sabbath laws were the gleaning laws in which the owner's of fields were not allowed to harvest out to the edges of their fields. They had to leave a percentage of grain in the field for the poor to come and take.
- Sabbath, then, is the deliberate limitation of productivity, as a way to trust God, be a good steward of your self, and declare freedom from slavery.
- In my case this has meant deliberately setting fewer goals for myself in a given week and day, not "harvesting out to the edges."
- Some of our work-worlds are institutionally structured toward over-work. Rather than opt out of them totally, we might pay our dues in the early years (see above under "seasons") but at some point we will have to trust God by practicing Sabbath and risking falling behind in our careers.

- It may happen that you will fall behind and yet retain your sanity. But it may be that God will work keep raising you up the ladder despite your practice of the gleaning principle. It is up to him.

BRAINSTORMING ABOUT YOUR SABBATH

- Find at least four other people in your work-field and ask them how they handle the need for rest, leisure, and restoration. Ask them about their weekly or seasonal rhythms. Almost always you will discover one or two ideas that are really helpful.
- If you can, get the people together to actually brainstorm about it.

Sum: The purpose of Sabbath is not simply to rejuvenate yourself in order to do more work. Nor is it the pursuit of pleasure. The purpose of Sabbath is to enjoy your God, life in general, what you have accomplished in the world through his help, and the freedom you have in the gospel, the freedom from slavery to any material object or human expectation. The Sabbath is a sign of the whole future salvation that is coming.

¹ Robert Benne, "The Calling of the Church in Economic Life" in *The Two Cities of God*, ed. Carl Braaten (Eerdmans, 1997) p. 102, 107

² J.Shulevitz "Bring Back the Sabbath" *New York Times Magazine*, March 2, 2003

³ Walter Brueggemann, "Sabbath as Active Faith," *Sunday Magazine* Summer 2002. When the Jews were dispersed and living in pagan societies, the practice of Sabbath was profoundly 'counter-cultural' and a witness to their neighbors as to the nature of their God.

⁴ N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (IVP, 1998)

Gospel Christianity

How do I follow Jesus?

Study 1 | Course 2

The gospels show us Jesus calling people to be his disciples, to follow him. What does it mean to be called to follow him?

KEY CONCEPT — DISCIPLESHIP

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

Called to relationship

In secular Greek, the word “disciple” referred to the pupil of a teacher or the apprentice of a craftsman.

- a) In both cases, the disciples entered into a close personal relationship with the master-teacher.
 - i. They often literally lived with the teacher and brought their whole lives under his authority.
 - ii. They did this to receive not simply information from him but wisdom and character.

Called to ultimate allegiance

In Mark 1:16-20, we see the first disciples “leaving” their father (v.20) and “leaving” their nets (v.18).

- a) This does not mean that they lost their relationship with him or that they never fished again.
- b) Discipleship means that Jesus becomes the ultimate, supreme allegiance of your heart.
 - i. Serving, knowing, pleasing and resembling him is the non-negotiable.
 - ii. He is the pre-eminent passion and purpose of your life.

Called to unconditional obedience

In Luke 6:46, Jesus asks “*Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?*”

- a) A consultant gives you recommendations that you can choose to follow or not, since you retain authority over your own life.
- b) But discipleship means giving up that authority to Jesus and, therefore, removing all conditions off of your obedience to him.

- i. If you ever say “I’ll obey the Lord if I get ‘X’ ” — it means you have some allegiance to “X” and value it higher than God.
- c) Conditional obedience is the sign that there has been no allegiance transfer yet.

Called to listen and learn

In Luke 10:38-42, we see that a disciple “sits at Jesus’ feet listening.”

- a) This metaphor implies both submission and attention to Jesus’ truth.
- b) A disciple is an extremely diligent student of the Bible, listening for his voice to us in his Word.
- c) It is difficult, if not impossible, to be a disciple of Jesus if you don’t believe in the entire authority of the Bible.
 - i. If you can omit from the Bible any thing that offends you or that you think is wrong, then you have no way for the Lord to tell you things you don’t want to hear.

Called to suffer and serve

Many times Jesus called his disciples to:

- a) live a simple lifestyle (cf. Luke 6:30-36, 9:3, 14:12-14)
- b) sacrifice (cf. Luke 12:4-12)
- c) not to feel any self-pity about it (cf. Luke 17:7-10)

That’s what servants do — and disciples are his servants.

Called to mission

Jesus “calls us in” to himself but also “sends us out” into the world in mission.

- a) In Luke 10:1-20, he calls us to “gospel-messaging.”
 - i. We are to publicly tell the gospel of Jesus and urge everyone to believe it.
- b) In Luke 10:25-37, he calls us to “gospel-neighboring.”
 - i. We are to sacrificially meet the basic human needs of those around us, whether they believe our message or not. (The men in the Good Samaritan parable are of different faiths.)

Called by grace

In Mark 2:14-18, we see Jesus calling a tax collector — a moral “outsider” — to be a disciple.

- a) This shows that Jesus does not look for spiritually qualified people to call.
 - i. He calls people before they are morally qualified.
 - ii. We are called by sheer grace.
- a) And the dynamic motivation of our discipleship is gratitude for this grace and a desire to please and enjoy the one who called us.

1. Which statements impressed you and why?**2. What are some of the concrete ways you can make Christ King and Lord of your life (rather than just a helper)?**

BIBLE STUDY #1

Colossians 1:15-20

- 1. Make a list of the remarkable claims made about Jesus' person and power in these verses.**
- 2. What are the implications of all this for our own personal discipleship and obedience?**

Luke 9:22-25, 51-62

- 1. What do we learn about discipleship from vv.22-25?**
- 2. What do we learn about discipleship from vv.57-62?**
- 3. What do we learn about discipleship from vv.51-56?**

READINGS

Read and put a "?" if you have a question; put an "!" if an insight is helpful to you.

Whatever controls us is really our god... The one who seeks power is controlled by power. The one who seeks acceptance is controlled by the people he or she wants to please. We do not control ourselves. We are controlled by the lord of our life... Jesus' ownership of our lives is not a control that manipulates us or takes away our dignity. He governs our lives... by being who he is without compromise and by insisting we become all that we are meant to be. And this can only occur through following him, obeying him, and maintaining a living, passionate kinship to him... God created us for himself. If we live with any center other than Jesus, we will be living incompletely... Is Jesus' desire to be the Lord of our lives some little fetish of his? Why is it so important to him? Besides the fact that he deserves it because of who he is, he knows he is the only one in the universe who can control us without destroying us. No one will ever love you like Jesus. The last breath Jesus breathed on this planet was for you. Jesus will meet you wherever you are, and he will help you. He is not intimidated by past failures, broken promises, or wounds. He will make sense out of your brokenness. But he can only begin to be Lord of your life today-not next month but now.

– Rebecca Pippert¹

Imagine that the distance from the earth to the sun — 92 million miles — was the thickness of one sheet of paper. Then the distance from the earth to the nearest star alone would be a stack of paper 70 feet high. The diameter of just our galaxy would be a stack of paper 310 miles high. And our galaxy is only a single speck — one of an infinite number of galaxies just in the part of the universe that we can see. If, as the Bible says, Jesus Christ holds all *that* together with just a word of his power (Heb 1:3) — is that the kind of person you ask into your life to be your *assistant*? Or your *consultant*? Of course not. If you are to relate to such a person, he will be either the absolute Lord of your life or nothing at all.

– Barbara Boyd²

Cheap grace is the enemy of the church. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth... an intellectual assent to that idea is held to be itself sufficient to secure remission of sins. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance... grace without discipleship, grace without a cross... Costly grace is the gospel [of the church]... It is costly because it costs a man his life, and grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his son... it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God... When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die. That is why the rich young man was so loath to follow Jesus, for the cost of his following was the death of his will. In fact, every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts.

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer³

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

2. Consider the Pippert and Boyd quotes. What reasons do they give for making Christ Lord of our lives?

3. Consider the Bonhoeffer quote. Read the following background.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, a group of younger ministers, including Dietrich Bonhoeffer, opposed him, but the Nazi bishop of the German church ordered ministers to “preach the pure gospel” and forbade them from speaking out about Hitler’s policies because that was preaching “politics.” Most of the German ministers and church members complied. The resisting ministers spoke out and persecution followed. Bonhoeffer was eventually arrested and executed by the Nazis.

How does “cheap grace” help us explain why so many in the German church were willing to stand back and not oppose Hitler?

In what way is “every command of Jesus a call to die?”

4. Think of the main areas of your life:

Career
Money and possessions
Self-image
Private thought life
Leisure time
Friendships
Marriage/or relationship
Family relationships
Physical health/maintenance
Church Involvement
Other (add here):

Look at each area and ask the following questions:

- *“Am I willing to obey whatever God says about this life-area no matter how I feel about it?”*
- *“Am I willing to thank God for whatever happens in this area whether I understand it or not?”*
- *“Is there something in this area I am relying on more than God for my hope and meaning in life?”*
- *“Are there problems or limitations in my life I think are too big for God to remove?”*

On the basis of your evaluation — choose one or two areas of your life that you most need to acknowledge Christ’s lordship more deeply.

What could you do to give him greater Lordship? Consider including:
a) repentance and prayer, b) attitude/thought change, c) behavior change,
d) accountability to someone for the changes.

¹Rebecca Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker* (2nd ed. IVP, 1999), p. 52-54.

²Barbara Boyd was Inter-Varsity staff for many years. This quote is from notes taken from her "Lordship" talk that was part of the *Bible and Life* course of training she developed.

³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (MacMillan, 1959), p. 45-48.

Gospel Christianity

How do I meet Jesus myself?

Study 2 | Course 2

There is much talk about having personal fellowship with Christ through the Bible and prayer. How does that happen?

KEY CONCEPT — MEDITATION

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

Traditionally, devotional time consisted of Bible reading and prayer. But for many, these disciplines alone do not get them to the experience of God’s presence that the Psalms call us to (see Psalm 27, 63, 84).

- *Meditation* is a middle practice which bridges between reading and prayer.
- It is at once *prayerful* reading and *informed* prayer.
- It is “the descent of the mind with truth into the heart, until our whole being yearns for God.” (Peter Toon)

The Biblical term meditation often appears in the Psalms.

- One Hebrew word for it means literally to “talk to oneself.” This refers to how meditation entails both focused attention and personal application.
- Another word for it means to “muse” or “ponder.”
 - a) In Psalm 77:12 and 143:5, we are called to meditate on the works of God in nature and history.
 - b) In Psalm 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 148 we are exhorted to meditate on God’s Word, his verbal revelation.
 - c) In Psalm 63:6, the Psalmist simply meditates “*on thee*” — God himself.
- Many of the Psalms are themselves examples of extended meditations.

Incorporating Meditation into Your Time with Jesus**Lectio – Reading**Understand the passage

- Read slowly through the whole passage.
 - a) When a thought, phrase, or word captures your attention, stop and dwell on it. Underline or note each.
- Read a second time and ask: “What truth is the author getting across here?” Ask what it says about:
 - a) who God is
 - b) who we are
 - c) who Christ is and what he did
- Read a third time. List each:
 - a) example to follow
 - b) command to obey
 - c) promise to claim

Meditatio – ReflectingMeditate and listen for the voice of God

Choose the two or three most important insights or verses from your reading and ask:

- Adoration – How does this lead me to adore and praise God?
 - a) What attribute of God does it show?
- Confession – How does this lead me to confess or repent to God?
 - a) What wrong thoughts, feelings, and behavior happen in me when this is forgotten?
- Thanksgiving – How can I thank Jesus for being the ultimate answer to this sin?
 - a) How is this sin being caused by an inordinate hope for something to give me what only Jesus can really give me?
- Supplication – What does this lead me to petition God for?
 - a) What do I need from God if I am to realize this truth in my life?
- Why might God be showing me this today?

Oratio – Praying

On the basis of your meditation, speak very directly to God about what you are learning and hearing

- Σ Pray every one of the meditations — Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving and Supplication — back to him.

Contemplatio – Sensing

Often, though not always, during reading, reflecting or praying, you begin to get a “sense on the heart” of the reality of God and his presence.

- You may receive strong assurance of belonging to him. Stop and enjoy him!

1. Which statements impressed you and why?**2. On the back of this sheet, study the following four sets of Scripture passages using the directions provided for each set only.**Set #1 – John 1:29-38

1. Note words or ideas that are repeated.
2. Note metaphors, comparisons and contrasts.
3. Notice cause-effect relations between and within clauses, sentences and paragraphs.
4. What truth does each noted item convey?

Set #2 – John 1:29-34

1. List what it tells about God or Christ.
2. List what it tells us about us or me.
3. List: examples to follow or avoid, commands to obey, promises to claim.

Set #3 – John 1:35-42

1. The key verse that impressed me.
2. Put verse in your own words.
3. What is the thought just before the verse and just after?
4. Give 2-3 reasons it helped you.

Set #4 – John 1:43-61

1. What did you like?
2. What did you not like?
3. What did you not get?
4. How should you apply what you learned?

Which set of questions did you prefer? Why?

Psalm 1:1-6

- 4. What do vv.5-6 promise? How can this be the result of a life of meditation?**

5. Psalm 1 is not itself a prayer, unlike most of the rest of the Psalms. It is a meditation on meditation. Why do you think it was chosen to stand here as an introduction to all the rest of the prayers of the Psalms?

READINGS

Read and mark "?" - question to raise "!" - insight or helpful to you

"Formerly, when I arose, I began to pray as soon as possible...But what was the result? I often... suffered much from wandering thoughts... I scarcely ever suffer in this way now... I began to meditate on the New Testament from the beginning, early in the morning... searching, as it were, every verse to get a blessing out of it... not for preaching [to others], but for obtaining food for my soul. After a few moments my soul is *led* to confession, thanksgiving, or intercession."

– George Mueller¹

"Meditation... is distinguished from the study of the word, wherein our principle aim is to learn the truth, or to declare it unto others; and so also from prayer, whereof God himself is the immediate object. But meditation is the affecting of our own hearts and minds with love, delight, and humiliation."

– Richard Baxter

"I...used to spend abundance of time, in walking alone in the woods, and solitary places, for meditation, soliloquy and prayer... I had then, and at other times, the greatest delight in the Holy Scriptures, of any book whatsoever. Oftentimes in reading it, every word seemed to touch my heart. I felt a harmony between something in my heart, and those sweet powerful words. I seemed often to see so much light, exhibited by every sentence, and such a refreshing ravishing food communicated, that I could not get along in reading. Used oftentimes to dwell long on one sentence, to see the wonders contained in it; and yet almost every sentence seemed to be full of wonders... I... found, from time to time, an inward sweetness, that used, as it were, to carry me away in my contemplations, in... a calm, sweet abstraction of soul from all the concerns of this world, and... fixed ideas and imaginations, of being alone... sweetly conversing with Christ, and wrapped and swallowed up in God. The sense I had of divine things, would often of a sudden as it were, kindle up a sweet burning in my heart; an ardor of my soul that I know not how to express..."

– Jonathan Edwards²

"First comes the actual exercise of the mind, fixing thoughts and meditations upon spiritual truths... Next comes the inclination of all the affections toward these things, whereby they cleave to the spiritual truths and make an engagement unto them... Finally comes a relish and a savor in which lies the sweetness and the satisfaction of the spiritual life. We taste then by experience that God is gracious, and that the love of Christ is better than wine... If we settle for mere speculations and mental notions about Christ as doctrine, we

shall find no transforming power or efficacy communicated unto us thereby. But when, under the conduct of spiritual light, our affections do cleave unto him with full purpose of heart, our minds fill up with thoughts and delight in him — then virtue [change in character] will proceed from him to purify us, increase our holiness, and sometimes fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory... Where light leaves the affections behind, it ends in formality and or atheism; where affections outrun light they sink into the bog of superstition."

– John Owen³

"In the year of grace 1654 Monday 23 November... from about half-past ten in the evening till about half an hour after midnight. FIRE. God of Abraham. God of Isaac. God of Jacob. Not of the philosophers and the learned. Certainty. Joy. Certainty. Emotion. Sight. Joy. Forgetfulness of the world and of all outside of God. Joy! Joy! Joy! Tears of joy. My God, will you leave me? Let me not ever be separated from you."

– Blaise Pascal

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

2. Consider the Mueller quote. What was his problem and how does meditation solve it? What have you done about wandering thoughts in prayer?

3. Consider the Edwards quote. What two extremes does Edwards avoid?

4. Consider the quote from Pascal. After he died, this description was found sewn into the lining of his coat! It was the description of a “mountain-top” spiritual experience. What should our attitude be toward such experiences? Should we seek them?

¹George Muller (1805-1898), a Christian leader chiefly known for the orphanage he founded, and for his spirituality. *Soul Food* (London, 1897)

²Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) “Personal Narrative” in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader* (Yale Press)

³John Owen, *The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded*

Gospel Christianity

How do I meet Jesus with others?

Study 3 | Course 2

You are not called only to have an individual relationship with the Lord, but to join a worshipping community of believers — to engage in corporate worship of God

KEY CONCEPT — WORSHIP

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

What is worship?

Our word *worship* is from the Old English *weorth-scipe* — literally “worth-shape.”

- Worship is:
 - a) seeing and being affected by what God is worth
 - b) in response, giving him all that we are because of his worth (Gen 28:10-22).
- Worship responds with all that we are to all that God is. It is offering our whole selves — mind, emotions, and will — in obedient service, motivated by the beauty of who God is in himself (Rev 4:9-11).

When is worship?

Christ has completely fulfilled the Old Testament worship ritual. He *is* the altar, the sacrifice, the High Priest. He has, once for all, opened the way into the Holy Place — the presence of God (Heb 10:19-21.) What does this mean for us?

- Christians are called to see *all* of life as worship.
 - a) The Old Testament language about the temple, priesthood and sacrifice is now applied to believers’ entire lives.
 - b) Our deeds of service to others (Heb 13:16) and God (Rom 12:1) are priestly sacrifices (1 Peter 2:5; Rev. 1:6).
 - c) We must conduct every part of daily life consciously for him, asking: “Since God is the most important — glorious — thing in my life, how should I be acting and living in this area of my life?”
- Christians are also called to gather weekly in corporate worship.
 - a) In Hebrews 10, we see that because Jesus fulfilled the temple worship ritual, we can and must “draw near” to God’s presence (vv.19-23) as a gathered body of believers (vv.24-25; Heb 12:18-29).

- b) If we forget the first aspect of worship, we may become “super-spiritual” and seek mainly emotional experiences rather than changed lives and service in the world.
- c) If we forget the second aspect of worship, we may become formal and lose the vital inner heart dynamic for our service in the world.

How do we worship?

- In Word and Spirit. Worship must be “in Spirit and in Truth” (John 4:23).
 - a) The purpose of worship is not simply to make the truth about God clear, but to make it real.
 - b) By the Spirit’s influence, truths that we have known intellectually may become fiery, powerful and affecting.
 - c) They thrill, comfort and empower (or even) disturb you in a way they did not before (cf. Eph 1:18-22; 3:14-21).
- In Word and Sacrament. Worship not just a time of teaching and inspiration.
 - a) It is a re-enactment of our union with Christ through the gospel.
 - b) God’s unmerited grace comes to us as a word to believe not as a deed to be performed. Therefore every worship service consists of hearing God’s word of grace followed by our response to it.
 - c) God’s word is read and we respond with confession of sin. God’s word is preached and we respond with song, or with an offering of our lives and substance.
 - d) But especially in the sacraments — in baptism and the Lord’s Supper — we see the gospel re-enacted. The bread and wine are tokens of Jesus’ self-offering on the cross, and we respond by giving ourselves to him as we partake of them.
 - e) In every case, the worship service is a covenant renewal ceremony, in which we renew and deepen our remembrance of what Jesus has done for us and of what we have promised him.
- Already but not yet. Worship is a foretaste of the coming future cosmic Sabbath of perfect peace, justice, and joy (Heb 4:1-16).
 - a) Weekly we rejoice in the coming kingdom of God and thereby are molded into a people whose daily life practice is shaped by the gospel of grace, peace, and hope rather than by our surrounding culture.

- 1. Which statements impressed you and why?**
- 2. What are some more of the implications of the fact that Jesus fulfilled all the detailed worship regulations of the Old Testament?**
- 3. Discuss why the Lord's Supper is such an important part of worship's gospel re-enactment?**

Psalm 95

- 1. vv.1-2. These two verses seem very familiar but they are packed with facts about worship. What do we learn about worship and how we do it?**
- 2. vv.3-5. If the first two verses give us the “what” of worship, these next three verses give us the “why” of worship. (The word “for” or “because” at the beginning of v.3 shows us this.) Why are we to worship him?**
- 3. vv.6-7b. After the praise and rejoicing of the first 5 verses, a different note is struck. a) Compare and contrast the call of v.1 and v.6. Why the difference?
b) How does vv.6-7 follow naturally from vv.1-5?**

4. vv.7c-11. This passage of warning doesn't seem to fit the rest of the Psalm. But think. a) What does it add about how we are supposed to worship?
b) Imagine this is a third stage to an act of worship, after vv.1-5 (praise) and vv.6-7 (repentance). What is the third stage? c) What does the summons to rest have to do with worship and hearing God's word in faith?
(Read Heb.4:1-13)

READINGS

Read and mark "?" - question to raise "!" - insight or helpful to you

Worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His Truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of the will to His purpose — and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin. Yes – worship in spirit and truth is the way to the solution of perplexity and to the liberation from sin.

– Archbishop William Temple¹

The message of the resurrection is that this present world matters; that the problems and pains of this present world matter; that the living God has made a decisive bridgehead into this present world with this healing and all-conquering love; and that, in the name of this strong love, all the evils, all the injustices and all the pains of the present world must now be addressed with the news that healing, justice, and love have won the day. That's why we pray *"thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven"*... Christianity [is not] simply a warmth-in-the-heart religion [but] a kingdom-on-earth-as-it-is-in-heaven religion. It [is not] focused on me and my survival, my spirituality [but] on God's world that still needs the kingdom-message. The gospel is good news which warms our hearts *precisely because it isn't just about warming hearts*... That is why we who [worship] do so with material things: water (when people are baptized); bread and wine at the Eucharist... and above all, music. The world of creation has been reclaimed by the living and healing God.

– N.T. Wright²

[Why is Psalm 150—a psalm of pure praise put at the end of the prayer-book of the Bible, the Psalms?] "All [true] prayer, pursued far enough, becomes praise. Any prayer, no matter how desperate its origin, no matter how angry and fearful the experiences it traverses, ends up in praise. It does not always get there quickly or easily — the trip can take a lifetime — but the end is always praise... There are intimations of this throughout the Psalms. Not infrequently, even in the middle of a terrible lament, defying logic and without transition, praise erupts. Psalm 150 does not stand alone; four more hallelujah psalms are inserted in front of it so that it becomes the fifth of five psalms that conclude the Psalter. These five hallelujah psalms are extraordinarily robust. [This

means]... no matter how much we suffer, no matter our doubts, no matter how angry we get, no matter how many times we have asked in desperation "How long?," prayer develops finally into praise. Everything finds its way to the doorstep of praise. This is not to say that other prayers are inferior to praise, only that all prayer pursued far enough, becomes praise... Don't rush it. It may take years, decades even, before certain prayers arrive at the hallelujahs, at Psalm 146-150. Not every prayer is capped off with praise. In fact, most prayers, if the Psalter is a true guide, are not. But prayer is always reaching toward praise and will finally arrive there. So... our lives fill out in goodness. Earth and heaven meet in an extraordinary conjunction. Clashing cymbals announce the glory. Blessing. Amen. Hallelujah.

– Eugene Peterson³

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

3. Consider the Wright quote. Why is his emphasis an important one to remember?

HOW DO I MEET JESUS WITH OTHERS?	notes
<p>¹This quote is cited so often that I have not been able to find its original source yet. Also, most of Archbishop Temple’s writings appear to be out of print.</p> <p>²N.T. Wright, <i>For All God’s Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church</i> (Eerdmans, 1997) pp. 65-67.</p> <p>³Eugene Peterson, <i>Answering God</i></p>	

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to other Christians?

Study 4 | Course 4

This week we will look at specific ways to build the community we discussed earlier.

KEY CONCEPT — MEMBERS

Read and put a "?" if you have a question; put an "!" if an insight is helpful to you.

The Apostle Paul says Christians are "*members of one another*" (Rom 12:5). This goes deeper than the modern concept of being a "member" of a club.

- The Greek word *melos* was the common word for a part of the human body. Paul is saying: "You are the limbs and organs of one another. You are the eyes, arms and heart of one another."
- Believers are profoundly interdependent. In ourselves we are radically incomplete. When Paul says: "*Do not lie, for we are members of one another*" (Eph 4:25), he means that, to tell a lie, and therefore cut yourself off from other believers, is like stabbing yourself in the vitals.
- The implications of this principle are spelled out practically in dozens of "one another" passages in the New Testament epistles. A summary follows:

AFFIRMING ONE ANOTHER

Affirming one another's strengths, abilities and gifts

- Romans 12:10 – *Honor* (praise the accomplishments of) *one another*
- James 5:9 – *Don't grumble* (groan and roll your eyes) *against one another*
- Romans 12:3-6 – *Confirm the gifts of one another*

Affirming one another's equal importance in Christ

- Romans 15:7 – *Accept* (welcome, appreciate, include) *one another as Christ accepted you*
- 1 Corinthians 12:25 – *Be equally anxious* (regardless of ability or socio-economic status) *for one another*
- 1 Peter 5:5 – *Gird yourselves with humility toward one another*
- James 2:1 – *Don't show favoritism*

Affirming one another through visible affection

- Romans 16:16 – *Greet one another with a holy kiss* (culturally appropriate, visible affection)
- James 1:19 – *Listen more than you speak*
- 1 Thessalonians 3:12 – *Abound exceedingly in love to one another*

SHARING WITH ONE ANOTHER*Sharing one another's space, goods and time*

- Romans 12:10 – *Show brotherly love* (treat one another as family)
- 1 Thessalonians 5:15 – *Do good* (meet the practical needs) *of one another*
- 1 Peter 4:9 – *Offer hospitality* (open your homes and share your food and goods) *to one another*

Sharing one another's needs and problems

- Galatians 6:2 – *Bear* (share the difficulty and pain of) *one another's burdens*
- 1 Thessalonians 5:11 – *Encourage* (come alongside and strengthen) *one another*

Sharing one another's beliefs, thinking and spirituality

- Romans 12:16 – *Become of the same mind* (work to come to consensus) *with one another*
- Colossians 3:16 – *Teach the Bible to one another*
- 1 Corinthians 11:33 – *Wait for each other to take the sacrament together*
- Ephesians 5:19 – *Sing God's praises to and with one another*

SERVING ONE ANOTHER*Serving one another through accountability*

- James 5:16 – *Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another*
- Romans 15:14 – *Admonish* (lovingly confront) *one another*
- Hebrews 3:13 – *Exhort each other daily about your sin*
- Ephesians 4:25 – *Tell the truth to one another*

Serving one another through forgiveness and reconciliation

- Ephesians 4:2 – *Be completely humble, gentle, patient, putting up with one another*
- Ephesians 4:32 – *Forgive one another as Christ forgave you*
- Galatians 5:26 – *Don't provoke or envy one another*
- Romans 14:19 – *Don't condemn one another*
- James 4:11 – *Don't slander or attack one another*
- Matthew 5:23; 18:15 – *Re-establish broken relationships with one another*

Serving one another's interests rather than our own

- Romans 14:9 – *Edify one another*
- Hebrews 10:24 – *Consider how to stir one another up to love and good works*
- Galatians 5:13 – *Be servants (literally slaves) of one another.* (The goal of each interaction is the good and spiritual growth of the other person)
- Romans 15:1-2 – *Don't please yourself*

1. Which statements impressed or helped you and why?

2. These are nine categories of community-building practices urged upon us by the New Testament. Which of the behaviors do you have the most problem understanding? Discuss until your thinking is clarified.

Romans 12:9-21

- 1. v.9 What do the imperatives in this verse have in common? Why are these commands so important for setting up a lifestyle of love?**
- 2. v.9 How can we love unlovely persons who we do not like and yet still be “sincere?”**
- 3. v.10-16 Divide the 12-13 exhortations in these verses into 2-4 broad categories that help you get a grip on what love means practically.**

4. v.10-16 How does the gospel make each aspect of love possible?

5. v.10-16 Many think “sacrificial love” is unhealthy. How do the varied exhortations about love balance each other and prevent extremes?

READINGS

Read and mark "?" - question to raise "!" - insight or helpful to you

Our community with one another consists solely in what Christ has done to both of us. Christian brotherhood is a spiritual and not a human reality. In this it differs from all other communities.

– D. Bonhoeffer²

What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything else of that sort. Christians come together... because... they have all been loved by Jesus himself... They are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus' sake.

– D.A. Carson³

I must release the other person from every attempt of mine to regulate, coerce, and dominate him with my love. I must leave him his freedom to be Christ's [not mine.] Human love constructs its own image of the other person, of what he is and what he should become. It takes the life of the other person into its own hands. Spiritual love will meet the other person with the clear Word of God and be ready to leave him alone with this Word for a long time, willing to release him again in order that Christ may deal with him. Human love produces human dependence and constraint; spiritual love lives in the clear light of service and creates freedom. From the first moment when a man meets another person he is looking for a strategic position he can assume over against that person. It is vitally necessary that every Christian face this danger squarely and eradicate it.

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists of listening to them. As love to God begins with listening to his Word, so the beginning of love for others is learning to listen to them. It can be greater service than speaking. There's an impatient, inattentive listening that despises, only waiting for a chance to speak.

The second service is that of active helpfulness. This means, initially, simple assistance in trifling, external matters. We must allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions. We may pass them by, preoccupied with our more important tasks, as the priest passed the man who had fallen among thieves, perhaps reading the Bible.

We speak, third, of the service of bearing others. It is only in bearing with my brother that the great grace of God becomes wholly plain. To cherish no contempt for the sinner but rather to prize the privilege of bearing him means to be able to accept him, to preserve fellowship with him through forgiveness.

Where Christians live together the time must inevitably come when in some crisis one person will have to declare God's Word to another. It is unchristian consciously to deprive another of the one decisive service we can render to him... We admonish one another to go the way that Christ bids us to go. We are gentle and severe... "Confess your faults to one another" (James 5:16.) He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everyone must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship, living in lies and hypocrisy. But it is the grace of the Gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that says: "You're a sinner, a great desperate sinner. Now come, as the sinner that you are, to the God who loves you" ...A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person.

– D. Bonhoeffer⁴

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

- 2. Consider your own relationships with other believers.**
- a) Which of the 9 categories of community-building are you currently the best at? Why? Which of the 9 categories are you the worst at? Why?**
- b) In light of your analysis, choose 2 or 3 practical things you can do to improve your community-building practices.**

3. Look at the following list from Romans 12.**a) In which of these are you the weakest?****b) In which of these are you now being (or about to be) tested?****c) What practical steps could you take to improve in your weak area?**

- Love honestly, speaking out against what is wrong. v.9
- Love even unattractive people doggedly because they are your brothers and sisters. v.10
- Love by making people feel honored and valuable. Listen and show consideration. v.10
- Love by being generous in a practical way with your home, money and time. v.13
- Love without bitterness. Don't pay back or hold resentment against others. v.14
- Love with empathy. Be willing to be emotionally involved with others. v.15
- Love with humility. Be willing to associate with people who are very different than you. v.16

¹The quotes from Bonhoeffer come from *Life Together*, a book written about and for an underground seminary for prospective Lutheran clergy in the late 1930's in Germany. Bonhoeffer taught in the seminary and lived with the students before the Nazis shut it down. Because all of the little underground community consisted of males, the language of the book almost exclusively used masculine pronouns.

²Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (Harper, 1954), p.23, 25, 26.

³D.A. Carson, Love in *Hard Places* (Crossway, 2002) p.61.

⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (Harper, 1954).

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to my neighbor?

Study 5 | Course 2

According to the Bible, everyone is my “neighbor.” What is the implication of this?

KEY CONCEPT — JUSTICE

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

What do we owe our neighbor?

In the Old Testament, justice and love are closely linked.

- When God says “*Love your neighbor as yourself*” in Lev 19:18, he also says “*Do not defraud, pervert justice, show partiality against the poor, or do anything to endanger your neighbor’s life*” (vv.13-17).
- Justice, then, is love in action, and it is what we owe our neighbor.
- According to Jesus, God is still a God of justice and anyone who has a relationship with him will be concerned for justice as well (Luke 18:1-8).

Who is our neighbor?

It is typical for us to think of our neighbors as people of the same social class and means (cf. Luke 14:12).

- The Old Testament, however, called Israel to recognize the immigrant, the single-parent family, and the poor as neighbors, even if they were of another nation or race (cf. Lev 19:34).
- In Luke 10:25-37, Jesus goes further. He says that your neighbor is anyone you come into contact with who lacks resources, even someone of a hated race or of another religious faith.

What is ‘justice’?

According to the Old Testament, God’s justice means to share food, shelter, and other basic resources with those who have fewer of them (Is 58:6-10).

- Injustice happens when people are barred from fair wages and, therefore, from the same goods and opportunities afforded others (Lev. 19:13, Jer 22:13).
- Jesus tells us that God is still committed to justice and that those with a relationship with him will be as well (Luke 18:1-8).
- So meeting basic human needs such as food, safe housing, health and education is not simply a matter of *mercy* but also of *justice*.

Should we still be concerned about injustice today?

Consider the following example. Inner city children receive inferior schooling and often grow up in an environment extremely detrimental to learning.

- Conservatives argue that this is the parent's or the local sub-culture's fault while liberals argue it is the failure of government and/or the fruit of systemic racism.
- But no one argues that it is the children's fault. The reality is that some children, through no fault of their own, grow up with opportunities for academic and economic success vastly smaller than others.
- Why does this situation exist? Part of the sinful brokenness of the world is an unjust distribution of assets and opportunities.
- There is a Latin American prayer that captures the Christian attitude well: *"O God, to those who have hunger give bread; and to those who have bread the hunger for justice."*

Why should we do justice?

God tells Israel: *"The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God"* (Lev 19:34).

- The Israelites had been aliens and oppressed slaves in Egypt. They did not have the ability to free themselves — God liberated them by his grace and power.
- Now they're to treat all people with less power or fewer assets as neighbors, doing love and justice to them. So the basis for "doing justice" is salvation by grace!
- Christians may disagree about the particular political approach to the problems of injustice. But all Christians must be characterized by their passion for justice, and their personal commitment to ameliorate injustice through personal giving, sacrifice and generosity.

Summary

Christians do "gospel-neighboring" by sacrificially meeting needs and lovingly working for justice for those in our city with less of the world's goods.

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

2. Why is it important to recognize the motives of both mercy and justice as we meet concrete human needs of our neighbors?

Isaiah 58:3-10

- ### 3. What is the result of doing justice? (v.8-10)

Matt 25:31-46

1. **Jesus is expecting a particular kind of ministry from his followers. What kinds of people or needs are the focus of this ministry? List them.**
2. **Who is Jesus examining and why (vv.32-35)? How can God use this ministry to determine who goes to heaven or hell (v.46)? Does this deny the doctrine that we are saved by Christ's works, not ours?**

Luke 10:25-37

1. How does Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan guard against and thwart what the law expert is trying to do?
2. On the basis of Jesus' teaching, who is your neighbor?
3. How does Jesus show us what the true motive should be for "doing justice and mercy" to our neighbor?

READINGS

Read and mark "?" - question to raise "!" - insight or helpful to you

Why do we not observe how the benevolence of Christians to strangers... has done the most to advance their cause? For it is disgraceful that... the impious Galileans [Christians] support not only *their* poor but *ours* as well, while everyone is able to see that our own people lack aid from us!

—Roman Emperor Julian (360 A.D.)¹

[During the great epidemic] most of our brother Christians showed unbounded love and loyalty, never sparing themselves. Heedless of danger, they took charge of the sick, attending to their every need and ministering to them in Christ. Many, in nursing and curing others, transferred their death to themselves and died in their stead... The pagans behaved in the opposite way. At the first onset of the disease, they pushed the sufferers away and fled even from their dearest, often throwing them into the roads before they were dead...

—Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria (260 A.D.)²

Raymond Fung, an evangelist in Hong Kong, tells of coming to know a textile worker in his early forties. At Fung's urging he came to church one Sunday at the cost of a day's wages. After the service they went to lunch. The worker said, "Well, the sermon hit me." It had been about sin. "What the preacher said was true of me — laziness, a violent temper, and addiction to cheap entertainment." Fung wrote, "I held my breath, trying to keep down my excitement. Had the message gotten through? "But nothing was said about my boss," he continued. "Nothing about how he employs child laborers, how he doesn't give us the legally required holidays, how he puts on false labels, how he forces us to do overtime..." My friend, the textile worker, agreed that he was a sinner, but he rejected the message of the church because he sensed its incompleteness... A gospel which ignores [the missing part] cannot possibly work among the overwhelming majority in Asia: the poor peasants and the workers.

— Harvie Conn³

"Christians should form communities that establish a voluntary consensus on minimum levels of income and resources below which people in the community should not be allowed to fall, and maximum levels of consumption and expenditure on self, above which people ought not be allowed to continue... Christians should focus on the creation of small local groups of a cross-section of major political, economic, and religious leaders of individual communities, taking the needs of their local settings into their own hands, as an alternative both to the impersonal and often ruthless policies of multi-

national corporations that dominate global capitalism and to the large interventionist and statist machines that often characterize western and particularly European governments."

– Craig Blomberg⁴

When the scriptural people of God seek redemption, they want something that goes far beyond personal salvation. In their eyes, God's redemption means justice is coming, the King of all the earth is coming! They want *"justice to roll down like waters"* (Amos 5:24). Do contemporary Christians bring the same passion to their hope of redemption as the people in the Bible did? When our earthly kingdoms have a good year, we don't necessarily long for [justice] to break in. But if you are a slave in Pharaoh's kingdom, or in a Mississippi cotton kingdom "your kingdom come" *means* "your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

– Cornelius Plantinga⁵

- 1. Which statements impressed you and why?**
- 2. Consider the first two quotes from ancient writers. How does unselfish service to others and outsiders ultimately build up the Christian community?**
- 3. Consider the quote by Harvie Conn. How could that church have altered its ministry so that it made more sense to the textile worker?**

4. Consider the quote from Craig Blomberg. This is an approach to doing justice that seeks to avoid both traditional western liberal and conservative approaches to justice. What do you think of it?
5. What are some of the practical ways that individual Christians and the church can go about doing justice and mercy in the city?
6. Who is your neighbor? Make a list of some people or groups of people who God has placed in your road and who you should be aiding. How can you be a neighbor to them?

¹ Quoted in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Harper, 1997), p.84.

² Quoted in Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Harper, 1997), p.82.

³ Harvie Conn, *Bible Studies in Evangelization and Simple Lifestyle* (Paternoster, 1981) p.18.

⁴ Craig Blomberg, *Neither Riches nor Poverty* (Apollos, 1999) p. 26-27

⁵ Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World* (Eerdmans, 2002) p.103-104.

⁶ Stark, p. 76.

⁷ Stark, p. 94, 211.

⁸ John Perkins, *With Justice for All*, (Ventura, CA: Regal, 1982), pp. 146-166).

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to those who don't believe?

Study 6 | Course 2

How do people receive Christ and become children of God (John 1:12-13)?

KEY CONCEPT – EVANGELISM

Read and put a "?" if you have a question; put an "!" if an insight is helpful to you.

"Gospelizing" in the Book of Acts

- The word "*evangelizdomenoi*" means "to gospelize," to tell people the good news about what Jesus did for us. In the book of Acts:
 - a) Everyone does it. Not only the apostles (5:24) but every Christian (8:4) did evangelism — communicated the gospel. They did this endlessly (5:24).
 - b) Everyone does it differently. The gospel is not presented identically in every setting, but rather is adapted to different audiences. The gospel can be put in different nutshells. See the following passages:
 - i. 2 Corinthians 5:19-21
 - ii. Mark 1:14-15
 - iii. Romans 1:1-4, 16-17
 - iv. 1 Corinthians 15:1-5
 - v. Philippians 2:5-11
 - vi. 1 Timothy 2:5-6
 - vii. Titus 3:4-7
 - viii. 1 John 1:8-2:1
 - ix. 1 John 3:8b
 - x. 1 John 5:1
 - c) Yet the gospel has a definite content. Luke refers to *the* word, *the* message, *the* gospel (cf. 11:19; 13:26; 15:7; 20:32). When Cornelius' household "*received*" the message (11:1), the Holy Spirit fell on them (10:44). The gospel is a set of core truths which, when understood and received, converts and saves us.

The Gospel in the Book of Acts

- When the gospel is summed up in one or two words, it is usually said to be about:
 - a) salvation

- b) grace
- c) the Lord Jesus Christ
- It is also referred to as the:
 - a) "gospel of God's grace" (Acts 20:24)
 - b) "the word of his grace" (Acts 20:32)
 - c) "the good news about the Lord Jesus" (Acts 11:20)
 - d) "the message of his grace" (Acts 14:3)
- Thus we see the essential message is that through Jesus we are saved by grace.
- Each gospel presentation in Acts has several core components. John Stott calls them the gospel *"events, witnesses, promises, conditions."*¹
 - a) The gospel events – Jesus' death, resurrection and return to renew the world in history
 - b) The gospel promises – pardon for past, freedom for present, hope for the future
 - c) The gospel witnesses – Biblical writers and eyewitnesses to the resurrection
 - d) The gospel conditions – requirements of repentance and faith, not good works

Household "Gospeling" in the Book of Acts

- In Acts the main method of evangelism is not a program or a well-oiled scheme. Rather it is, literally, "household gospelizing" (10:2, 24; 16:15, 31; 18:8).
- "Oikos" is the Greek word for "household," but it means far more than the nuclear family. A Greco-Roman household contained not only several generations of the same family, but also servants, their families, friends and business associates.
- An *oikos* is a web of common:
 - a) kinship affinity (relatives)
 - b) geographical affinity (neighbors)
 - c) vocational affinity (co-workers)
 - d) associational affinities (special interest colleagues)
 - e) just plain friends

- *Oikos* evangelism is the most personally demanding of all methods, because it requires that you be a changed person, transformed by the gospel.
 - a) Your life is the main attractor and evidence for the truth of the faith.
 - b) In *oikos* evangelism, your life is under observation by those who don't believe. You can't run and you can't hide!
 - c) If your character is flawed (or even unexceptional), you won't be effective.
- *Oikos* evangelism is non-manipulative.
 - a) The person outside the faith is "in the driver's seat." He or she gets to raise questions and determines the speed of the process.
 - b) There is no canned presentation. He or she gets a very good view of how Christianity works in a life.
- In short, all the advantages of *oikos* evangelism are for the person who does not believe, not for the believer. No wonder it is so effective!

1. Which statements struck you and why?

2. Discuss the concept of "household gospeling." a) What is necessary for this to be effective? b) What practical things could you do to be better at this?
3. The gospel is presented differently to different audiences. a) How would you explain the gospel to a person from a traditional, moral society? b) How would you explain the gospel to a person from a secular, relativistic society?

BIBLE STUDY

Acts 16:11-40

1. vv.11-15. What are we told about Lydia? How did she come to faith? What signs are we given that Lydia was truly converted?
2. vv.16-19. Contrast the pre-Christian spiritual state of the slave-girl with that of Lydia. Contrast the ministry of Paul to Lydia with that of Paul to the slave-girl. What is Luke trying to show us?
3. vv.19-40. a) What led the jailer to believe? b) Compare his pre-Christian spiritual condition with that of Lydia and the Pythoness. c) How does Paul lead him to Christ? d) Why does Paul insist on a public apology in v.37?
4. Surely there were many conversions at Philippi. Why do you think Luke chose three such disparate people to profile for readers?

READINGS

Read and put a "?" if you have a question; put an "!" if an insight is helpful to you.

The famous story of the blind men and the elephant is often quoted to neutralize the affirmation of the great religions. None of the blind men are able to grasp the full reality of the elephant, and in the same way, no religion can get a hold of more than part of the truth. But the story can only be told from the point of view of [one] who is not blind and who sees the whole elephant. The story (then) is told by one who claims to see and know the full truth which all the world's religions are groping after... There is an appearance of humility in the protestation that the truth is much greater than any one of us can grasp, but if this is used to invalidate all claims to discern the truth, it is in fact an arrogant claim to a kind of knowledge which is superior to [all others]... We have to ask: "What is the vantage ground from which you claim to be able to relativize all the absolute claims which these different scriptures make?"²

Becky meets LS (law student) on the bus and introduces the subject of heroes.

LS I guess Karl Marx is my hero. [Editor's note: Remember, this was 1979!]

BP What makes him your hero?

LS I think his ideas were great — they haven't always been carried out rightly.

BP But what exactly is so great about his ideas?

LS He's my hero because of his passionate regard for the oppressed.

BP I agree with that concern, but I know Marx holds no belief in God.

LS Yes, he sees the universe as godless, and we have meaning only in a corporate sense of class. We are not significant as individuals.

BP Yet you admire his regard for the oppressed even though they are ultimately insignificant. It seems strange to value people so highly when they are random products of a universe. Why not manipulate them as you please?

LS I couldn't do that. I guess if my natural response is to feel [individuals] are significant then I need a philosophic system that says the same things. But I believe we are basically good. If we could just live in a classless society, we would be free of the things that weigh us down.

BP Listen, I know a guy who is one of the worst racists. If he lived with you for 50 years in your classless society, he would still think "nigger."

How can Marx wipe out the ugliness and hatred of a bigot?

LS [Eyes glaring] We've been trying to change that for centuries. And all the rules and laws in the world can't... make you love me.

BP Look, you tell me you know individuals are significant, and you need a system that says so. Now you're saying that the real evil comes from within us. For external rules or laws can curb but cannot transform behavior. So you need a system that regards evil as internal and a solution that transforms radically not curbs superficially. Right? Well, that's the very kind of system I've found.

LS Hey, what kind of revolution are you into?

(Pippert) When I told her I followed Jesus, I think I had better not quote her exact words of response! But after she recovered from her shock she asked me how I knew it was true. For the rest of our trip she asked me to defend Christianity. She listened intently, and when we arrived she said, "I'd like to get together again... When I went home this weekend my younger sister came to see me, too. Then she told me she'd become a Christian. I told her it was anti-intellectual and unsubstantiated. In a furor, I packed my bags, walked out saying I never wanted to discuss it again. And here I got on a bus and sat down next to you." We do indeed worship the Hound of Heaven.³

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

2. **Modern people assume the story of the blind men and the elephant is true and therefore it is never right to try to convert someone else. How does this quote undermine that objection to evangelism?**
3. **How does Becky Pippert uncover a theme of relevance for the law student? How does she uncover her belief position? How does she show the contradiction between the two? How does she adapt her gospel presentation to the theme of relevance?**

¹ J.Stott, *The Message of Acts*, p.79-81

² L. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* p.9-10, 170.

³ This adapted from account of a conversation between Becky Pippert (BP) with a black female law student (LS) on a bus in Salem, Oregon. (in *Out of the Salt Shaker*, IVP, 1979, p.160ff.)

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to those who wrong me?

Study 7 | Course 2

KEY CONCEPT – FORGIVENESS

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

God’s Forgiveness and Ours

- When God reveals his glory to Moses he says he “*forgives wickedness*” yet “*does not leave the guilty unpunished*” (Exod 34:6-7).
 - a) Not until Jesus do we see how God can be both completely just and forgiving through his atonement (1 John 1:7-9).
- Jesus says: “*If you do not forgive men their sin, your heavenly Father will not forgive your sins*” (Matt 6:15).
 - a) This does not mean we can earn God’s forgiveness through our own forgiving, but that we can disqualify ourselves from it. No heart that is truly repenting toward God could be unforgiving toward others.
- God’s grace gives us the two prerequisites for a life of forgiveness:
 - a) *Emotional humility* – You can only stay bitter toward someone if you feel superior, if you feel that you “would never do anything like that!” Those who won’t forgive show they have not accepted their own sinfulness.
 - b) *Emotional wealth* – You can’t be gracious to someone if you are too needy and insecure. If you know God’s love and forgiveness then there is a limit to how deeply another person can hurt you. He or she can’t touch your real identity, wealth and significance. The more we rejoice in our own forgiveness, the quicker we will forgive others.

A Balance

If our forgiveness truly reflects God’s it must honor justice as did his.

- When people wrong us we must completely surrender the right to pay back or get even, yet at the same time we must never overlook injustice or serious wrongdoing.
 - a) It is never loving to let a person simply get away with sin. It is not loving:
 - i. to the perpetrator, who continues in the grip of the habit
 - ii. to others who will be wronged in the future
 - iii. to God who is grieved

- b) This is difficult, for the line is very thin between a moral outrage for God's sake and a self-righteous outrage because of hurt pride.
- The natural response to most wrongs is to say nothing on the outside and burn with resentment and ill-will on the inside.
- The gospel response is the very opposite. We must openly address wrong, but without any desire to pay back (Rom 12:14, 20-21).
 - a) Only if you have forgiven thoroughly on the inside can you confront non-abusively, without trying to make the person feel terrible.
 - b) Only if you have forgiven and wish the perpetrator well in every way will your words come without disdain and have any potential for changing the heart.

The Definition of Forgiveness

- Forgiveness is giving up the right to seek repayment from the one who harmed you.
 - a) Sins are "*debts*" (Matt 6:12) which you can either:
 - i. make the debtor pay by hurting them until you feel things are "even"
 - ii. you pay by forgiving and absorbing the pain within yourself
- How can you pay the debt yourself?
 - a) refuse to hurt the person directly
 - b) refuse to cut the person down in front of others
 - c) refuse to indulge in ill-will in your heart
 - d) instead of hoping for their pain, you pray positively for their growth
- Forgiveness is granted before it is felt.
 - a) It is a promise to perform the three refusals listed above and pray for the perpetrator as you remind yourself of God's grace to you.
 - b) Though it is extremely difficult and painful because you are bearing the cost of the sin yourself, forgiveness will:
 - i. deepen your character
 - ii. free you to talk to and help the person
 - iii. lead to love and peace rather than bitterness

By bearing the cost of the sin, you are walking in the path of your Master (Col 3:13; Matt 18:21-35).

HOW DO I RELATE TO THOSE WHO WRONG ME?	<i>notes</i>
<p>Which statements struck you and why?</p>	

BIBLE STUDY #1

Matthew 18:21-35

- 1. How does the parable in vv.23-35 answer Peter's question in v.21?**
- 2. How does the image of a monetary debt help us understand what it means to forgive all kinds of wrongs?**

Galatians 6:1-3; Romans 12:14-21

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BIBLE STUDY #3

Matthew 5:23-24; 18:15-17

- 1. On the basis of these two passages, when is it your move to seek reconciliation when a relationship needs repair?**
- 2. What are some practical ways to carry out Matthew 5 and Matthew 18?**

READINGS

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

Christians are called to abandon bitterness, to be forbearing, to have a forgiving stance even where the repentance of the offending party is conspicuous by its absence; on the other hand, their God-centered passion for justice, their concern for God’s glory, ensure that the awful odium of sin is not glossed over.

– Don Carson¹

[Forgiveness] is to deal with our emotions... by denying ourselves the dark pleasures of venting them or fondling them in our minds... Once upon a time, I was engaged to a young woman who changed her mind. I forgave her... but in small sums over a year... done when I spoke to her and refrained from rehashing the past, done whenever I renounced jealousy and self-pity when seeing her with another man, done when I praised her to others when I wanted to slice away at her reputation. Those were the payments — but she never saw them. And her own payments were unseen by me... but I do know that she forgave me... (Forgiveness) is more than a matter of refusing to hate someone. It is also a matter of choosing to demonstrate love and acceptance to the offender... Pain is the consequence of sin; there is no easy way to deal with it. Wood, nails and pain are the currency of forgiveness, the love that heals.

– Dan Hamilton²

Forgiveness flounders because I exclude the enemy from the community of humans even as I exclude myself from the community of sinners. But no one can be in the presence of the God of the crucified Messiah for long without overcoming this double exclusion — without transposing the enemy from the sphere of monstrous inhumanity into the sphere of shared humanity and herself from the sphere of proud innocence into the sphere of common sinfulness. When one knows that the torturer will not eternally triumph over the victim, one is free to rediscover that person’s humanity and imitate God’s love for him. And when one knows that God’s love is greater than all sin, one is free to see oneself... and so rediscover one’s own sinfulness.

– Miroslav Volf³

“Why do we ‘keep score’? First, it makes us feel superior to the person we resent. Also, it gives us an excuse for indulging in exquisite plots for revenge, such as hurting the person by withholding our ultimate treasure — personal friendship... Third... There is a sense in which we remember past wounds to

hurt ourselves. [Why?]. . . We feel noble and worthy as the decent person who was wrongly hurt. They give us a chance to justify ourselves. But we do, in fact, also hate resentment. . . It depresses us, robs us of gratitude, sneaks into other relationships. . . If you cannot free people from their wrongs. . . you enslave yourself to your own painful past, and by fastening yourself to the past, you let your hate become your future. You can reverse your future only by releasing other people from their pasts.

– Lewis Smedes⁴

Forgiveness is not simply a one-time action. . . the practice of forgiveness involves us in a whole way of life. Its central goal is to reconcile and restore communion — with God, one another, and the whole creation. Forgiveness [is] to offer a future not bound by the past. . . forgiveness [is] yearning for the possibility of reconciliation. Forgiveness does not merely refer backward to the absolution of guilt; it also looks forward to the restoration of community. Sometimes reconciliation requires separation, particularly in abusive or oppressive situations where proximity threatens. . . but it also requires the struggle to learn to wish enemies well even when we cannot be in their presence, when they are impenitent, and even when we are appropriately angry. Boundaries are legitimate. Permanent hopeless boundaries are not.

– L. Gregory Jones⁵

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?
2. The first quote assumes that gospel forgiveness cannot oppose or preclude the seeking of justice. Why not? And how can both be pursued together?
3. The second quote gives some very practical “how to’s” about the process of forgiveness. Make a list of them.
4. The fifth quote talks about going beyond mere forgiveness to the restoration of a relationship. What are some ways we can do that after we are wronged? What do we do if the offender won’t be reconciled to us?

¹ Don Carson, *Love in Hard Places* (Crossway, 2002) p.83

² Dan Hamilton, *Forgiveness* (Inter-Varsity, 1980) p.10ff

³ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Abingdon, 1996) p.124

⁴ Lewis Smedes, *Love Within Limits* (Eerdmans, 1989) p.74-44 and "Forgive and Forget"

⁵ L.Gregory Jones, "Forgiveness" in *Practicing our Faith*, D.Bass, editor, (Jossey-Bass, 1997)

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to money?

Study 8 | Course 2

KEY CONCEPT – MONEY

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

A community for radical giving

“They share their table with all, but not their bed with all. They are poor and make many rich; they are short of everything and yet have plenty of things.” Letter to Diognetus, c.100-150 A.D.

Unlike their neighbors, Christians were promiscuous with their money, not their bodies. They shared their possessions in a proportion and with a joy that the surrounding materialistic culture had never seen. This radical generosity began immediately after the resurrection when *“selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need (Acts 2:45) ...they did not consider that any of their possessions were their own.” (Acts 4:32)*

The guidelines for radical giving

The tithe

The Old Testament called believers to tithe — give 10% of their income. The New Testament nowhere explicitly requires tithing, but in Mt 23:23 Jesus castigates the Pharisees for not being willing to go beyond the tithe when there are community needs.

- This means the while the church cannot require members to give any particular amount of money, Jesus assumes his followers will go beyond the tithe in giving.
- This is only reasonable. Since we have greater privileges, joy, knowledge, and power than our ancestors in the faith, how could we be expected to be less generous with our possessions?
- So the tithe is a minimum rule of thumb for Christians who want to give in a gospel way to the church, the poor, and others.

Surplus and sacrifice

Surplus — Jesus warns against *“storing up”* beyond what you truly need (Lk. 12:21).

- While there can never be a firm line between necessities and luxuries, it is sufficient to know that most middle class people in the U.S. should continually be pushing the percentage of their giving further and further beyond a tithe.

Sacrifice — There may be seasons of life in which you cannot tithe and still meet your other obligations. But more basic than tithing is the guideline of sacrifice.

- Paul tells us of a church who gave *“even beyond their abilities”* (2 Cor 8:3). Their giving entailed sacrifices in their daily lifestyle (how much they spent on clothes, travel, home, etc.).
- If we have tithed and it doesn’t cut in to the way we actually live, we need to give more. But if we have *not* tithed yet our giving *does* cut in to our daily lifestyle, our consciences can be at rest.

Community

Few people think they are materialistic, but many are self-deceived. How can we guard against it?

- The final guideline for giving is this: *“Exhort one another daily that you are not hardened by the deceitfulness of sin”* (Heb 3:13). We must share our income and spending patterns with at least some other Christians.
- You should discuss together lifestyle choices such as recreation, children’s activities, travel, etc. Without such discussion and accountability you won’t be able to be sure you are self-deceived.
- Greed *must* exist — but the Bible does not give any hard and fast definition. Its guidelines have to be applied across centuries, cultures, and economic systems.
- We must work the specifics out in community.

The dynamic for radical giving

Jesus said that your treasure goes where your heart is (Mt. 6:21).

- You always give most effortlessly to that which is your real salvation, your hope, your meaning in life.
- If Jesus is the one who saves you, your money flows out easily into his work and the lives of people.
- If your real hope is in your appearance, status, or comfort, your giving will flow more easily into those items and symbols, and giving will seem very difficult.
- Generosity is a test of the heart.

HOW DO I RELATE TO MONEY?

notes

Which statements struck you and why?

BIBLE STUDY #3

Luke 11:37-42

1. What does Jesus affirm the Pharisees in doing? What does that mean for us?

2. What does Jesus condemn the Pharisees for not doing? What does that mean for us?

Luke 12:15-34; Mark 10:17-30

- notes*

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

1. (Verse 8) Why should Christians not need a command to give and to give generously?
2. What practical guidance does the passage give to those who want to know “How much should I give?”

READINGS

Read and put a "?" if you have a question; put an "!" if an insight is helpful to you.

When we were first married more than eighteen years ago, my wife and I committed to begin with a tithe, based on the very modest income I had when I was a graduate student, and then to increase that percentage if God increased his annual provisions for us. Over the years God has blessed us... Our overall combined family income... puts us \$4,000 below the average household income for our affluent suburban community. Nevertheless, we are able to give over 30% of our income to our church and to para-church organizations and individuals involved in Christian ministry. This was our fifth consecutive year of topping 30%, following the principle of the graduated tithe. I must quickly confess that we live in a large, comfortable suburban home. It is true that our neighbors for the most part are working class or retired rather than professional and that our suburb is surrounded by considerably more affluent ones, to which most of my once professional neighbors have moved. We are happy to give nice gifts to our children so as to make them feel not too different from their peers socio-economically, and to enjoy recreational activities, cultural and sporting events, a meal out — though compared to our suburban friends we do these latter things considerably less frequently... We refuse to go into debt for anything but property and education, bought cars only that we could afford to pay cash for, bought goods in bulk, at discounts, at garage sales and thrift shops. We have not amassed the number or nature of clothes most Westerners seem compelled to accumulate. Nor is anything I have written meant to suggest that I believe savings, investments, insurance or pension schemes are wrong. I have all these and hope their earning continues to grow. While I know of others who, for a variety of reasons have adopted a much more radically simple lifestyle, God has not yet led me to follow them, even after considerable discussion, prayer, and soul-searching. In short I feel I have a very rewarding life, materially speaking, and am not a particularly exemplary model of sacrificial giving... but when the American Christian average of total giving per family is below 3% of per capita income, surely we can do considerably better!

– Craig Blomberg ⁵

By the gospel we must give aid even when we can't do it without suffering ourselves... how else will we bear one another's burdens? If we are never obliged to relieve others' burdens but when we can do it without burdening ourselves, then how do we bear our neighbor's burdens when we bear no burdens at all?"

– Jonathan Edwards ⁶

Personal Memorandum - December 1868

Thirty-three and an income of \$50,000 per annum. By this time two years I can so arrange all my business as to secure at least 50,000 per annum. Beyond this never earn — make no effort to increase fortune, but spend the surplus each year for benevolent purposes. Cast aside business forever except for others...

...Man must have an idol. The amassing of wealth is one of the worst species of idolatry. No idol more debasing than the worship of money. Whatever I engage in I must push inordinately therefore should I be careful to choose a life which will be the most elevating in character. To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares and with most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time, must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery. I will resign business at Thirty-five...

– Andrew Carnegie 7

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

- 3. This remarkable note by Andrew Carnegie was written to himself when he was thirty-three. He wanted to get out of business within two years but he never did. What does this teach us?**

4. Consider the following exercise, if you have never done something similar:

- Estimate what percentage of your money is currently going to:
 - a) Christian ministry - church, Christian workers, other ministries
 - b) People outside your family with economic needs
- How close is this to 10% of your income?
- Develop a plan for regular giving:
 - a) Decide what percentage of your income you will give this year.
 - b) Make it a sacrificial level. Identify the sacrifices in your own mind that you will probably have to make.
 - c) Prayerfully determine how this giving portion will be distributed among causes you feel will honor him.
 - d) Decide at what intervals you will give and have a way to keep a record of how well you follow your plan.

¹ L. Vischer, *Tithing in the Early Church* (Fortress, 1966) p. 10.

² Craig Blomberg, *Neither Riches nor Poverty* (Apollos, 1999) p. 136.

³ Ibid, p.132.

⁴ Ibid, p.145.

⁵ Ibid, p.248-249.

⁶ Jonathan Edwards, "The Duty of Charity" in *Works* ed. by Edward Hickman, vol. 2, p.171 (Banner of Truth, 1974.)

⁷ Quoted in Os Guinness, *Doing Well and Doing Good: Money, Giving, and Caring in a Free Society* (Navpress, 2001), pp.281-282.

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to love and marriage?

Study 9 | Course 2

KEY CONCEPT – MARRIAGE

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

What are the purposes of marriage according to the Bible?

- To build kingdom-exhibiting community before the world (1 Cor 7)
Christians should choose partners not primarily for personal fulfillment or social status/security. Rather, we choose marriage and a partner to be a *sign* of the future kingdom.
 - a) We marry to show how God’s grace creates unity across the gender barrier and reunites humanity.
 - b) We marry to bear and disciple children, creating a new Christian community in which relationships of truth and love exist in interdependent balance.
- To be a vehicle for our spouse’s future-selves through sacrificial service (Eph 5)
Christians should choose marriage partners not just for what they are, but in view of what they can become. We are to develop a vision for ministry to our spouse. It is a life-long commitment to our spouse’s future beauty and glory.
 - a) We want to do whatever it takes to be a vehicle for that and so we develop strategies of service to our spouse that confront, affirm and forgive.
 - b) And of course, nothing will help your spouse grow more than if he or she is committed to your growth in the same way.
 - c) This view of marriage in the long run provides great personal fulfillment, but not in the sacrifice-less and superficial way that contemporary people want it to come.

What is the purpose of the single life according to the Bible?

- Christianity was the first major religion that held up the single life as a valid way to live. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 holds both marriage and singleness before his readers as options.
 - a) Traditional cultures tend to make an idol of marriage and family, so singleness is seen as aberrant.

- b) Contemporary Western culture tends to make an idol of individual freedom, so marriage is delayed or derided.
- c) Christianity does neither. The strongest ties are not those of blood, but of faith (Mark 3:31-35), so the church is our ultimate security and community.
- If through the gospel our security and hope is in Christ, we will neither fear nor over-desire marriage. This means that Christian singles should do seasonal marriage-seeking.
- a) While much of the time you may be passive, waiting to come across someone, there should be other times in which you deliberately look for prospective marriage partners among people that you may be overlooking.
- As Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 7, the advantages of the single life is the greater amount of discretionary time and money that can be given to others in ministry.

What is the purpose of sex according to the Bible?

- Sex is God's way for one person to say to another, "I belong completely, exclusively to you in every aspect: socially, legally, economically, spiritually and emotionally."
- a) In 1 Corinthians 6:17, Paul forbids sex between unmarried persons.¹ He insists it is radically dissonant to give your body to someone to whom you will not also commit your whole life.
- b) Sexual integrity means we should not split off the body from the rest of the life. Don't give your body if you aren't willing to give your whole life.
- When physical one-ness is an expression of whole life one-ness, then sex deepens the trust and love between two people.
- a) Sex outside marriage is asking for physical union without the willingness to give up your freedom.
- b) So sex is a way God invented to do "whole-life-entrustment" and self-giving. It mirrors the whole-life commitment we make to Christ (Eph 5:22ff).
- c) If you use sex for physical and emotional gratification instead, you weaken your ability to do this entrustment.

1. Which statements struck you and why?

2. What is wrong with wanting to marry for personal fulfillment or for social status and security?

[Note: If your group consists mainly of married persons, you may do only Bible Study #'s 1, 3 or 4. If your group consists mainly of single persons, you may do only Bible Study #'s 1, 2 or 4.]

BIBLE STUDY #1

Genesis 2:18-24

- 1. Verse 21 says Adam did not have (literally) 'a help fit for him.' Consider the other uses of this word in Exod 18:4, Ps 121:1-3, Hos 13:9. What does this tell us about the woman?**
- 2. Verse 24 says "for this reason" a man shall unite with his wife. What is this "reason" referred to?**

1 Cor 7:27-31

1. Why does this passage seem so negative about marriage?
2. In vv.29-31 Paul assumes that the kingdom of God is both partially here and not here yet. What is the practical effect of this belief on us?
3. When Paul was writing there was no society in which single adulthood was an acceptable form of living. Why was that? Why did the gospel change that?

BIBLE STUDY #3

Eph. 5:25-28

1. **What, according to vv.26-27 is the goal of Christ for the church? What, then, according to v.28 should be the goal of each spouse in marriage?**
2. **How does this purpose of marriage speak to people who are afraid to get married?**

BIBLE STUDY #4

Matthew 5:27-30

1. How does Jesus' teaching here subvert the classic double standard of male and female sexual mores?

2. What does Jesus urge us not to do? What does he urge us to do?

READINGS

Read and put a "?" if you have a question; put an "!" if an insight is helpful to you.

Immediate erotic thrill is the most superficial benefit of the sex act. The bodily exposure that arouses and accompanies it can be both profoundly symbolic and powerfully healing. It is the healing, concrete sign of what is happening in the whole relationship — the uncovering of our inner selves, our deepest fears and yearnings. As I look tenderly on the body of another — and as I experience what it is to feel the tenderness of another's caress — then the one who accepts and touches my most intimate body and caresses it with tenderness caresses also my inmost being — or so it seems when all is right... So it only makes sense that sexual relations be confined to marriage. For mutual disclosure and tender acceptance is not the activity of a moment, but the delicate fabric of a lifetime's weaving. Each time sex springs from casual encounter—physical disclosure and touching — some of its life-giving and healing nature is destroyed.

– John White ¹

The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union. The Christian attitude does not mean there is anything wrong about sexual pleasure, any more than about the pleasure of eating. It means you must not isolate that pleasure and try to get it by itself, any more than you ought to try to get the pleasures of tasting without swallowing and digesting, by chewing things and spitting them out again. ²

We use an unfortunate idiom when we say of a man prowling the streets, that "he wants a woman." Strictly speaking, a woman is what he does not want. He wants a pleasure for which a woman happens to be a necessary apparatus... [Real love] makes a man really want, not [even] a woman, but one particular woman. In some mysterious fashion, the lover desires the Beloved herself, not the pleasure she can give. ³

Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one... avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe... But in that casket — safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, and irredeemable. ⁴

It is probably impossible to love any human being simply “too much.” We may love him too much *in proportion* to our love for God; but it is the smallness of our love for God, not the greatness of our love for the man, that constitutes the inordinacy.

Being in love is a good thing, but it is not the best thing... Love in a second sense — love as distinct from “being in love” is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit, reinforced (in Christian marriages) by the grace... from God. They have this love for each other even at those moments when they do not like each other... It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run; being in love was the explosion that started it. ⁵

We must not attempt to find an absolute in the flesh. Banish play and laughter from the bed of love and you may let in a false goddess... We are under no obligation at all to sing all our love-duets in the throbbing world-without-end, heart-breaking manner of Tristan and Isolde; let us often sin like Papageno and Papagena instead. ⁶

– C.S.Lewis

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

2. The first quotes speak of the Christian principle that sexual intercourse is only for marriage. How (on the basis of what we've studied) would you respond to some of the following typical objections to this principle?

a. Why can't Christians have sex outside of marriage?

b. "But isn't that a negative view of sex?"

c. "What's so harmful about it?"

d. "Sex is a private matter — no one's business but mine."

3. The third quote has to do with the power of sexual desires and urges. What are some practical ways single Christians can embrace chastity?

3. How active (or passive) should a single Christian be in seeking marriage?

4. On the basis of what we've studied, how can we know when we should marry someone?

5. For marrieds: How do the last four quotes give us practical guidance that could improve our marriages?

¹ John White, *Eros Defiled* (IVP, 1977) pp.18-19.

² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, bk. 3, chp. 6.

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, chapter 5.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, chapter 6.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, chapter 6.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, bk. 3, chp 6

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to my work?

Study 10 | Course 2

KEY CONCEPT – WORK

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

God’s creation and our work

The importance of work

- Human beings were put into paradise and given work to do (Genesis 2:15) before the Fall, before sin and before anything was wrong with the world.
- Therefore work is not a curse — it is something we were designed to do. Without work there is a sense of significant inner loss or emptiness.
- Though sin makes work often frustrating and difficult (Gen 3:17ff.), it is intrinsically good.

The goodness of all kinds of work

- Human work means being partners with God in *his* work. That is the obvious implication of Genesis 1-2.
- Since God’s Spirit does not simply save souls but also sustains, cultivates, and renews the material world by his Holy Spirit (Psalm 104:30; 145, 147) then making clothes, practicing law, tilling fields, mending broken bodies, advancing science, or nurturing children all participate in God’s work. God does not only send ministers to give the world sermons, but doctors to give medicine, teachers to impart wisdom, and so on.
- The view, then, that an artist or a banker is doing secular work while a minister is doing spiritual work does not fit with the Biblical understanding. God is also an artist and an investor in the material world. And in Gen 1 God’s hands are literally in the dust — he is also a manual laborer. So all work has dignity.

The limits of work

- The fact that God himself rested after work (Gen 2:2) proves that work is not everything — it is not all there is.
- You will not have a meaningful life without work, but you must not make your work the meaning of your life. To make any work — even ministry — your meaning in life is to create an idol.

Jesus' redemption and our work

- Both ancient Greek and modern thought tend to separate faith-beliefs from the public world and life. This has been called dualism.
- But the Bible does not support a sacred vs. secular distinction. We cannot separate our heart faith from our work and our life in the public sphere.
- Every part of our lives — work, family, civic involvement, recreation — is now to be done for God's glory (1 Cor 10:31).
- The glory of God means his ultimate importance, so in every area of life we must ask: "If God is the most important thing then how should I be conducting my business? How should I be spending my money? How should I live in my neighborhood and municipality?"

Work and Rest

One of the key themes of the Bible is *Sabbath*.

- Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28) — the Lord of Rest! Jesus urges us to come to him because "*I will give you rest.*" (Matt 11:28-30) and no one else will.
- The Sabbath means to regularly cease from, and to enjoy the results of, your work.
 - a) In Deut. 5:12-15, God ties the Sabbath to freedom from slavery. Anyone who cannot rest from work is a slave — to your own need for success, your materialistic culture, exploitative employers, or to all of the above.
 - b) They will use and abuse you if you are not disciplined in the practice of Sabbath. Sabbath is a declaration of freedom.
- External rest of the body, however, is impossible without inner rest from anxiety and strain. It takes the deep rest in Christ's finished work for your salvation (Heb 4:1-10) to avoid over-work. Only then will you be able to regularly walk away and rest from your vocational work.

1. Which statements struck you and why?

2. What are some of the practical implications of the Biblical teaching that all work is good and has dignity and we must not separate God from our work?

BIBLE STUDY #1

Eph 5:21, 6:5-9

1. Verse 21 is a governing principle for all the relationships that follow — wives and husbands, parents and children, masters and servants. What is the implication of this for relationships at work?

2. What practical guidelines are given here working and for managing workers?

BIBLE STUDY #2

Exod 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15

1. Each of the two statements of the command to rest ties the observance to a different event in history. What does each event tell us about the reason we must rest?
2. What practical guidance do we get from these two passages for our inner attitude during Sabbath time?

Luke 5:4-11; Matthew 11:28-30

2. **Matthew 11. Jesus promises to “give us rest.” How can the deep rest Jesus gives us in the gospel change our relationship to our work?**

READINGS

Read and put a “?” if you have a question; put an “!” if an insight is helpful to you.

The church... has no blueprints for proper economic behavior in the world. Rather it communicates its core religious and moral vision to its members and allows them to draw the implications of that vision for their own lives in the world. Christian notions of calling, of gratitude, of modesty and humility, of compassion and justice, of covenantal existence, of respect for the natural world, and, above all, of justification by grace and not by economic works — are pregnant with meaning for life in the modern economic world.

– Robert Benne¹

My mood would darken every weekend, until by Saturday afternoon I’d be unresponsive and morose. My normal routine, which involved brunch with friends and swapping tales of misadventure in the relentless quest for romance and professional success, made me feel impossibly restless. After a while I got lonely and did something that, as a teenager profoundly put off by her religious education, I could never have imagined wanting to do. I began dropping in on a nearby synagogue... Finally I developed a theory for my condition. I was suffering from the lack [of a Sabbath.]... There is ample evidence that our relationship to work is out of whack. Let me argue on behalf of an institution that has kept workaholism in reasonable check for thousands of years. Most people mistakenly believe that all you have to do to stop working is not work. The inventors of the Sabbath understood that it was a much more complicated undertaking. You cannot downshift casually and easily. This is why the Puritan and Jewish Sabbaths were so exactly intentional. The rules did not exist to torture the faithful. Interrupting the ceaseless round of striving requires a surprisingly strenuous act of will, one that has to be bolstered by habit as well as by social sanction.

– Judith Shulevitz²

It is commonly agreed that Sabbath... becomes decisive for Israel’s faith in the exile. The imperial pressure of Babylon was endlessly demanding of productivity but this counter-provision for regular rest was a visible, public assertion that people of faith would not have their lives defined by [economic] expectation. Thus Sabbath is an act of refusal and resistance, a vigorous assertion of a different identity grounded in God’s freedom and enacted as socio economic freedom from every production system and every commodity ideology.

– Walter Brueggemann³

The gospel of Jesus points us and indeed urges us to be at the leading edge of the whole culture, articulating in story and music and art and philosophy and education and poetry and politics and theology a worldview that will mount the historically rooted Christian challenge to both modernity and post-modernity, leading the way into the post-postmodern world with joy and humor and gentleness and good judgment and true wisdom. I believe we face the question: if not now, then when? And if we are grasped by this vision, we may also hear the question: if not us, then who? And if the gospel of Jesus is not the key to this task, then what is?

– N.T. Wright⁴

- 1. Which statements impressed you and why?**
- 2. Look at the first quote. Benne says that the Christian gospel, especially the gospel of grace itself, has many applications to the work life. Brainstorm some of them.**
- 3. Look at the second quote. It explains that rhythmic rest will not work without a great deal of intentionality and discipline. Brainstorm the kind of habits and practices that can practically help us observe Sabbath.**

¹ Robert Benne, "The Calling of the Church in Economic Life" in *The Two Cities of God*, ed. Carl Braaten (Eerdmans, 1997) p. 102, 107

² J.Shulevitz "Bring Back the Sabbath" *New York Times Magazine*, March 2, 2003

³ Walter Brueggemann, "Sabbath as Active Faith," *Sunday Magazine* Summer 2002. When the Jews were dispersed and living in pagan societies, the practice of Sabbath was profoundly 'counter-cultural' and a witness to their neighbors as to the nature of their God.

⁴ N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (IVP, 1998)

