

GOSPEL REVOLUTION

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CONTENTS

Why this Book is for You	3
Three Ways to Use this Book	5
One: Defining the Gospel	7
Two: Saved by the Gospel	19
Three: Changed by the Gospel	35
Four: Growing in the Gospel	57
Five: Advancing the Gospel	79
Six: Defending the Gospel	115
Study Guide	131
Discussion Guide	145

3rd edition. January 2013.
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WHY THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU

This book is suitable for everyone because the Gospel is for every person, every day and every moment. It is not only the "news" that causes a person to cross the line of faith, but also the "news" that needs to steadily be applied to every single aspect of our lives.

If you are enquiring into the Christian faith,
this book is for you.

If you have recently crossed the line of faith,
this book is for you.

If you have been a believer for many years,
then this book is most certainly for you.

I say "most certainly" because seasoned believers are usually weakest in applying the power of the Gospel to their daily lives. They wrongly think that the Gospel is "milk" for new believers as opposed to the "meat" that they now need to mature. Crazy talk. The Gospel is both our milk and our meat. Outside of a deepening grasp of the Gospel, there is no other power on earth to genuinely change a person. Paul told the Roman believers that he wanted them to be "established in the Gospel".[1] The Gospel is something that we need to grow increasingly *into* not *out of*. When Paul told the Corinthians that the Gospel message was of "first importance",[2] he didn't mean of importance only at the outset, but of continual first importance.

Martin Luther said we need to "beat the Gospel into our heads". The Gospel Revolution is a stick to help do just that. It will wrap you around the life-changing power of the Gospel so that you can say with confidence, "I am a Gospel-Centred believer".

[1] Rom 16:25
[2] 1 Cor 15:3

THREE WAYS TO USE THIS BOOK

You can read it and do the study guides **by yourself**

or

You can discuss each chapter and study guide **with a mentor**

or

You can do it all in a **group setting**

Enjoy the ride.

ONE: **DEFINING THE GOSPEL**

I was first exposed to the Gospel three decades ago. Thirty years. I have woken up for the last 11,000 days with a growing knowledge of the Gospel, and honestly, it is still news that daily warms my heart and thrills my head. 11,000 days into the Gospel seems a good juncture as any to write a book about it. I still feel like I am paddling in the shallows of the Gospel ocean, but I'll gladly pass on what I've got so far. Actually, the more I "get it" the more I appreciate it. The Gospel is outstanding. The Gospel is enormous. And although the Gospel is about way more than improving my little life, the Gospel benefits to the individual are off the charts.

Defining something is often pretty straightforward. Not so defining the Gospel. To illustrate, D.A. Carson structured one of his talks entitled, "What is the Gospel?" around eight summarising words, five clarifying sentences and one evocative summary! The Gospel is too awesome, too all encompassing to reduce to a tidy one-line definition. Even a one-chapter definition will be unsatisfactory, but I trust it will capture the essence of the Gospel and give context for the rest of the book. I will be giving a **9-part definition of the Gospel** and even then shall only be scratching the surface. Here we go:

1. The Gospel is GOOD NEWS.

"Gospel" is actually a translation of "Evangelion" literally meaning "good news". But the problem with starting the definition here is that it makes the Gospel sound like just another bit of quite nice news: "Good news, my team won on Saturday". "Good news, I can get off work early today." So we need to enlarge the definition. We need to double-click on "good news". What sort of good news are we talking about?

2. The Gospel is good news for the INDIVIDUAL.

The Bible is full of stories of individuals having revolutionary encounters with God, and some of the best-known verses in Scripture are those describing individual responses to the Gospel. For example:

> *For God so loved the world that he gave His only Son, that **whosoever** believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. (Jn 3:16)*

Whosoever. The Gospel is massive and wonderful news for the individual, so much so that the salvation of individuals was in the mind of God before the world was even created.[3] But here's the thing: the individual salvation must be understood within the context of world salvation. Don't hear what I am not saying: the Gospel is certainly relevant and revolutionary for the individual, but the relevance and revolution to the individual is a subplot within the Bigger Story of how the Gospel is revolutionising the universe. I know this is something of a shock to our modern Western what's-in-it-for-the-me culture, so stay with me as I keep enlarging the definition of the Gospel because paradoxically, locating individual salvation within God's wider plan of salvation is the route to an individual living large and fulfilled for God.

3. The Gospel is good news for the WORLD.

Broader still, the Gospel refers to God's dealings with Mankind throughout the ages, through Jesus. We will unpack "through Jesus" as we go, but register for now that the Gospel target is larger than just you! The Gospel is recorded from Genesis-to-Revelation, not just in a single verse about how God offers salvation to the individual.

With the Gospel being good news for the *world*, it is hardly surprising that there are many themes that together make up the Big Gospel Story. Space does not allow me to try to summary all these "world"

[3] Eph 1:4

themes, so I will go for four of the most prominent themes that run from Genesis-to-Revelation. For each, note how the Gospel is **larger than the individual**. Note how the personal is found *within* the universal and how it should therefore be understood *within* the universal. The Gospel themes that I am thinking of are:

*Through Jesus, God is **renewing the world**,*
and I can personally be part of that renewal.

*Through Jesus, God is gathering **His own People**,*
and I can personally be part of that people.

*Through Jesus, **God's Presence** is filling the earth,*
and I can personally enjoy His presence.

I know that each of these needs some unpacking and explaining, and I will do that shortly, but right now I want to keep banging the drum that the Gospel is universal-*and*-personal.

I once had a small part in a school play, and although I was only on stage for a matter of minutes, each week I had to sit through hours of rehearsals watching the other scenes rehearse. When I complained the Director told me that to act well in my scene I needed to have a grasp of the whole play. That's precisely what we are talking about here. In order for me to act out the scene of my life in a manner worthy of my salvation, I must have a grasp of the Big Story of Salvation through the ages. **My story** must be located within **His story**. If it's not, my Christianity will be reduced to "I will go to heaven when I die, and in the meantime I can cope better with life's problems because God is with me." Of course, the Gospel *does* make me heaven-bound and *does* empower me to better face the problems of life, but it is so much more than that. If you understand the Gospel as primarily personal, then your faith will be outworked as something primarily personal - reductionist at best and selfish at worst. But when the My Story is found within the Big Story, then the Gospel is not an add-on to my life but something that my life gets added on to.

Paul always tried to declare the "**whole** will of God".[4] He had an obsession to make God's Word "**fully** known".[5] Clearly, the Gospel can be understood either partially or fully. As glorious as the individual part of the Gospel is, it is just that – *part* of the Gospel. And if you understand the Gospel partially, you will live it out partially. If you understand it more fully, you will live it out more fully.

Only the *full* Gospel is a game-changer, a recalibrator, a revolutioniser. Why? Because only the *full* Gospel can change my **worldview**, and worldview is where the battle is won or lost. To state the obvious, to get a new worldview you need to get a *new view of the world,* and grasping the Genesis-to-Revelation Gospel story is quite literally, acquiring a new view of the world. We need the whole Bible story to explain the origin of the world, the phases of world history, and the future of the world. And, grasping this wide-angle shot of the Redemptive Story gives my life the context I need to recalibrate, re-motivate and realign my life to the agenda of God through the ages.

Lets continue to define the Gospel by looking at three of these Genesis-to-Revelation Gospel themes:

4. The Gospel is that through Jesus, God is RENEWING THE WORLD, and I can personally be part of that renewal.

Genesis begins with God creating the world perfectly good with no evil, suffering, sickness or death.[6] It was the perfect world. But by Genesis 3, man had chosen to live in a manner contrary to God - a pattern that continues to the present day - and the inevitable result was a world in a mess. But in His mercy, in Genesis 3:15 God promised to send Jesus to redeem and renew the world. This would only happen in the future, and until that time God began His redemptive agenda by working through a special people group, Israel, from whom Jesus the Messiah would come. When Jesus did come, He

[4] Acts 20:26-27
[5] Col 1:25
[6] Gen 1:1,25

demonstrated the renewal of God by healing people, speaking justice, bringing peace, and crucially, offering renewal to individuals. And, the Bible teaches that Jesus will come again to complete the restoration of all things,[7] creating a perfect new heavens and new earth[8] - **world renewal**.

Personal renewal happens like this: All of creation will one day be made new, but God has begun this process by offering renewal to people right now. The Bible uses various phrases[9] to describe our inclusion including being "born again" and being made into "new creations".[10] Those who accept this offer by faith are assured a place in the renewed world of the future age, and get to enjoy God's renewing life within right now.[11] But because my understanding of the Gospel is *world* renewal not just personal renewal, my outworking of the Gospel reflects that in the following ways:

a. I consider **social justice and fighting poverty** as fundamental to being a Christian. If I only think of the Gospel as personal renewal, then where is my motivation to work for wider renewal? Renewed ones, who look forward to the future renewal of *all things*, live their short lives deliberately in that direction, for that is the direction of the Gospel.

b. I prioritise **helping others get personally renewed**. Personal rebirth is not an end in itself, but as a means towards the end of helping others know Gospel rebirth. Evangelism is top priority for every Christian.

c. I am **strengthened to face the challenges of this age**. Knowing that the future age will be new and perfect gives me a "heavenly hope"[12] that fortifies me in this life.[13] This tough age will not last forever!

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[7] This is a comprehensive restoration of all things. See Mt 25:34, Acts 3:21, Col 1:20, Rev 11:15.
[8] Rev 21:3
[9] Like becoming citizens of heaven (Phil 3:21), like receiving His righteousness (2 Cor 5:20) and transferring to the kingdom of light (Col 1:12-13).
[10] Jn 3:3,7 and 2 Cor 5:17.
[11] 2 Cor 4:16
[12] Col 1:5, 1 Thes 1:13, 2 Thes 2:16, Titus 1:2,13, 1 Pet 1:13.
[13] Rom 8:18-25.

For the record, another common Biblical way of describing this theme of renewal is the **Kingdom of God**, which exists *wherever Gospel renewal is taking place*. For example, people being healed and delivered is described as the coming of the Kingdom of God,[14] and a person becoming a Christian is described as entering the Kingdom of God.[15]

5. The Gospel is that through Jesus, God is gathering His own PEOPLE, and I can personally be part of that people.

Genesis begins with God creating Adam and Eve as His own special people, and Revelation ends with the People of God – now a countless multitude – dwelling with God in their midst. The bit in the middle is the story of how God gathered His People. Originally, Israel were God's people,[16] but then Jesus came to make a way for Gentiles (non-Israelites) to be included as part of this new people group - **God's People**.

The **personal** aspect looks like this: within the big story of God gathering a People, is the smaller story of God graciously reaching out to me personally. Consequentially, much of my Christian experience is personal, but I must locate the *personal within the corporate*, because the Gospel story is more about God gaining a People than a person gaining God. The Gospel story ends with me as part of God's People around the throne, not me and God sitting together privately on a cloud. Those of us from cultures that promote individualism find this aspect of the Gospel especially challenging and need to work harder to outwork the Gospel in the following ways:

a. **Being part of a local church.** Jesus taught us to pray, "*Our* Father" not "My Father".[17] Clearly, God is after a *people*. Although I will keep enjoying personal intimacy with God, I will bias

[14] Mt 24:14, Mt 4:23, Mt 9:35
[15] Mt 19:23, Phil 3:20, Col 1:13-14
[16] The OT does record some Gentiles (e.g. Rahab and Ruth) being included in the People of God, but only in the NT do the Gentiles become a major focus of both God's attention and the evangelistic efforts of the church.
[17] Mt 6:9

towards enhancing the expression of God's *People.* This means being an active member of a local church, honouring and speaking well of other believers and churches, and welcoming discipleship by the leaders of your church.

b. **Being involved in church planting**. Before seeing the bigger picture, I was content to think about the advance of the Gospel essentially as individual people crossing the line of faith. But realising now that God is after a People, I am motivated to help multiply healthy local churches so that new suburbs and cities can see the *People* of God on display.

c. **Avoid racist attitudes**. I used to try to avoid racism because I knew it was the "right thing to do", but now I know *why* it is the right thing to do – because the Gospel is about the joining of different nations into a new nation – the *People* of God. This helps me eagerly and humbly to embrace people from other cultures.

d. **Helping the Gospel reach the unreached people groups on earth.** Before seeing the Big Story, I was not properly motivated towards the Gospel message getting to every tribe and tongue. But I now realise that the fulfilment of the Gospel[18] hinges on some from *every* tribe and tongue believing the Gospel.

6. The Gospel is that through Jesus, GOD'S PRESENCE is filling the earth, and I can personally enjoy His presence.

The Gospel story begins with God fully present in the Garden of Eden, even walking around the garden with Adam and Eve,[19] and Revelation ends with God once again fully present amongst His people.[20] But, between these two bookends is the incredible "journey" of God's presence – another major Gospel theme. As a result of man's sin, in the Old Testament God's presence was mostly restricted to *places*

[18] Mt 24:14, Rev 5:9, Rev 7:9.
[19] Gen 3:8
[20] Rev 21:3, Rev 22:4

such as Mount Sinai, the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle, and ultimately to the Temple in Jerusalem. Although some key *people* experienced God's indwelling presence, the norm was that God's presence was found in a **place not a People**.[21]

But amazingly when Jesus came, this got reversed, and God's presence dwelt in **people not places**. Jesus would fill *people* with the Holy Spirit,[22] which is exactly what happened in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost when Peter told the crowd that they were witnessing God pouring out His Spirit on all *people*.[23] It had happened. The construction of the New Temple had begun, a temple of *people*, of living stones.[24] Knowing this great Gospel theme of God's presence now dwelling in people causes me to regard corporate (local church) and individual fullness of the Holy Spirit as essential, not a personal preference or optional extra. *Individually,* and *together*, we are the Temple of God!

OK. We are nearly there. Just three more aspects of the Gospel:

7. The Gospel is Jesus.

Mark begins his gospel saying: "The beginning of ***the Gospel about Jesus Christ.***" Jesus has loomed so large in each of the previous segments of our definition that it should be no surprise to hear that we could summarise Jesus-is-the-Gospel-and-the-Gospel-is-Jesus.[25] Jesus is the facilitator of all these aspects of the Gospel, but the question remains exactly *how* is Jesus the facilitator of all these things?

The answer is found at the **cross** of Jesus. The above-mentioned elements of the Gospel are all needed because of the problem of **sin**

[21] Ps 84:1
[22] Lk 3:16, Jn 7:37-39
[23] Acts 2:16
[24] Eph 2:21-22, 1 Peter 2:5
[25] Mk 1:1, and here's a truckload of other verses all stating that the Gospel is Jesus: Rom 1:1-2, Rom 1:9, Rom 15:20, 1 Cor 4:4-5, 2 Cor 2:12, 2 Cor 10:14, 1 Thes 3:2, 2 Thes 1:8, 2 Cor 4:4.

on earth and in every life. Sin is the bad news for individuals and the world. Sin is why everything needs renewal. Sin is what God's People are saved from. Sin is what prevents our access to God's presence. Every aspect of the Gospel counters sin in some way, but that is only possible because of what happened at the cross. And to be clear on what happened at the cross, we need to back up a bit:

All of creation is in mess because of sin. Through man's sin, God's perfect creation and man's perfect relationship with God was corrupted. Sin, suffering, sickness and death all became elements of life, and the consequence of sin was quite literally, deadly. Universally, all of creation is decaying.[26] Individually, the consequence of sin is death.[27]

The only solution to sin is death. God, being perfectly loving, could not leave us in this desperate state, but being perfectly holy, demanded justice for sin and couldn't just sweep sin under the carpet: the Bible is clear that the punishment for sin is death.[28] Therefore, the members of the Trinity planned to act in great love toward humanity, by the Father sending His only Son to bear His just wrath for sin by dying on the cross.

Jesus died for the sin of the world. At a cosmic level, the Cross changed everything: it triumphed over Satan's domain,[29] signalled the demise of the kingdom of darkness,[30] and made way for "all things" to be reconciled to God.[31]

Jesus died for the sin of individual people. At an individual level, Jesus took upon Himself the sin of all those who would come to trust in Him. That means that if you trust Him as your Lord and Saviour, you can know that Jesus went to the cross and took upon Himself all your sin - past, present and future - and that He died in your place, paying your debt to God and purchasing your salvation.[32]

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[26] Rom 8:21
[27] Rom 6:23
[28] Rom 6:23
[29] Col 2:15
[30] Col 1:13-14
[31] Col 1:19-22
[32] Rom 10:9, Mt 10:32, Lk 12:8

Martin Luther referred to Christ's work on the cross as The Great Exchange. Paul writes, "For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."[33] He became what we are, sinners, so we might become what He is, righteous. He got what we deserve, death, so that we might receive what only he can give, life. The Son of God became a rebel so that rebels might become sons of God. Individuals that trust in Jesus and His work on the cross have their sins forgiven and are declared righteous by God, the ultimate judge, and the perfectly righteous life of Christ is attributed to them.

The Gospel is not good people earning God's blessing, but bad people receiving God's blessing because Jesus earned it for them. God gave Jesus what we deserved so that God can gives us what Jesus deserved. The Gospel is the exceedingly magnificent news that God has sent His Son to live a perfect life on behalf of sinful people who never could, and then die the death they deserved to die. Those who believe and trust in this news live eternally in the presence of God.

No doubt about it: Jesus-is-the-Gospel-and-the-Gospel-is-Jesus because of what happened at the cross. But in terms of starting a connection with Jesus, it is helpful to think of the Gospel as both a **moment** and a **journey**. These are the final two aspects of our definition of the Gospel:

8. The Gospel is a Moment.

The beginning of a friendship with a person can always be traced back to a moment, so not surprisingly, both Scripture and experience teach us that there is a defining moment when we encounter Jesus. To the Colossians Paul points to a day:

> *"All over the world this Gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you* ***since the day you heard it*** *and understood God's grace in all its truth." (Col 1:6)*

[33] 2 Cor 5:21

Paul's moment of personal "Gospel collision" happened on the road to Damascus.[34] He would tell you, "That morning I wasn't a believer, but by midday I was". In that moment of belief we are forgiven all of our sins: past, present and future, and are born again[35] into a new life of being a child of God. Can you point to a moment, a day, or maybe a month within which you know you crossed the line of faith? So, a friendship begins with a **moment**, but it is also a **process**.

9. The Gospel is a Process.

Take another look at the same verse:

> *"All over the world this Gospel is **bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it** and understood God's grace in all its truth." (Col 1:6)*

Do you see it? The Gospel saved them in a moment from sin's penalty but gradually from sin's power. *Since* the moment of initial impact, the Gospel had been hard at work in them, **gradually changing them**, and developing good "fruit" in their lives.

About the rest of this book

OK. Decision time. Having defined the Gospel in nine different ways, I feel I could write nine different books about the Gospel. But for the rest of this book I am going to hone in on definitions 7, 8, and 9, which means showing how **Jesus's** life, death and resurrection can save us in a **moment,** and change us as a **process.** Chapters Two, Three and Four will cover that, and then the remaining two chapters will look at how to advance and defend some aspects of the Gospel. Let's get to it.

[34] Read about that in Acts 9 (also Acts 22 & 26).
[35] A phrase that Jesus used to describe becoming a Christian in Jn 3:3-7. See also 1 Pet 1:23 and James 1:18.

TWO: **SAVED BY THE GOSPEL**

We ended the previous chapter saying that the Gospel **saves** me in an instant and **changes** me gradually thereafter. This chapter deals with how the Gospel saves me in an instant. We could say this happens as I **see** Jesus, **believe** in Jesus, **receive** from Jesus, and am **united** to Jesus.

a. Through seeing Jesus

"The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ…but God made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of Christ." (2 Cor 4:4, 6)

Satan, the "god of this age", blinds people by making them think of Jesus simply as a fictional figure in history, or a moral teacher, or some kind of spiritual guru, *anything* to shroud his true identity as God. God exists in three distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each person is co-existent, co-equal and co-eternal. Together they are God. And within the triune God, Jesus is the Son of God.[36]

But God graciously shines His light into our hearts enabling us to see Jesus for who He is. This "light" might come to us in various ways. Commonly, God helps us see that there must be a Creator behind creation,[37] or He reveals himself through the words of a preacher, or as we read the Bible, or through a friend's actions or words, or through bringing us into a tough time that makes us aware of our need for Him. As John Newton's famous hymn says, the amazing grace of the Gospel begins with "I was blind but now I see".

Then, **seeing** must lead to **believing**.

[36] John 1:1-18 and Colossians 1:15-23 are two great passages about who Jesus is.
[37] Rom 1:19-20

b. Through believing in Jesus

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever ***believes in Him shall not perish*** *but have everlasting life…Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but* ***whoever does not believe stands condemned already*** *because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." (Jn 3:16-18)*

This is huge. You are currently perishing. You are travelling on what AC/DC calls the "Highway to Hell." Without deliberately changing lanes and taking the off-ramp of belief, you are assured a spot in hell. It is that simple. Just keep driving. Just keep breathing.

There were two criminals on the cross on either side of Jesus. One believed in Jesus and was saved. The other didn't and wasn't. The saving work of Christ on the cross is sufficient but not automatic. You must actively choose to believe that Jesus is God. You don't drift across the line of faith, you deliberately cross it saying, "Jesus, now I truly believe that you are Lord, and also my Saviour, saving me from the punishment of my sin. I believe."

Look at these other verses teaching the importance of deliberately choosing to believe in Jesus:

"You refuse *to come to Me for eternal life" (Jn 5:40).*

"I told you that you would die in your sins; ***if you do not believe*** *that I am the One I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." (Jn 8:24)*

And understand that believing means believing *in* Jesus not just *about* Jesus. It means *heart belief* not just mental assent. Believing that Jesus is truly God, that He came to earth to die on the cross to make a way for you to be forgiven and brought into a relationship with Him, inevitably flows into *receiving* something from Him.

c. Through receiving from Jesus

What do you need to receive? Let's find out: *"For **in the Gospel a righteousness from God** is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last… it comes from God through faith in Christ Jesus." (Rom 1:17, 3:22)*

There it is. You need to receive God's gift of righteousness. I guess that raises some fundamental questions:

Q: Why do I need to be made righteous?

Because you are a sinner, twice over. You are guilty on two counts: Firstly, you are guilty from inherited sin. Paul writes, "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners",[38] referring to how Adam's sin brought the DNA of sin into the human race. We are natural born sinners. Have you noticed how kids never need to be taught how to sin?

Secondly, you are guilty from intentional sin. Solomon, the wisest man in the Old Testament, said, "There is no man living who does not sin".[39] Paul concurs saying, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God".[40] Guilty on two counts.

Because you are spiritually dead. Outside of receiving the gift of righteousness from Jesus, the punishment or "wages" that you will receive for your sin is death.[41] Death refers to being spiritually dead in this life towards God, meaning no connection with your Creator, and no righteousness, peace or joy that come from knowing Him. And it means continuing on that same trajectory through the moment of death into eternal living death in hell, totally cut off from God's blessings forever.

[38] Rom 5:19
[39] 1 Kgs 8:46
[40] Rom 3:23
[41] Rom 6:23

Because you are much worse than you thought. Let's cut to the chase. The Bible describes you as:

- A sinful corpse (Eph 2:1)
- An object of God's wrath (Eph 2:3)
- Darkened (Eph 4:18)
- Ignorant (Eph 4:18)
- Worthless (Rom 3:12)
- Deserving of death (Rom 1:32)

If you are thinking "But I don't deserve to be called those awful things" then you don't know how awful you really are. The glorious message of the Gospel is that you are more awful than you ever realised, but God is more kind than you ever knew; you are more wicked than you ever realised, yet more loved by God than you ever could imagine; you are more undeserving than you ever realised, but God is more gracious than you ever knew.

In Mark 2 a paralysed man is brought to Jesus on a stretcher. Jesus' first words to him are, "Son, your sins are forgiven". To be honest, I expected the paralysed man to respond, "Er, thanks man, but you seem to be the only person in earshot who didn't hear what I asked for: not sins forgiven but healing - there's a clue to be found in the fact I can't move anything except my mouth. I've got a more pressing problem here than sin. I need healing!" But Jesus is trying to teach him that his primary need is to be forgiven of his sin. Paralysis can hinder a short life on earth but sin can destroy a life for eternity.

Q: But isn't Christianity about "doing good"?

If you ask the average person what a Christian is, they will likely reply something along the lines of "A Christian is someone who does X, Y or Z, such as going to church and being kind to people". This definition stems from our culture that obsesses about *deserving* and *undeserving*. From a young age we learn that we get what we deserve for what we do, whether it is which class or team we are in at school, or the level of our pay-grade. This causes us to think that God divides the world into *deserving* and *undeserving* based on the

things that we do. And if we do more good things than bad things, or more good things than other people, then God will surely accept us. But this is not how the Gospel works. In God's eyes good things do not cancel out bad things. Furthermore, God is not comparing us to others but to the sinless standard of Himself.[42] The essential problem is that God is holy and even one sin defiles us and makes us an affront to His holiness. A million good deeds could never solve that. Another solution is needed.

Certainly, Christians should do good things. In fact it is one of the marks of being a true child of God.[43] However, the Bible thunders out that we are saved by faith in the free gift of righteousness given to us by God and *not* by works of obedience.[44] Martin Luther said, "We are saved by faith alone but not by faith that remains alone." Good deeds soon begin to accompany the faith that we are saved by, but they do not have anything to do with us getting saved and staying saved. Good deeds are a *response* to God's acceptance of us and not a means of *gaining* that acceptance. They are the *fruit* of our acceptance, not the *root.* They are the *consequence* not the *basis* of our salvation.

The Gospel is not a list of things to do; it is a gift to be received.
The Gospel is not a list of things to do; it is news to be believed.

Q: How could I miss the salvation of God?

Because being accepted by God is not a result of "being good", and being rejected by God is not a result of "being bad", Jesus repeatedly emphasised that there are two ways to miss salvation: **by being good** or **by being bad.** A graphic presentation of this is the Parable of the Two Sons in Luke 15. The Good Boy stayed at home working the farm, the model of good works and good behaviour. By contrast, the Bad Boy hit the road plunging into sex, drugs and rock 'n roll. After coming to his senses he returns and says to his father, "I do not deserve to be your son." The Father accepts him back and throws a

[42] Rom 3:23
[43] Jn 13:35, Jn 15:5, 1 Jn 2:6
[44] Eph 2:8-9

party to celebrate the boy's return. The older brother (the "good boy") resents the Father's unconditional acceptance of the Bad Boy and complains that he is actually the one *deserving* a party.

Remembering that the feast is a biblical metaphor for acceptance into the Kingdom of Heaven, the alarming punch line of the parable is that the lover of prostitutes enters the Kingdom whilst the do-gooder doesn't, and is left outside shivering in his tatty robes of deservedness.

This is shockingly counter-intuitive to those who expect merit to be earned by good behaviour. The Bible repeatedly uses **shock tactics** to wake us out of our misplaced slumber of deservedness. Paul said that our good deeds are like "refuse" meaning "excrement, manure, garbage, kitchen scraps" and Isaiah says that "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags", probably denoting used menstrual cloths.[45] If you rely on good works to get right with God, rather than on God's mercy, you are actually cursed and severed from Christ.[46]

Are you getting it? Religion divides humanity into good and bad. Moralism divides people into deserving and undeserving. The Gospel lumps everyone into one category: **undeserving**. And within this category are those who gratefully receive God's free gift of righteousness and those who don't. Those who resist the reality that they are undeserving sinners never truly "get" their need of God's grace, never reach out in faith, and so, like the older brother, never make it into the Kingdom of Heaven.

[45] Phil 3:8 (Pillar NT Commentary on Philippians)
[46] Gal 3:10, Gal 5:4

Q: What happens when I receive God's gift of righteousness?

In the moment that you believe Jesus is Lord and Saviour and by faith receive God's forgiveness and His gift of righteousness, you get credited with the sinless, perfect life of Jesus. Jesus lived the life that you could never live, and died the death that you thoroughly deserved, so that you could be reconciled to God. Paul writes:

> *"God made Him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Cor 5:20-21)*

Did you see the exchange? As Jesus, the sinless One, took our sin upon Himself on the cross, He became sin. In return, us sinless ones become righteous.

> *"This is how God demonstrates His love for us: while we were still sinners Christ died for us." (Rom 5:8)*

Remember, before a Holy God your sin must be punished with death,[47] and Jesus took the punishment of your sin by dying on the cross in your place.

> *"He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed." (Isa 53:6)*

Because He took your punishment you can know peace with God. You can move from being an "object of wrath" [48] to being a child of God:

> *"Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God." (Jn 1:12)*

But there is no such thing as a **free lunch!** Absolutely right. But here's the thing: whilst salvation is free to you it cost Jesus everything. He paid for lunch. The purchase price for your freedom

[47] Rom 6:23
[48] Eph 2:3

was death, a price that He paid with the currency of His own blood. It is His gift to you. It is free. It is undeserved. It is 100% grace. Grace means unmerited favour. Someone helpfully said that grace stands for **G**od's **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist's **E**xpense.

"It is by grace you have been saved… a gift from God… not by works so that no one may boast." (Eph 2:8-9)

Grace has always been God's way of saving people. In the Old Testament, God's people looked forward in faith to the cross of Christ. God provided a sacrificial system where the faithful Old Testament believer would regularly bring animals and other offerings to God to atone for their sins. However, deep down, the people of God knew that this system was pointing to something more profound: the perfect human Lamb of God would come and die once and for all for their sins.

The community would gather annually for a major sacrifice where, with bated breath, they would wait in silence as the High Priest examined a lamb. Holding it above his head, all eyes would rest on the lamb. He would then shout out, "I find no fault with the lamb" and the people would cheer because the sacrifice was free from blemish, so their sins could be imputed (transferred) to the lamb.

And it is the same for us. We too look at The Lamb, the Lamb of whom Pilate unwittingly echoed the same words that the High Priest did in the Old Testament, "I find no fault with Him".[49] We look to see if He really did rise from the dead, knowing *that* would be proof that God the Father considered Jesus' sacrifice to be acceptable. People in all of history are always, and only, saved through faith in the grace work of Jesus on the cross. Some looked ahead. Some look back. But all those who are saved gaze on The Lamb, grateful that *He* got what *they* deserved and *they* got what *He* deserved.

[49] Lk 23:4, Jn 19:6

Q: Can I be sure I am really forgiven?

Often we look at the horror of our sin and wonder whether the blood that Jesus shed on the cross is really sufficient in the eyes of God to take our sin away. Wonderfully, it is.

One of the most striking Old Testament pictures of the cross was the original **Passover**. When it was time for God to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, God said that in the night He would send a destroyer to kill the inhabitants of any house that did not have a smearing of lamb's blood on their doorframe. Imagine huddling together as a family as you hear the destroyer getting closer and closer as he systematically takes out the firstborn in the houses in your street. You look at the brown smudge of blood above the door and think "That brown smudge? Is that really enough to appease the wrath of God?" And then all is silent… and then you hear the firstborn son in the house on the other side of you taken out. And in amazement and relief you look at the door saying, "It worked! The blood of the lamb was sufficient!" Now look at the blood of *the* Lamb and believe the same. God's fury against sin has *passed over* you because Christ's blood is sufficient to forgive all your sin.

Jesus' last words on the cross were "It is finished". He didn't say "I am finished" but used the word "**Tetelestai**" meaning "paid in full". It was the word that got stamped on a bill that had been paid. The payment of death for your past, present and future sin has been paid in full by Jesus. There is nothing left to pay. You are now stamped "Tetelestai".

I remember hearing the tale of how **Robert the Bruce** once escaped capture by the English troops. With the English knights and their bloodhounds only a mile behind him, Robert the Bruce plunged into a river and waded 100 metres upstream. The hounds reached the river and sniff as they may, they could not pick up his scent. Here's the thing: the red river from Christ's cross has washed your sins away. The hounds of hell are off your tail. Relax. Your scent of your sin is gone. You are righteous and free forever.

As a young man my father John was struggling to believe that God really had forgiven him. One night God gave him a vivid dream. In the dream he sat in an empty classroom at a desk. Jesus stood next to the **blackboard** that was covered with a list of all John's sins. John hung his head in shame. Then Jesus took a piece of chalk and drew a line through each sin. John's head stayed low. Then Jesus took the eraser and wiped every word out. John's head lifted. He knew that he was forgiven and that Jesus' blood had not just crossed out his sin, but erased it completely.[50]

Are you getting it? If you still doubt that Christ's death can make you holy, blameless and free from accusation then try this one for size:

*"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and **free from accusation**." (Col 1:21-22)*

Let's begin to pull the threads together and ask:

Q: What is the choice I need to make?

Paul presents the choice so well: *"Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and **sought to establish their own**, they did not submit to God's righteousness." (Rom 10:3)*

There it is. Either you attempt to establish your own righteousness before God (impossible), or you submit to God's gift of righteousness to you by believing in Jesus and His work on the cross.

Q: Once in, can I ever be thrown out of God's family?

This question is usually asked by people who have not quite got the Gospel, because the Gospel is more about **belief** than **behaviour**, and more about **birthrite** than **behaviour**. We *believe* unto salvation not *behave* unto salvation, and we are *born* into the family of God,

[50] Ps 103:12

not *behave* into the family of God. Very simply, we are *saved by grace, not by works.*[51] This means that doing good or doing bad does not impact your status as a child of God. Remember, your salvation has everything to do with Jesus and nothing to do with you. The only thing that you contribute is the sin that He graciously forgives.

Your sonship is not dependent on how you behave. Think about it: suppose that you "borrow" your dad's car and then crash it, would you stop being his son? It is true that you haven't behaved like a model son, but your status is still that of son. Biological laws eliminate the possibility of you ever losing your status of sonship, as do adoption laws. In Roman and modern day law, a parent cannot un-adopt their adopted child. No matter how you behave, you will always be your dad's son. You will want to say a big "sorry", but you are still his son! And so it is with your Heavenly Father. Ephesians 1:5 says you are **adopted into** God's family and John 3:3 says you are **born into** God's family. Whichever way you look at it you are now 100% part of God's family. And you can never be kicked out of this family, not even when you slide back into sin.

Think about Prince Harry of England. Even though he may have days when he doesn't act in a very princely way, he is still a Prince. Similarly, our status as forgiven, heaven-bound children of the King remains unchanged even when we don't act in a manner appropriate for children of God. Of course, those who have royal blood will, over time, live out this status more and more faithfully, but when they don't, they remain Princes and Princesses.

Wonderfully, Scripture teaches us that we have now died to sin and been united to Christ, which means we can look forward to ever-increasing victory over sin as we live out our lives. While our salvation is secure, we do not conclude, as a result, that we can now sin with reckless abandon, as that would be to completely miss what the Gospel has brought about in us.[52]

[51] Eph 2:8-9
[52] Rom 6:1-14

So, you may rest secure knowing that neither your own sin nor the devil can ever take away your salvation. Your salvation was sealed forever by Christ's death on the cross. Jesus wants you to be sure that you are safe forever. He said:

"I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of My Father's hand. I and the Father are one." (Jn 10:28-30)

Q: How can I receive God's gift of righteousness?

There are many different biblical expressions to describe receiving God's gift of righteousness including:

- Becoming a Christian (Acts 11:26)
- Being born again (Jn 3:3-7)
- Becoming a child of God (Jn 1:12)
- Receiving eternal life (Jn 3:16, Rom 6:23)
- Being saved (Mt 19:25, Mk 16:16, Acts 2:40)
- Believing in Jesus (Jn 3:16)
- Receiving Jesus (Jn 1:12)
- Being forgiven (Acts 2:38)
- Receiving the Gospel (Rom 1:17, Col 1:6)
- Becoming a Christ follower (Mk 1:17)
- Making a confession of faith (Rom 10:9)

Or, you can simply describe becoming a Christian as "**crossing the line of faith**". I like this metaphor because I feel it captures both the "moment" and "process" of the Gospel. You are currently on the wrong side of the line and you need a moment of deliberately stepping over it! But in terms of "process", a person can gradually approach the line of faith, then cross it, then keep walking into deeper faith.

Paul gives us a helpful way to cross the line of faith:

*"If you **confess with your mouth** 'Jesus is Lord' and **believe in your heart** that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." (Rom 10:9)*

It is quite possible that as you have read this chapter you have done just this. Good. Or, you may have crossed the line of faith at some point in the past. Or maybe you haven't yet believed the Gospel. If you haven't, then don't delay. Pray to God, putting into practice what you have read in this chapter. Acknowledge Him as Lord and Saviour. Ask Him to forgive you of your sins. And amazingly, as you do this, you are *united* to Christ. Take a look:

d. Through being united to Jesus

Not only does the Gospel save us through *seeing, believing* and *receiving* from Jesus, but through us being united to Jesus. The Bible teaches that believers are, from the point of meeting Jesus, actually mysteriously united to him, so that the life they lead is no longer merely an independent one, but is "Christ living in them" (Gal 2:20). Regarding this truth, John Murray wrote, "union with Christ is… the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation… It is not simply a phase of the application of redemption. It underlies every aspect of redemption." [53] This concept is in fact, all over the New Testament, once you start looking.

The New Testament uses two expressions to describe this amazing union:

1. We are in Christ [54]
2. Christ is in us [55]

At least three passages combine these two concepts in one verse.[56] This concept is very helpful in linking Jesus – the Gospel – to every aspect of our salvation. The following verses show how every part of salvation is related to being in Christ:

[53] John Murray, Redemption Accomplished and Applied
[54] For example see: 2 Cor 5:17, Gal 3:28, Eph 1:4, Phil 3:9
[55] Gal 2:20, Col 1:27, Rom 8:10, Eph 3:17
[56] Jn 6:56, 15:4 and 1 Jn 4:13

1. We are initially united with Christ in *regeneration* [57]
2. We live out this union *through faith* [58]
3. We are *justified* in union with Christ [59]
4. We are *sanctified* through union with Christ [60]
5. We *persevere* in union with Christ [61]
6. We *die* with Christ [62]
7. We have been and shall be *raised* with Christ [63]
8. We will be *glorified* with Christ [64]

To summarise, being united to Christ means that we share in His death, His resurrection, His ascension and His promised return. All these amazing benefits are ours because we have, gloriously, been united with Him. More than that, we can have great hope for our lives even now, because the very life of God is active in our souls – and the life we now live is Jesus' very life. What an amazing source of comfort, strength and hope!

Before ending the chapter, we need to talk about one of the greatest thrills that you could ever have: **water baptism.**

I had been a believer for several years before I saw the biblical imperative of water baptism. I wish I had seen it sooner and acted on it immediately after crossing the line of faith. I found my baptism to be:

1. A significant **witness** and encouragement to other believers and a provocation to my unbelieving friends.
2. Something that put **courage into me**. Consequently, I started to follow Jesus more boldly and unashamedly.
3. Something that greatly **assisted my understanding of the Gospel** in my life. The physical reality of going under water and

[57] Eph 2:4-5
[58] Gal 2:20
[59] Phil 3:8-9, 2 Cor 5:21
[60] 1 Cor 1:30, Jn 15:4-5
[61] Rom 8:38-39
[62] Rom 6:3
[63] Col 3:1, 1 Cor 15:22
[64] Col 3:4

then bursting out consolidated my grasp of my spiritual reality of once being dead in a watery grave, but now raised with Christ into new life!

The biblical command to be water baptised is everywhere: Jesus was baptised.[65] Jesus told us to be baptised.[66] The disciples baptised people.[67] Peter said we should be baptised.[68] Peter and John expected that all new believers would be baptised.[69] Paul was baptised.[70] Paul often referenced baptism in his theological writings.[71] Clearly water baptism was a huge deal for Paul and his assumption was that all believers had been water baptised. Water baptism is a wonderful rite given to mark our initiation into the worldwide church. We believe that it should follow repentance (i.e. "infant baptism" or "christening" is not a practice we find in the Bible) and should be done by immersion into water.

Is water baptism *necessary* for salvation?

No. We know this because one of the criminals on the cross next to Jesus was accepted into heaven, even though he was not baptised.[72] However, this exceptional case should not make us think that baptism is somehow optional for Christians. Baptism is part of the normal order of salvation and without baptism we are missing out on an important part of God's grace to us. As baptism is a command of Jesus, it *is* necessary if we are to be obedient to Him.

How can I get baptised?

Speak to a leader at your church, invite along all your unbelieving friends and family, and get baptised.

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[65] Mt 3:16
[66] Mt 28:19
[67] Jn 4:1
[68] Acts 2:38
[69] Acts 8:16
[70] Acts 8:16
[71] Rom 6:3, 1 Cor 1:13-17, 1 Cor 10:2, 1 Cor 12:13, 1 Cor 15:29, Gal 3:27
[72] Luke 23:43

THREE: **CHANGED BY THE GOSPEL**

In a moment and over time

The previous chapter was about how believing the Gospel is the defining **moment** of salvation. But the Gospel is also something that we **journey** deeper into for the rest of our lives. The same Gospel-power that saved us in a moment from the eternal penalty of sin is the same power that steadily delivers us from the temporary power of sin.

As incredible as the moment of salvation is, it is a mistake to think that responding to the Gospel is a one-off event. For example, people might ask "how many people responded to the Gospel on Sunday?" The answer is that we hope that everybody did. We hope unbelievers responded by approaching and hopefully crossing the line of faith, and believers responded (not by re-crossing the line of faith; that was a one-off moment that doesn't need to be repeated), by freshly believing and applying the Gospel to a specific and current aspect of their lives. Believing the Gospel on the front end to be saved is just the beginning of a life-long journey into deeper and deeper belief in the Gospel. Once we have initially embraced the Gospel, instead of growing out of it we must grow into it. Look how our experience of the Gospel is both a moment and a process:

The Gospel	
A moment	A process
"*The day you first heard the Gospel*"(Col 1:6)	"*The Gospel is bearing fruit and growing in your lives*" (Col 1:6)
The Door	The Corridor
New Life	New Lifestyle
Saves us	Sanctifies us
Escaping sin's penalty	Escaping sin's power

The Gospel is something that we take our stand on,[73] hold firmly to,[74] become established in,[75] and grow in.[76] Gospel-centred living is clearly an on-going and never-ending process. And, bearing in mind the extraordinary breadth of the Gospel outlined in Chapter 1, it will certainly required not just a lifetime, but all eternity, to fully grasp.

Beware schizophrenia

Most Christians are clear about the Gospel as the means of entering the Christian life, but thereafter are unsure how to grow in the Gospel by steadily applying it to their lives. The result can be schizophrenic Christians who understand that they **got saved** by the Gospel of grace, but thereafter try and **live saved** through their own legalistic efforts. Effort is of course important (as we shall see in Chapter 4), but is in vain if it is not rooted in the life-changing power of the Gospel.

Paul's single message to unbelievers and believers

Paul offered no other answer than the Gospel to both unbelievers and believers. To the unbeliever he said, "The Gospel is the power of God to **save you**." [77] And to the believer he said that the Gospel is the on-going power of God to **change you**, to save you from the lesser things that you need saving from, such as ungodly attitudes and actions. He presented the Gospel as the secret to everything – to generosity with money,[78] to a successful marriage,[79] to overcoming sin,[80] to reigning in life[81] and so on. Very simply, Paul "resolved to know **nothing** except Jesus Christ and Him crucified".[82] Nothing! Paul maintains the Gospel is *all* we need for *all* of life.

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[73] 1 Cor 15:1
[74] 1 Cor 15:2
[75] Rom 16:25
[76] 2 Pet 3:18
[77] Rom 1:16
[78] 2 Cor 8:8-9
[79] Eph 5:22-33
[80] Titus 2:11-14
[81] Rom 5:17
[82] 1 Cor 2:2

The million-dollar question

This of course brings us to the key question: **how does the Gospel actually change me?** In Chapter 1 we spoke a great deal about how the various mega-themes of the Gospel change our worldview and therefore change the way we live, but as you know we are focusing now specifically on the "Great Exchange" aspect of the Gospel. So more accurately the question is, **"how does a revelation of the Great Exchange change me?"** I mean, if I am struggling with unforgiveness, porn, or a failing marriage, surely I need a little bit more to change my behaviour than "Jesus died for me"! On the contrary, the Gospel is the only thing that really can change your behaviour, because, and this is the key bit, it is the only substance in the universe that can successfully infiltrate and change your two sources of behaviour: your **identity** and your **heart**.

a. The Gospel changes my identity

Humans are so designed that **how we think about ourselves largely determines how we behave**. Psychologists tell us that a person who feels insignificant will behave in such and such a way, and so on. So, change your identity (how you think about yourself) and your behaviour will change accordingly.

When we moved to South Africa, although I was a foreigner, the South African authorities issued me with a South African identity book. I received it because my wife, Ashleigh, is a South African citizen. They gave it to me right up front, before I had lived there or contributed in any way to my new nation. I received it through no merit of my own, rather because I was "with her". Because you are with Jesus, the Father gives you a brand new Gospel identity up-front, not based on any of your works, just because you are "with Him". Like Paul, you can now say, "I am what I am by the grace of God".[83]

[83] 1 Cor 15:10

The authorities never said, "PJ, your South African identity is conditional on you being a productive South African citizen." Yet, grateful to be embraced by South Africa, I got straight to work contributing to my new nation, not to **gain or retain** my identity but in **response** to my new identity. I began to live in a way that reflected who I now was; I started eating biltong, drinking beer, supporting the Springboks, making jokes about Australians – you know, all the stuff that makes a South African a South African. Do you see it? My new identity motivated me to begin to live in line with that identity. Receiving my new identity, fully believing it, brought about a change in my behaviour.

This is almost exactly how the Gospel works. When you become a believer you become a member of the worldwide church, which the Bible describes as being married to Jesus.[84] Because you are now married to Jesus you get a brand new identity up-front, that, if you believe and embrace, will catalyse a change of behaviour from the inside out. Change your identity - change your behaviour. Your new identity in the Gospel is **righteous, accepted** and **empowered.** Let's look at these three in turn:

My identity is Righteous

Remember the Great Exchange? "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that **in Him** we might become the **righteousness of God**." [85] There it is. The moment you believe in Jesus you are placed "in Him". We spoke about this union with Christ at the end of the previous chapter - a mammoth truth. Extraordinary, I know, but your identity is now that you are as righteous as Jesus.

Imagine before coming to Christ you literally were a **pig**. Because "pig" was your DNA, you walked, talked, and smelled like a pig. Now when you came to Christ He didn't say to you, "Hello Pig, time to stop behaving like a pig. Stop rolling in the mud of selfishness and stinginess. From now on Pig, you must behave like an eagle and fly on wings of unselfishness and generosity." That would have set you

[84] Eph 5:25, Rev 19:6-8
[85] 2 Cor 5:21

an impossible task because as one well knows, pigs can't fly. Instead, Jesus says: "Hello Pig. I am now changing your DNA from pig to eagle. Eagle is your new identity. Now, my eagle friend, go fly."

You say, "Nice story PJ, but deep down I know I'm still pig so it won't be long before I am once again rolling in the mud of sinful behaviour." Well mate, that's the problem, isn't it? You haven't embraced your new Gospel identity. To change the metaphor, you think of yourself like a **Christmas tree**. You are grateful that the Gospel has sprinkled a few shiny lights on you, but you know that underneath you haven't really changed much at all - still just a drab Christmas tree, still just the same old sinner.

Total trash. You are no longer a sinner who sometimes behaves righteously; you are now a righteous one who sometimes behaves sinfully. You are not an **onion** that looks okay on the outside but once you peel off the layers you discover that it is rotten on the inside. You are now the reverse of that: although your outer "behavioural" layer might sometimes look rotten, cut yourself open and you will find you are righteous to the core. You must get this.

Paul told the new Christians in Rome: "Count yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, do not let sin reign in your body…" (Rom 6:11-12) "Count" is an accounting term meaning to "put in the right column". Just as you shouldn't put a capital expenditure item in the salary column, don't place yourself in the sinner column. *Ac-count* yourself in the righteous column.

And note Paul's order is **identity then behaviour**. Only once he's established your righteous identity does he call for righteous behaviour. When sin comes knocking you now respond, "If I was still in the sin column I would join in, but I am now in the righteous column so I won't." Tempted to roll in the mud? Remember which column you are now in - eagles don't do mud. This is not the power of positive thinking; you are not trying to think yourself into a fictional state of righteousness, rather you are lining your mind up with your factual state of righteousness that is yours in the Gospel. The fact of

the matter is that "anyone who is in Christ is **a new creation**; the old has gone and the new has come".[86]

You are not a pig who has strapped on some eagle's wings. You are now an eagle. When you came to Jesus you didn't turn over a new leaf. You became a whole new tree. You were born again into a whole new species, part of the righteous race of God. C.S. Lewis says that no matter how hard a grass field tries, it cannot produce wheat. The only way to get wheat is to plough it up and re-sow it with wheat. The message of the glorious Gospel is that you have been ploughed up and re-sown, or to quote Jesus, "re-born".[87] You are now wheat, not grass; an eagle, not a pig. And, as such, you are fully empowered to behave differently.

My identity is Accepted

To be accepted by a holy God, you need to be righteous. And righteous you now are. That righteousness is a free gift from God to you. But beware: religion[88] and moralism will try to lie to you that acceptance is not actually free, and that you need to *obey to be accepted*. However, the truth of the Gospel is in fact, *"Because you are accepted, obey."*

This order of accepted first, and obey second, is everywhere in the Bible. Jesus says to the woman caught in adultery,

"I do not condemn you. Now go and leave your life of sin."[89]

Note that He first establishes her identity as accepted one, and only *then* calls her to behave like an accepted one. Paul uses the same Gospel tactics on the Romans, urging them to live holy *because* they had received God's merciful grace, not in order to gain it.[90] He does the same to the Ephesians, taking four chapters to unpack their new

[86] 2 Cor 5:17
[87] Jn 3:3
[88] Technically I mean false religion, as "religion" is sometimes used positively in the Bible, as in James 1:27. But "religion" today usually denotes some kind of striving for acceptance with God through works.
[89] Jn 8:11
[90] Rom 12:1

Gospel identity, and only then saying, "Therefore…live like this." The same is true in Colossians 3 where identity precedes instruction about behaviour. It is even true in the Old Testament with redemption from Egypt (a picture of sin and death) happening long before the giving of the Ten Commandments. The consistent message of the Bible is that **we *believe* unto salvation, not *behave* unto salvation.** Behaviour follows belief. Obedience follows acceptance.

My favourite demonstration of identity preceding behaviour is in 1 Corinthians 6, where Paul forbids sexual immorality saying,

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? You were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body."[91]

His argument is not that if they avoid sexual immorality they will *become* temples of the Holy Spirit, rather *because* they are temples of the Holy Spirit they should avoid sexual immorality. Behaviour follows belief in our new identity.

And then Paul adds that we were "bought at a price". You may know the story of a young boy who spent hours making a model boat. One day it was blown out to sea and he thought he had lost it. A week later he spotted it in the window of a second hand shop. The shopkeeper didn't believe his story and told him he would have to buy it, although he consented to reserve it for him for one month. After a month of gruelling odd jobs the boy returned and purchased the boat. As he walked out of the shop he whispered to his precious boat. "You are mine twice over. I made you and I bought you." These are the words that Jesus whispers in your ear. "Mine twice over. I made you and I bought you." Your Creator not only made you, but purchased you back at a huge cost, at the cost of His own life.

My eldest son is now regularly at parties at the weekend. Before he goes out, rather than giving him a list of rules, I give him a hug and whisper in his ear, "**You are my son. I trust you. Have a great time."** Note the order: I am affirming his identity as my son up front.

[91] 1 Cor 6:19-20

I am communicating my acceptance of him and my unconditional love for him, because I know that there is no greater motivation to behave well at a party than the inner, upfront assurance of acceptance. This is what God whispers in your ear every morning to motivate you for holy living.

From the moment they could understand words I taught my boys the mantra: "**I love you when you are good. I love you when you are naughty. I love you all time**." They could all say it by the age of three and still know it to this day. This of course doesn't mean that commands and consequences for misbehaviour are wrong, rather that stressing identity and acceptance is primary. You might feel that it is important to smuggle in a bit of fear to keep the standards up. But you would be wrong to think that. God's way is to brand us, upfront, with unconditional acceptance as the primary motivation to live godly lives. Then, on this unshakeable foundation of acceptance, come helpful commands and exhortations to behave well; but they are all within the security of God's unconditional acceptance.

My identity is Empowered

There is a longer section in Chapter 4 about receiving the power of the Holy Spirit, but I want to log here the reality that God is deeply and powerfully at work within us to help us live changed lives. Look at these verses:

"I labour, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me." (Col 1:29)

"Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose." (Phil 2:12)

Those who live in cold climates know that you cannot de-ice a car's windscreen by throwing warm water on it from the outside, because it immediately freezes over again. The trick is to turn on the car heater, which gradually de-ices the windscreen from the inside out.

This is how God works in us, from the inside out, steadily unfreezing us from the ice of sin. Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes:

"This verse (Phil 2:12) is perhaps one of the most perfect summaries of the Christian life to be found anywhere…God doesn't merely present certain things to you from the outside. God is doing something right within you, right within our nature. He energises us. He works in us. It is God who energises our very desires, hopes and aspirations. God is at work in us to will and to do."

The Gospel is not about God leaving us to sort ourselves out. The Gospel is that God comes *within* us to change us. He doesn't tell us to stoically crack on without Him, or pull ourselves up by our shoelaces. Rather, He empowers us from within.

OK. So the Gospel gives us a radical new identity as righteous, accepted and empowered ones. If believed and embraced, this new identity will cause new behaviour, because a changed identity leads to changed behaviour. But having a changed identity isn't enough. God said that, through the Gospel, He would also change the other source of our behaviour: our hearts…[92]

b. The Gospel changes my heart

Proverbs 4:23: *"Above all else, guard your heart, for* ***everything you do flows from it****."* There it is. The heart is our source of behaviour.[93] If we want to see lasting change in the way we think, speak and act then our hearts need to be changed. Change the heart, change the behaviour. The most common biblical metaphors for disobedience are:

- A wayward heart[94]
- A hard heart[95]
- Idolatry of the heart[96]

[92] Ezek 11:19, 36:26
[93] 1 Sam 6:6, 1 Sam 7:2-4, 1 Kings 11:2, Prov 4:23, Ezek 11:19, Mt 12:34, Mt 23:25-27, Lk 6:45, Acts 5:3, Acts 8:21, 1 Thes 1:9, 1 Jn 5:21
[94] 1 Sam 7:2-4, Is 29:13, Ezek 11:19, Mt 15:8, Acts 8:21
[95] 1 Sam 6:6, 2 Chron 36:13, Ps 95:8, Prov 28:14, Mt 13:15, Eph 4:18, Heb 4:7

Or, to use more contemporary language:

- The heart always pursues happiness
- The heart resists rules but receives the Gospel
- The heart worships what it believes will satisfy it the most

The Gospel is tailor-made to fully win over any wayward, hard or idolatrous heart. Let me show you:

The heart always pursues happiness

The heart operates according the **"the pursuit of happiness"** principle, which Pascal believed to be the driving force for mankind:

"All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both, attended with different views. The will never takes the least step but to this object. This is the motive of every action of every man." [97]

For example, one day you eat cake because you believe that the experience will bring you more happiness than being thin. A month later you pass on the cake because you now believe being thin will make you happier than the experience of eating the cake. In terms of sin, if the heart thinks that sinning will result ultimately in more happiness than not sinning, then it will pull towards sin. Conversely, if it thinks that not sinning will make it ultimately happier than sinning, it will pull away from sin.

Now, this is great news because if we keep the Gospel in front of our heart, it will choose the Gospel over sin every time. **Our problem is not that we pursue happiness, but that we set our sights too low**, on things that can never bring lasting happiness, instead of on the Gospel that can. C.S. Lewis said,

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[96] Ezek 14:2, 1 Thes 1:9, 1 Jn 5:21
[97] Pascal, B. Pensées. Morality and Doctrine. 1660. p. 425.

"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."[98]

In the 5th century, a North African man called Augustine discovered this for himself. In his own words his whole existence could be described as "in pursuit of happiness", which was essentially code for pursuit of wine, women and song. And then he encountered the Gospel. But once he became a believer – and here is where he was revolutionary – he continued his belief that the **pursuit of happiness should remain the driving force of his life, even as a Christ-follower**. He reasoned that because Christ is the only source of deep and lasting happiness, true pursuit of happiness would always end up with Christ. Here is how he described his conversion:

"At the end of all those years of rebellion…How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of those fruitless joys which I had once feared to lose. You drove them from me and took their place, You who are the true, Sovereign Joy."[99]

"You **drove** them from me and took their place" is a far cry from the experience of many Christians who say, "I tried and tried to stop sinning but I could never quite do it." Augustine is claiming that the Gospel did the heavy lifting for him, that the Gospel drove sin out of him. In the eighteenth century Thomas Chalmers preferred the word **displaced**. He said:

"It is seldom that any of our sins can be made to disappear by mental determination or natural extinction. But, what cannot be destroyed may be displaced. One taste may be made to give way to another, and to lose its power entirely as the reigning affection. The heart is so constituted that the only way to dispose of an old affection is by the

[98] C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory Harper Collins (2001), p25 (transcribed from a sermon preached by C.S. Lewis on 8th June 1942, Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford)
[99] Confessions, by Augustine of Hippo, 397-8 AD

expulsive power *of a new affection. It is only by receiving over and over the spirit of adoption that the heart, brought under the mastery of this one great and predominant affection, can be delivered from the tyranny of former desires. Thus, the more received is the doctrine of grace, the more it shall lead to godliness. So then, try every legitimate method of opening your hearts to His extravagant grace".*[100]

There it is. **Gospel in, sin out.** Chapter 4 will give us some "legitimate methods" of keeping our hearts open to the extravagant Gospel of Grace, but let's stay focused on the heart for now. Augustine concludes:

"He is happy who possesses God. What sure rest is there apart from You? Thus, the soul commits adultery when it turns from You and seeks these things that it cannot find except in You. These inferior pleasures are not equal to You, my God, Who has made them all. Oh Lord, You made us for Yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

Here is a man totally convinced that ultimate happiness and rest can be found in nothing other than in Jesus, the Gospel.

The heart resists rules but receives the Gospel

Giving the heart a *what* without a compelling *why* doesn't work. Rules can bend the heart towards obedience for a period, but it soon snaps back to its original disobedient shape. But, although the heart often resists rules, it receives the Gospel.[101] The flame-thrower of the Gospel is able to melt and remould the heart into a brand new obedient shape. Let's look at some case studies of how hard hearts get softened and reshaped by the Gospel:

[100] This is a paraphrase of a section of Thomas Chalmers' 1830 work *The Expulsive Power of a New Affection.*

[101] This is not to say that the Bible doesn't use other motivators for obedience. At various points, the Bible motivates obedience by appealing to rewards, by threatening discipline, by appealing to us to imitate God, and by insisting that great joy lies on the other side of obedience. That said, the Gospel is the motivator "par excellence" and the one that should undergird all the other motivators.

The Gospel and the stingy heart: Watch how Paul motivates the Corinthians to give away money: "Excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you…For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich." [102]

Note he says, "I am not commanding you" because he knows that rules are not able to move the heart like the Gospel is. Rather, he brings the heat of the Gospel to bear saying, "You want to become lastingly generous? Then remember how The Rich One was stripped into ultimate poverty, shredded on the cross, so that you might become ultimately rich. Let the generosity of the Gospel melt your heart into a generous shape."

The Gospel and the unforgiving heart: In Matthew 18:21-35 Jesus tells the story of a king who forgives his servant a massive debt. The servant in turn does not forgive another person who owes him a debt that is small in comparison, so the king has him thrown in prison. Jesus' point is that in the Gospel we have abundant motivation to forgive others, because the Gospel is that we have been forgiven much – scandalously much - by our Heavenly King. Jesus is targeting the heart with the Gospel saying, "Are you struggling to forgive that person? Then think again on the huge debt of death that you have been let off through the death of Jesus on the cross. Think on that until your heart is melted towards those that you need to forgive."

The Gospel and the racist heart: When Paul confronted Peter of his racism in Galatians 2, he didn't say "Peter, didn't you get the memo about Christians not being racist?" Rather he said, "Peter, you are not acting in line with the Gospel." Paul knew that the only lasting way out of racism was for Peter to marinade again in the glorious Gospel of grace. Paul was reminding Peter of the extraordinary non-racism of God in the Gospel – how Jesus of the Sinless Race reached out and embraced Peter of the Sinful Race. What heart can remain racist in the face of such a reminder of God's non-racism towards us?

[102] 2 Cor 8:7-9

The Gospel and husbands: In Ephesians 5, Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives "as Christ loved the Church". He knows that to simply say "love your wife or else she will be miserable" is not a particularly powerful motivation, because behavioural compliance to rules without heart-change will tend to be superficial and fleeting. So, he softens their hearts by reminding them of how much God loves them, and then simply says, "So now love your wives as Christ, your Great Husband, has loved you."

Are you getting it? Receiving the Gospel must not be a one-off event because overcoming a hard heart is not a one-off event. A heart has the ability to harden in a different area before you know it, so we need to cultivate a lifestyle of constantly being softened by the Gospel (more about that in Chapter 4).

This is why I encourage preachers to spend most of their preaching time on the "why," freshly painting heart-melting Gospel portraits, and the balance on the "what." The "what" concerns instruction on do's and don'ts, on effort and self-control which are all vital implications of the Gospel package, but which gain no lasting traction unless on the foundation of the glorious "why" of the Gospel. Simply, the heart does not receive commandments isolated from the Gospel.
Having seen how the Gospel is the remedy for a wayward heart and a hard heart, we turn now to how the Gospel deals with an idolatrous heart.

The heart worships what it believes will satisfy it the most

John said to a group of Christians **"Beloved children, keep yourselves from idols"**.[103] Why did he tell a bunch of Christians to watch out from committing idolatry? Surely we as Christians today don't need to guard ourselves from idolatry, do we?

Psychologists agree that our deepest needs include a sense of identity, purpose, and significance. Simply, we long to be satisfied. To this end we pursue (worship or idolise) things we believe will satisfy

[103] 1 Jn 5:21

our need for these most basic cravings. Some people worship **money**, believing that money can be their "saviour" by providing them with a sense of freedom and security. Others worship a **relationship** that they are in, believing that the relationship, or that person, can be their "saviour" by making them feel secure, satisfied and good about themselves. For others it can be **sporting achievement**. In Chariots of Fire, 100m runner Harold Abrams said, "I have 10 lonely seconds to justify my existence." He thought that sporting success would satisfy his thirst for meaning, value, and identity.

David Powlison sums it like this:

"We rarely say, 'I am going to set my heart on this thing and let it completely control my life,' but that is exactly what happens. The person you met and mildly enjoyed becomes the person you cannot live without. The work you undertook to support your family becomes the source of identity and achievement you can't give up. The house you built for the shelter and comfort of your family becomes a temple for the worship of possessions. A rightful attention to your own needs morphs into a self-absorbed existence." [104]
All of this happens because our hearts love to worship, actively pursuing that which we believe will satisfy us most deeply.

Out of all the potential objects of worship out there, only Jesus, the Gospel, can ultimately satisfy you. Every other idol will tell you, "Give yourself to me, work for that promotion, that salary raise, get that new car, that new girlfriend, that make-over and then you will be satisfied." But strangely, when you achieve that goal, after a short-lived rush of contentment, you are left feeling empty and dissatisfied. And so the search begins for a new "saviour", often a bigger, better version of the previous one, such as another bigger salary raise, promotion or whatever. It is time to stop searching. Jesus said:

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me will never go hungry and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty." [105]

[104] Paul Tripp, *Instruments in a Redeemer's Hands*, 2002, P&R Publishing, p73
[105] Jn 6:35

Uniquely, Jesus claims to satisfy completely in a way that no idol can. So coming full circle, it makes perfect sense for John to urge Christians to keep themselves from idols.[106] In fact, idolatry is more than just wrong priorities, it is **the driving force behind every sin.** The first two of the Ten Commandments[107] are to do with idolatry, and then the remaining eight are various outworkings of what can happen when we break the first two. To put it bluntly, because idolatry is placing anything, even a good thing, above God, you can only break commandments three through ten once you have broken the first two. Lets look at a case study to illustrate how idolatry is always behind a behavioural sin, and how the Gospel is the remedy for our idolatrous hearts:

Case Study: Lying on your tax return

For example, imagine you realise that you will be $20,000 short in the year ahead, so you lie on your tax return and keep $20,000 that should have gone to the tax man. Your surface sin of lying only happened because of the "sin beneath the sin," which is always some kind of idolatry. You might respond by thinking, "Nonsense, I wasn't worshipping an idol, I was just lying." Actually, you were. When you lied you certainly were not worshipping God, because you were not only dishonest, but also disobeyed His instruction to pay your taxes.[108] What were you worshipping? Money.[109] You placed "keeping more money" ahead of "keeping God's will." Why did you do that? Paul explains:

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped created things rather than the creator."[110]

You chose a **created thing**, money, over your **creator**, God. Why? Because you believed **a lie** instead **the truth** of God. You believed the lie that God would not see you through being $20,000 short. The truth is that God would of course provide for you over the year

[106] 1 Jn 5:21
[107] Ex 20
[108] Rom 13:1; Mt 22:17-22
[109] Or possibly the sense of security that is gained from having lots of money.
[110] Rom 1:25

ahead, despite your $20,000 shortfall, but you disbelieved that Gospel truth. OK, so we have now got three layers:

Behavioural Sin
↑
Idolatry
↑
Disbelief in the Gospel

The behavioural sin (lying) was driven by idolatry (worship of money), which was driven by a disbelief in the Gospel (failing to believe that I have been adopted as God's child and that He would provide for me). Therefore, the way not to lie on your tax return is to believe the Gospel. You may then respond that you do believe the Gospel because you believe God Himself bled and died for you, saving you from sin, death and a Christless eternity. Well, you might technically believe that, but, as you filled in your tax return, your actions declared that you do not believe God will somehow see you through your $20,000 deficit in the year ahead. Are you listening to yourself? It sounds suspiciously like you don't really believe the Gospel. You need to absorb Romans 8:32:

"He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not also graciously give us all things?"

You think that God, who gave His own Son to get you out of your immeasurable deficit of eternal death, will now not also graciously see you good on your comparatively tiny deficit of $20,000, either by giving you the extra cash, or helping you trim your budget, or taking you through a needed trial? Believe the Gospel. Believe it not just as a one-off event that saved you from hell, but as the same Gospel truth that will save you from lying. I am now going to apply this three-layered template to various behavioural sins or struggles to show how the solution to behavioural change is always to believe the Gospel.

Sin/struggle	**Fear of death**
Idolatry	Probably worship of earthly life. Maybe fear of the unknown. Maybe fearing God will not comfort those you leave behind.
Gospel disbelief	I don't believe God's word that heaven will be better than life on earth. I don't believe that God will carry me through death. I don't believe He will comfort those I leave behind.
What part of the Gospel do I need to believe?	Why would God, who died for you, now start lying about the quality of heaven? Why would Jesus, who voluntarily came to you when you were completely abandoned and alone in your sin, suddenly desert you at the point of death? Would Jesus, who died on the cross so that one day all pain might cease, not be faithful to comfort your loved ones?

Do you see how this works? If you truly believe the incredible Gospel truth that God gave His own for you (the first half of Rom 8:32), then it is but a small, logical step to believe the second half of the verse: "will He not also graciously give you all things?" What more could God do to prove His commitment to you than dying for you? Believe the Gospel. Here are some "case studies":

Sin/struggle	**Racism**
Idolatry	Worship of self or worship of my race. I believe that I (or my race) is better than others.
Gospel disbelief	I do not really believe that Jesus died for people of "every tribe and tongue" and finds all kinds of people, irrespective of their race, valuable and worth dying for. Somehow, I have come to the view that Jesus favours my race over others.
What part of the Gospel do I need to believe?	I need to believe that Jesus from the Sinless Race accepted me from the Sinful Race, just as I am, and I am so glad God was not a racist towards me. Freely I have received so freely I must give. I also need to believe that my sin and God's grace are the great levellers and therefore my heritage and race do not make me superior to those of other races.

Sin/struggle	**Adultery**
Idolatry	It could be worship of sex/pleasure. Or it could be revenge or unforgiveness against my spouse.
Gospel disbelief	I believe an affair will make me feel truly alive and satisfied. Sex is my functional saviour. Or, I don't believe that God has forgiven me much in the Gospel. If I did, I would forgive my spouse rather than take revenge on him/her.
What part of the Gospel do I need to believe?	That Jesus is sufficient to satisfy me without the thrill of an affair. Or, because He cared enough to rescue me from hell, at such cost, it is a small thing to believe that He is willing and able, to rescue my marriage. Or, because I have been forgiven so much by God, the appropriate response is for me to forgive my spouse rather than take revenge.

Sin/struggle	**Over conscious about my appearance**
Idolatry	Worship of beauty.
Gospel disbelief	In this area there is actually no difference between me and someone who doesn't have the Gospel, as both of us feel best about ourselves when we are looking good. I do not believe that the reality to me of Jesus' life, death and resurrection for me is enough to make me feel good about myself. Jesus + Looking Good satisfies me.
What part of the Gospel do I need to believe?	The solution is not to get a make-over, but rather to believe the Gospel truth that I am truly accepted by, and truly beautiful to, the King of Kings, no matter how I look. The purpose of life is not 'looking good' but knowing Him. Beauty is a good thing, but it must never become an ultimate thing, which is what happens when we get our sense of worth from human beauty over the beauty of being accepted by God. That is our higher affection. Once we "gaze upon the beauty of the Lord" (Ps 27:4), we'll stop caring too much about our own appearance.

Sin/struggle	**Unforgiveness**
Idolatry	The different reasons people have for not forgiving all boil down to worship of self (i.e. in light of the gospel they incorrectly feel superior to those that have wronged them).
Gospel disbelief	I don't believe the Gospel truth that I am as bad a person as them. Or, I don't believe that I have really been forgiven hugely by God, because if I did I would be up for forgiving them.
What part of the Gospel do I need to believe?	I need to believe the part of the Gospel that tells me that I have been forgiven a massive amount by God. And now, as Max Lucado says: "The grace-given give grace."

Sin/struggle	**Perfectionism**
Idolatry	It could either be striving to fulfil the excessive standards of others, or it could be looking to external order and neatness to give you inner peace.
Gospel disbelief	I don't really believe that God accepts me as I am, because if I did I would not be so concerned about meeting the excessive expectations of others. Or, I don't believe that Jesus, despite bringing me eternal security, can bring me inner security, so I look for order in created things to give me that feeling.
What part of the Gospel do I need to believe?	Believer that God accepts me as I am, whether I do things perfectly, well or badly. Settle that His opinion of me and my standard of work is the only one that really matters. It is appropriate to work hard and try to get things right, but when I don't do things perfectly, I must remember that such behaviour does not affect my perfect status in His eyes. My relationship with Him is far too valuable to sacrifice in order to chase after perfectionism or getting my own way. Or, I need to believe, and pursue, Jesus as the only true source of my peace and satisfaction of my heart's longing. It can also help me to remember that Jesus came to serve others, which often involved not getting His own way. If He didn't need always to get His own way, then neither do I.

Sin/struggle	**Workaholic**
Idolatry	Worship of approval of others, or money.
Gospel disbelief	I might say, "Jesus is enough for me", but deep down I actually need a successful career to feel properly saved, you know, feel good about myself. Success is my functional saviour. Or, I might say that "Jesus is my saviour", but only a bank full of money really makes me feel safe.
What part of the Gospel do I need to believe?	Climbing the ladder will never satisfy, because there is always another rung. It is like drinking salt water. It never satisfies. I choose to believe the Gospel truth that Jesus' approval of me, which is perfect and complete, is sufficient for me to have a solid identity and sense of success. Stewarding the money God gives us is important but it can never replace God and become our security. The Gospel says we have become adopted children of a very wealthy Father who can not only provide for us in this life, but also the next.

Sin/struggle	**Gluttony**
Idolatry	Worship of comfort and pleasure. Food is the means to this end.
Gospel disbelief	I believe that when I am sad food will help me feel better. I believe that when I am happy food will help me celebrate. I believe that when I have done well I can reward myself with food. My god is my stomach (Phil 3:19). Food is my functional saviour.[111]
What part of the Gospel do I need to believe?	That Jesus can satisfy my every craving. That beyond the initial "rush", food cannot satisfy me. In fact, it will make me feel worse about myself, not better. In contrast, Jesus promises to be my comfort. The Gospel frees me from looking for this in created things and allows me to find it in my Creator.

[111] Mark Driscoll Luke Part 75, 2011 http://www.marshillchurch.org/media/luke/jesus-on-money-idolatry-and-comedy

Sin/struggle	**Always needing a man (or woman)**
Idolatry	Worship of acceptance by men (or women)
Gospel disbelief	I might say, "Jesus is enough for me", but deep down I actually believe I need Jesus + a boyfriend to feel good about myself. The approval of man is my functional saviour.
What part of the Gospel do I need to believe?	I choose to believe the Gospel truth that Jesus: (a) forfeited romantic relationships for me, and (b) is my husband and brother and can completely satisfy me without the approval of another man. When tempted to go over and ask for male affirmation, I am going to reflect on this and ask Jesus to fulfil my longing.

I hope these few examples have given you some tools to help pastor yourself, and help you preach the Gospel to yourself, daily. For any sin or struggle, dig around until you find the disbelief in the Gospel, and then choose to actively believe and apply the Gospel to that sin or struggle. Like Paul, **resolve to know nothing** except the Gospel, to grow increasingly **into it not out of it**, allowing the **Gospel fire** to daily melt your heart to obedience. To quote Luther, we need to "beat" this Gospel into our heads and hearts.

FOUR: **GROWING IN THE GOSPEL**

"Growing in the Gospel" is a broad term, and it technically covers much of what we have looked at so far. Chapter Two was about where our growth in the Gospel begins, and Chapter Three was about being steadily changed by the Gospel thereafter, which certainly falls within the category of growing in the Gospel. So, you might ask, what kind of "growing in the Gospel" is Chapter Four going to be about?

Remember Thomas Chalmers' belief in the expulsive power of the Gospel – the whole "Gospel-in-sin-out" principle? Because he believed that the more we receive the Gospel, the more we will grow as Christians, he called for us to find conduits through which we can keep receiving the Gospel. This chapter is mostly about these conduits. We are going to look at five of them - five primary ways that we can remain **positioned** to continuously *receive* and therefore *grow* in the Gospel.

Once we have done that, we will look at some more **motivations** to keep growing in the Gospel, and then close out with a word about **fighting** against two particular things that try to stop us *growing* in the Gospel. You got it? **Positioned** to grow. **Motivated** to grow. **Fighting** to grow. Let's get to it.

a. **Positioned to grow in the Gospel**

The five main ways to stay positioned to keep enjoying and growing in the Gospel, are **Bible reading, prayer, worship,** receiving from the **Holy Spirit** and the engaging with the **local church**. The phrase "spiritual disciplines" is sometimes used to describe these kinds of activities (except of course for the Holy Spirit who as the third member of the Trinity couldn't ever be called a spiritual discipline, although cultivating a lifestyle of Spirit-dependency is a spiritual discipline).

Whilst they are certainly spiritual and do require discipline, it is a rather severe phrase not exactly capturing the thrill of how these pursuits are a "means of grace", or channels through which we can continuously receive the life-changing power of the Jesus, our Great Gospel. Let's look at them in turn:

Growing through Bible Reading

The centrality of the Bible to Christianity cannot be overstated. Jesus is Himself described as "the Word",[112] and the main way that He reveals Himself to us is through His Word.[113] We get saved through hearing God's Word[114] and grow through God's Word.[115] John Stott rightly concludes, "Christianity is, in its very essence, a religion of the Word of God". Hardly surprisingly then, reading the Bible is essential to growing in the Gospel.

When should we read the Bible? I suggest shooting for a daily time that works best for you. Many Christians follow the example of King David[116] and Jesus[117] and meet with God right at the start of the day. Others use their lunch hour at work, and still others prefer last thing at night. Whatever time of day you choose, try to use the same time and place each day so it becomes a part of your routine. In the busy lives that we lead, we need to be ruthless in setting quality time aside for our important relationships and no relationship is more important than our one with Jesus.

Where should we read the Bible? Mark 1:35 says that Jesus chose a "solitary place" to spend time alone with His heavenly Father. Try to find a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.

How should I read the Bible? I suggest starting out by reading five to fifteen verses. You can either read steadily through a book in the Bible (maybe start with John's gospel), or you can use daily Bible

[112] Jn 1:1-2, 14
[113] 1 Sam 3:21
[114] Rom 10:14
[115] Mt 13:23
[116] Ps 5:3
[117] Mk 1:35

reading notes available online,[118] or at Christian bookshops. These give you a passage to read each day, and say some things to help you understand and apply the passage.

I usually start by praying a short prayer asking God to speak to me through what I read, to open my eyes to His truth[119] and to incline my heart to Him.[120] I then read the Bible passage, and do "look up, look in, look out." I ask myself:

- **Look up:** What do I learn about God and the Gospel?
- **Look in:** How does this impact my life?
- **Look out:** How can I live out and pass on these truths to others?

After reading, it is good to spend some time praying about what you have read. There is no formula to prayer, but I often again use "look up, look in, look out":

- **Look up:** I thank God for who He is and what I have learned.
- **Look in:** I pray for strength to apply what I have learned.
- **Look out:** I pray for people around me, especially for unsaved friends to become Christians.

In fact, prayer is so important that it deserves its own section:

Growing through prayer

Communication is key to growing any relationship, and prayer is the main way we communicate to God. Here are some tips on talking to God.

Come just as you are. Talk normally. Don't start saying "thou" instead of "you." Be like Moses who spoke to God "as a man speaks to his friend." [121] God tells us to watch children if we want to know how to live in his Kingdom.[122] Have you noticed how kids don't wait to

[118] I recommend Ligonier Ministries' *TableTalk* or D.A. Carson's *For the Love of God.*
[119] Ps 119:36
[120] Ps 119:18
[121] Ex 33:11
[122] Mt 18:2-4, 19:13-14

get everything "together" before coming to their parents with their hopes, fears, and dreams? And, of course good parents welcome them just as they are. Similarly, God welcomes us to come to His throne of grace,[123] not law. You are accepted just as you are. Come with articulate prayers as well as confused, jumbled prayers. God understands you. He gets you. He loves you.

Come at planned and spontaneous times. Plan a daily time slot for a decent pray, which may well be the same time that you read your Bible. Then, punctuate these planned times with spontaneous prayers. I teach my sons that they can fire off quick "bullet" prayers anytime - prayers of thanks, worship or asking for help in what they are doing at that moment. Smith Wigglesworth said, "I seldom pray for more than thirty minutes, but I never go thirty minutes without praying."

Come with all kinds of prayers and requests. God is interested in everything in your life – things big and small, practical and spiritual. No request is too mundane and no request can be too bold. John Newton wrote, "Thou art coming to a King. Large petitions with thee bring. For His grace and power are such. None can ever ask too much."

Come for refreshing. I have found prayer to be a privilege, not a chore. It is a very literal means of refreshing. Spurgeon captures this so well:

"If God's mercies came to us unasked, they would not be half as useful as they are now when they have to be sought for. Now we get a double blessing – the blessing in the obtaining and the blessing in the seeking. To pray is to bathe in a cool swirling stream to escape the summer sun. To pray is to mount on eagle's wings above the clouds and get into clear heaven where God dwells. To pray is to enter the treasure-house of God. To pray is to grasp heaven in one's arms, to embrace deity with one's soul, and to feel one's body made a temple of the Holy Spirit. To pray is to cast our burdens, to tear

[123] Heb 4:16

away our rags, to be filled with spiritual vigour, to reach the highest point of Christian health."[124]

Come knowing that your prayers count. Not only are your prayers delightful to God,[125] they are powerful and effective.[126] William Cowper, a hero of the Faith in the eighteenth century, said, "Satan trembles when he sees, the weakest saint upon his knees."

Come knowing that God will always give you the best answer. Often we ask for things without having all the available facts. Fortunately, God not only knows everything, and is in charge of everything, but also promises to work all things for our ultimate good.[127] This means that He sometimes, graciously, does not answer our prayer, or answers it in a different way. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "I thank God that He is not prepared to do everything that I ask Him. I am profoundly grateful that He did not grant me certain things for which I asked, and that He shut certain doors in my face."

Growing through worship

We know from the previous chapter that worshipping God is a moment-by-moment issue of daily life. All of life is worship. Worship is a **lifestyle**, and many theologians and respected Christian leaders believe it is the primary reason for our existence.

However, "worship" also refers to dedicated **moments** set aside to sing or pray in a worshipful way to God. This can be done alone and together with others, such as in Sunday church meetings, or prayer meetings. These are times devoted specifically to admiring God and what He has done for us through Jesus, the Gospel. The Old Testament contains many stories, songs and prayers about worship, with heroes like David claiming that a single day of worship topped a thousand days without it.[128] The New Testament presents a church

[124] Excerpt from CH Spurgeon's sermon 'Order and Argument in Prayer' July 15th, 1866, delivered at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, England.
[125] Prov 15:8
[126] Jas 5:16
[127] Rom 8:28
[128] Ps 84:10

that had worship very high on the agenda,[129] and our eternal future will certainly involve a great deal of worship.[130] So, worship "moments", whether alone or in meetings, are to be prioritised and cherished, and not seen as a "filler" to kill time before we get into *doing* things for God, or Bible reading, petitionary prayer, or listening to a sermon – things that are themselves aspects of "lifestyle" worship. But the point is that worship "moments" should be seen an end in themselves.

My own regular times of personal worship involve chunks of time, anything from three to thirty minutes usually, using song and prayer. I just rave to God about how amazing He is. As I worship, **I get to know God better.** He is the ultimate diamond, endlessly multi-faceted. During times of worship I find the words of songs, and the worshipful prayers of others, all help illumine another facet of God. Sometimes I freshly see His mercy, other times His holiness, others His power, and so on.

As I see God through worship, **my perspective changes**. I enjoy Psalm 73 in which the writer is severely discouraged for the first part of the Psalm. Then verse 17 is the game-changer. It reads, "And then I entered the sanctuary of God." From that moment on the Psalm steadily climbs to the heights of encouragement. His whole outlook shifted once he had worshipped God. Politician William Wilberforce found something similar, writing, "Blessed be to God for the day of rest and worship wherein earthly occupations assume their true size. Worldly ambition is stunted."

With this change in perspective, I find **God gets bigger and problems get smaller**. David commonly described worship as magnifying the Lord.[131] Of course, God doesn't literally change size but my perspective of Him does, and consequentially, my sense of awe of Him increases and my faith grows that God is able to bring me through my current struggle in life. This reminds me of the believers' prayer in Acts 4. It is a seven-verse prayer with the first five verses

[129] Instructions on worship in Jn 4:21-24, 1 Cor 14:14-15, 1 Cor 14:25-26, Eph 5:19, Col 3:16, James 5:13, and examples of worship in Acts 4:24-31, 13:2, 16:25.
[130] See Revelation 5 for starters.
[131] Ps 43:3, 69:30. Some modern translations prefer "glorify".

being pure worship. Then, once faith is high… boom… they take just two verses to make their request. This is the way to pray. In fact, this is the way to live: lots of worship then little requests, at least it feels 'little' once you have worshipped our huge God!

Also, **worship makes me fruitful**. I once heard Terry Virgo speak on the link between worship and fruitfulness. He spoke about fruitfulness not being about busyness and a full calendar, but about depth of relationship with Jesus. An overwhelming task requires overwhelming intimacy. He spoke of Joshua who saw the Lord of Hosts, after which Jericho fell, and Isaiah who saw God high and lifted up, and as a result his whole life changed. Our encounter with God must be of such proportion that we are deeply affected. Our first relationship must be with the Lord.

My two best tips on worship are, firstly, learn how to use passages of Scripture to help you worship God and pray when you are alone. For example, I might choose a Psalm, read the first verse out loud, then I simply re-say it in my own words to God. For example, Psalm 84:

Verse 1: How lovely is your dwelling place, Oh Lord.
Then I might say: Yes Father, your presence is fantastic. Even now sitting here with you does me such good.
Verse 2: My heart yearns for you, the living God.
Then I might say: Nothing satisfies my heart except you, Lord. Father, forgive me for yesterday when I got driven at work and lost my peace. My heart worshipped my job ahead of you then. I am sorry. You alone are my satisfying Bread of Life!
Verse 5: Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage.
Then I might say: Father, not only is my righteousness in you, and my acceptance in you, but my strength is in you. And Lord, I want you to know that today and always I am on a pilgrimage after you. Like Jesus "set his face like a flint" to do your will, so do I for today. I love you Lord, so much.

Do see how "bouncing" off Scripture enriched my worship and prayer? If helped give me a vocabulary of worship, and gave me fresh angles from which to praise God.

My second tip is to worship with others, such as at church on Sundays. Arrive on time and be expectant. Soak in the words of the songs. Engage fully with God. Use your voice and body to worship God boisterously or tenderly, depending on the nature of the song. Allow the music to stir you and enhance your worship.

As you can see, worship is a mighty way to keep growing in our knowledge and love of Jesus, the Gospel.

Growing through the Holy Spirit

Our Chapter 1 definition of the Gospel was along the lines of "the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and the resulting benefits that come our way." One of the biggest Gospel benefits coming our way is the Holy Spirit. Without a major emphasis on the power of the Spirit, our connection with the Gospel can become hyper-rational, and we may neglect the supernatural assistance of the Spirit to empower us to live godly lives. Of course the Gospel is fundamentally supernatural, but you know what I mean.

As part of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit is fully God. His name is used interchangeably with God's name,[132] He has the attributes that only God has,[133] and He does the work that only God can do.[134] Although the Holy Spirit has been active since the dawn of creation[135] and throughout the Old Testament, Jesus said that once He ascended to heaven He would send the Holy Spirit to come and dwell right within us.[136] One of His names is "**The Helper**." He helps us in many ways, but here are four of the most important ones:

[132] Acts 5:3-4
[133] Omniscient (1 Cor 2:10), omnipotent (Lk 1:35) and omnipresent (Ps 139:7-8).
[134] Creating in Gen 1:1-2, regenerates hearts in Jn 3:5-7, and casting out demons in Mt 12:28.
[135] Gen 1:1
[136] Jn 16:7

Firstly, Acts 1:8 says that the Spirit **helps us to witness to others**, giving us wisdom and courage to help others come to a saving faith in Jesus.

Secondly, the Spirit actually "moves" us from within to **help us to obey** God.[137] This might be the thing I love most about God's interaction with us: He doesn't shout down, "Come on, obey me." Rather, He comes right within to give us an appetite for obedience. Pursuit of the Spirit enables us to increasingly "live by the Spirit" and "keep in step with the Spirit".[138] The Spirit sharpens our consciences and bends our desires towards righteousness.

Thirdly, the Spirit gives us an **assurance of our salvation**. Jesus said He would not leave us as orphans, rather that the Spirit would come to us.[139] The Spirit within us enables us to call God "Abba Father" testifying that we are God's children,[140] giving us great assurance of our salvation and sonship.[141]

Fourthly, **He gives us the tools we need**. He bears spiritual "fruit" in and through us such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and other characteristics that you can read about in Galatians 5:22-23. He also gives us all different types of **spiritual "gifts"** such as leadership, compassion, serving, prophecy, the ability to heal people, and many others that you can read about in 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, Romans 12:3-8, and Ephesians 4:11-12.

A key question often asked is, **"When do I receive the Spirit?"** The Bible teaches, without any admission of contradiction, that we *both* receive the Spirit at the moment of conversion, and that we need actively to continue to receive the Spirit after conversion – a principle that we understand from our study of the Gospel. We know we **receive the Spirit at conversion** because of the multitude of

[137] Ezek 36:27
[138] Gal 6:25
[139] Jn 14:18
[140] Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6
[141] The Bible usually uses the masculine term (i.e. son rather than child) for various reasons, which are beyond the scope of this work. However, this in no way implies that women are inferior, or are not equal heirs of salvation with men (e.g. 1 Pet 3:7, Gal 3:28).

Scriptures teaching that,[142] including Jesus saying the only way to enter the Kingdom is through being born of the Spirit,[143] and Paul saying that if you don't have the Spirit then you don't belong to Christ at all.[144]

Regarding receiving the Spirit after conversion, the biblical evidence is enormous. Paul exhorts us to actively choose filling with the Spirit over filling with wine,[145] something he would not say if our receipt of the Spirit was concluded at conversion. The early church made fullness of the Spirit an essential characteristic for certain leadership positions,[146] indicating that it is possible to be more full or less full of the Spirit than a fellow believer who, like you, received the Spirit at conversion.[147] And then there are repeated instances of believers having experiences of tangibly being filled with the Spirit long after their conversion, and after previous instances of being filled with the Spirit.[148] All of this points to the need to **keep receiving the Spirit after conversion**. So, if you haven't had a decent filling, then get one. And if you have, pursue greater fullness of the Spirit.

The next thing to ask is, **"How do I receive the Spirit?"** By His very nature, the Spirit is hard to pin down to a specific modus operandi and attempts to "standardise" Him are doomed to failure. The diversities of experience notwithstanding, here are some tips to receiving the Holy Spirit:

Don't fear receiving something bad. Jesus reassures us of the impossibility of us receiving something bad when we ask for the fullness of the Holy Spirit: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask!" [149]

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[142] Jn 3:5, Titus 3:5-7, 2 Thes 2:13, Rom 8:9, 15:16, Gal 3:2-14, 5:5, Eph 1:13-14, 4:30, 2 Cor 1:21-22, 1 Cor 2:6-16, 12:13
[143] Jn 3:5
[144] Rom 8:9
[145] Eph 5:18
[146] Acts 6:3-5, Acts 11:24
[147] 1 Cor 12:13
[148] Acts 4:8, 4:31, 7:55, 13:9, 13:52
[149] Lk 11:11-13

Don't try to earn the Spirit. The Spirit is a free gift from God to you.[150] He cannot be earned by doing good things, so don't think you need to wait until you improve your behaviour until you receive from Him. Anyway, you stand a much better chance of improving your behaviour with more of Him inside of you!

Be expectant. God responds to faith, so you need to be expectant in your heart. If you need more time to study the Bible to be convinced of your need to receive the Spirit, then take it. That said, even if you can't quite put all the puzzle pieces together, I would encourage you to leap expectantly into the river of God's Spirit with a child-like passion and faith.

Be active. Reception of the Spirit is active, not passive. Think "I am receiving the Spirit by faith." Breathe Him in. Drink Him in. Ask someone to lay hands on you. Be active.

Simply ask and receive. Jesus said, "How much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those that ask him?" [151] Simply ask. Simply receive. It is possible to receive the Spirit alone by yourself – that actually happened to my friend Scott who heard about all this stuff, then went back to his room, sat on his bed and asked Jesus to baptise him with His Spirit, and that is exactly what happened. And he even started to speak in tongues then and there by himself. That said, the most common biblical context for receiving the Spirit was in groups catalysed through the laying on of hands. So, it is usually best to get along to the next Holy Spirit event that your church runs where you can find out more about the Spirit and have some fellow believers pray for you to receive Him.

Growing through the local church

The Bible presents the church as staggeringly precious and beautiful. She is not a building, a place or a meeting: she is the People of God. From the early pages of the Bible, God always wanted his own special people through whom He could bless the world. Israel had that

[150] Acts 1:4
[151] Lk 11:13

privilege,[152] but then towards the end of the Old Testament it became clear that God had plans to extend His people well beyond the boundaries of Israel,[153] and that through putting their faith in Jesus, people from **every nation** could join the people of God.[154] This is why John the Baptist could say that Jesus was the one who would take away the sins of the *world*, not just Israel.[155]

Our current identity on earth is staggering: We are the bearers of God's wisdom and truth.[156] We are the home of God's Spirit.[157] Christ is our head.[158] We are the Body of Christ.[159] Probably the best definition of the church is a **community on a mission**. The New Testament church was clearly a warm community where people felt a keen sense of love and belonging.[160] In fact, the primary biblical image for God is "Father" and the church is "family".[161] But this family is on a serious mission to "Go into all the world and make disciples".[162] If we were just a community we would be very good at caring for each other but not very good at winning the lost to Christ. If we were just on a mission then we might be organised, efficient and courageous but we would probably not be very loving. We must be both.

If you think our origins and current status on earth are impressive, **our future is even brighter**. We shall become the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven.[163] Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes: "While the church is walking in this world of sin and shame she gets bespattered by mud and mire. But when she arrives in that state of glory and of glorification she will be without a single spot; there will not be a stain upon her. The most careful examination won't be able to detect the

[152] Gen 12:1-3
[153] Ezek 36:26-27, Hag 2:9, Is 49:6 (cf. Mt 28:19, Acts 1:8, Rev 5:9, Rev 14:6)
[154] Gal 3:14. Gal 6:19, Rom 4:16, Rom 9:8, Rom 11:17, 18, 1 Pet 2:7-12
[155] Jn 1:29
[156] Eph 3:10, 1 Tim 3:15
[157] Eph 2:22
[158] Eph 1:22
[159] 1 Cor 12:27, Eph 4:15
[160] Acts 2:41, Eph 3:14-15, 1 Cor 4:17, 2 Tim 1:2, 1 Tim 5:1-2, 1Tim 5:23, 1 Cor 4:15-16, 1 Thes 2:6-8, 11-12
[161] Mt 6:9, Eph 3:14-15
[162] Mt 28:18-20
[163] Heb 12:22-24, Rev 21:1-5, Heb 11:10, 13:14

slightest speck of unworthiness or sin. It is impossible to describe this perfection." [164]

How should we respond? If we ever needed convincing of the value and worth of the church we should remember the phrase "He gave Himself up for her." [165] Jesus laid down His life for the church. And so should we. This means **joining a local church.** The Bible knows nothing of believers who were not part of local churches, as those who were *saved* were always *added* to a local church.[166] In fact, local church membership was so assumed that one of the worst things that could happen to a believer was to be put out of the church![167] Descriptions of church life in the Bible indicate a warm family feel[168] with everyone feeling connected through relationship as well as function.[169]

Being part of a local church is a huge gift from God to us for our joy, and **one of the surest ways to grow in the Gospel**. Regarding these five ways of staying positioned to continuously grow in the Gospel, this one maybe the most important because of how it provokes and facilitates the other four.

The love and support of the church community is something we need as new believers[170] and for all of our lives. King David described Christians as trees who needed to be planted "in the house of the Lord" [171] rather than alone out in the desert somewhere. Christians planted in God's House will be "majestic and stable and upright and durable and useful and fruitful".[172] If you want to be that kind of tree, then join a local church!

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[164] Life in the Spirit, p174-5. Banner of Truth.
[165] Eph 5:25
[166] Acts 2:41, 47
[167] 1 Cor 5:1-5
[168] For example, see Acts 2:42-47 and Acts 4:32-37
[169] Eph 4:16
[170] 1 Pet 2:2
[171] Ps 92:13
[172] Ps 92:13 Amplified translation

Motivated to grow in the Gospel

Notwithstanding all the motivations within the previous chapters, I want to mention three further motivations to keep growing in the Gospel: **love, good works,** and **heavenly rewards**.

Motivated by love

Hippies don't get much right, but when it comes to motivation for growing in the Gospel, they are right on the money: it's about the power of love. Interestingly, Jesus' call to lukewarm Christians in Revelation Chapter 2 and 3 is weighted towards falling back in love with Him, rather than doing more things for Him. Doing good works happens most sustainably on the back of a loving relationship.

I fell in love with my wife Ashleigh when she was age 16 and I was 17. She played for the 3rd Team Hockey and one cold Saturday her school was playing mine. The 3rd Team match was on the field that every school has, the one in the bottom corner of the property next to the maintenance yard. I was about the only spectator and when my mates asked me why I had bothered watching an hour of bad hockey on a bad field in bad weather, I replied, "Because I am in love with the girl playing Left-Half." Do you see it? Love turns **duty into delight.** If your connection with God feels dutiful, like watching a match that you don't really want to watch, then think deeply on God's great act of love for you in the Gospel. Duty will soon become beauty.

My eldest son, Jack, finds learning Afrikaans a real duty. No delight there. But imagine if next term he falls for an Afrikaans girl in his school. Wham. It would change overnight. He would stay up late and get up early to learn the language. Why? Because love changes everything.

Allow God's love for you to fuel your love for Jesus, and consequently to fuel your works of love for Him. Remember again how Jesus left the glory of Heaven and lived a perfect life, then bled and died for your despicable sin that you might never bleed and die for your despicable sin. Remember the thrill of being plucked from the flames,

forgiven forever and called a friend of God. Let that get the love flowing, and zeal and obedience will flow from that.

Motivated by good works

Martin Luther said, "We are saved by faith alone, although not by faith that remains alone." He was probably referencing Ephesians 2:8-10 where Paul explained that whilst we are not saved or kept saved *by* doing works of obedience, we have been saved *to do* **good works** of obedience. Take a look:

*"For it is by grace you have been saved...**not by works**, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **to do good works,** which God prepared in advance for us to do." (Eph 2:8-10)*

There it is. Excitingly, God has good works for me to do. Although God did all the work in saving me, He now graciously allows me to contribute to His cause on the earth. After taking me off the field and cleaning me up, He now injects me back on to the field to influence the game. I am called to play a vital role in God's agenda on earth. Christ calls me to "conduct myself in a manner worthy of His Gospel" [173] as my good deeds are a source of witness to people who don't yet know Jesus[174] and they are a tangible way of expressing my love and worship to God.[175] My role counts! Grace has come to me not, as some people think, as a license to sin[176] or to be lazy,[177] but that I might be eager to do what is good.[178] I have a fight to fight and a race to run.[179] I am a committed soldier[180] striving for a crown.[181]

And not to miss an obvious point, because I have been "created" to do these good works, it means that I will be most fulfilled as I do

[173] Phil 1:27, 2 Cor 9:13
[174] Mt 5:16
[175] Jn 14:15, Jn 17:4, 1 Jn 2:5
[176] Jude v4
[177] 1 Cor 15:10
[178] Titus 2:11-14
[179] 2 Tim 4:7
[180] 2 Tim 2:3-6
[181] Phil 3:14

them. I will be literally doing what I was made to do. The motivations are clocking up fast: doing good works pleases God, satisfies me, and benefits those around me. What a motivation to be zealous and fervent[182] for the pleasure and joy of my King, and to promote His fame on the earth!

Motivated by heavenly rewards

Incredibly, the Bible teaches that I will rewarded in the life to come for these "good works" of obedience that I do in this life. Jesus said,

"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me. I will give to everyone according ***to what he has done****." (Rev 22:12)*

So, although doing "good works" doesn't save us, they are so important that we will even get rewarded for them and we are encouraged to pursue rewards in many places in the Bible.[183] One of the most helpful passages about rewards is 1 Cor 3:11-15:

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."

Here we see that Jesus is the foundation of our salvation, so our salvation is certain. Yet, we can build on top of that foundation with **good works, bad works or no works**. I am not exactly sure how it will look, but I imagine some angels with flame-throwers who burn off the bad works / no works on our way in to heaven. The good works we have done will survive the flames and reap us rewards in heaven. Scripture is content to leave the exact nature of these rewards something of a mystery, and different theologians have various views

[182] Rom 12:11, 1 Tim 4:15
[183] Prov 19:17, 25:22, Mt 5:12, Eph 6:8

on what rewards will be like, but either way, they will be great. Can you believe the grace of God? He saves us. Then gives us the fulfilment and joy of serving Him. And then, wait for it, He rewards us for doing that. That sure is motivating.

c. Fighting to grow in the Gospel

Before leaving this chapter about growing in the Gospel, we need to talk about fighting through things that try to hinder our growth in the Gospel. One of the things you "receive" in the Gospel is a new enemy. Actually, Satan has always been your enemy but when you believed the Gospel, things became official. He tries to obstruct your growth in many ways, especially with **guilt** and **temptation to sin**.

One of Satan's names is The Accuser because he reminds us day and night that we are not doing very well as Christians.[184] He tries to throw a web of **guilt** over us to impede our upward growth in the Gospel. You can slice through the web of guilt with just two deft swipes of your Sword:[185]

Swipe 1: "God made Jesus who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21). It's The Great Exchange. On the cross Jesus was accused and found guilty for all your sin. He took it all and there is now no guilt left over for you to bear. You are 100% righteous now and forever.

Swipe 2: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1). Why is there no guilt or condemnation for you? Because you are "in" Christ Jesus. "In Christ" was one of Paul's favourite ways of describing the new status of a believer. God has placed you inside Jesus so that when God looks at you He doesn't see your sin, He only sees you within the perfect righteousness of Christ. Tell Satan that. Stick it to him good. And for good measure, twist the sword: when he reminds you of your past, remind him of his future.

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[184] Rev 12:10
[185] Eph 6:17 uses "sword" as another name for the Bible.

Another hindrance to growth is **temptation to sin.** Actually, being tempted is not a sin, but giving in is. Temptation comes to us either directly from the devil, or from one of his accomplices – your body.[186] The good news is that you will get a brand new body in the life to come that will not be tempted to sin,[187] but the bad news is that until then you will find that you constantly need to keep your fleshly desires under control. A temptation would not be a temptation if it did not hold the promise of some pleasure, but it is *always* short-lived temporary pleasure. Sin always presents itself to us in a very tasty package, but don't be fooled: sin might taste good for a few minutes, but it soon turns bitter and will always harm you.

Despite all his power, the Bible is crystal clear that Satan can never actually force you to sin:

"And God is faithful; He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted He will also provide ***a way out*** *so that you can* ***stand up under it****" (1 Cor 10:13)*

The way out is to stand up under it, and not give in to it. Samuel Plimsoll was a British Member of Parliament who spent all his life working for better conditions for seamen. He was concerned about the number of sailors who drowned at sea because the ships they sailed in were overloaded and in a bad state of repair. His efforts resulted in the introduction of the Plimsoll Line in 1876. This is the mark on the side of every ship that shows the level in the water to which a ship can be safely loaded. God has set a Plimsoll line on each of us and He will never allow the devil to overload us with temptation that we cannot bear. Here are some ways to stand up under temptation:

First up, be **self-controlled.** "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet 5:8-9). Self-control is a mighty weapon of yours. Paul explains exactly how self-control works: "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin as instruments of wickedness … but rather offer

[186] Rom 6:11-14, James 1:14
[187] Phil 3:20-21, 1 Cor 15:51-52

the parts of your body to God as instruments of righteousness" (Rom 6:13). For temptation to be converted to actual sin, it needs to borrow a part of your body. So, here's a thought: don't lend out any of your body parts to sin. As soon as you sense the beginnings of stinking thinking, recall your mind and set it to think about "things above".[188] Don't let a jealous, proud, bitter or lustful thought use your mind. And the same goes for your eyes. We have a serious weapon in our arsenal: our eyelids. When a dodgy scene happens in a movie, drop 'em fast. And then lift them when the steamy scene is over (you'll know it is because the guy next to you will start eating his popcorn again).

And alongside self-control, Peter also mentioned the importance of **being alert**. Satan never plays fair. He will catch you in your weakest area when you are at your most vulnerable. Maybe the most important question in the study guide for this chapter is this: Knowing yourself better than anyone, if you were the devil, how would you attack you? Think it through. Where are you naturally weakest? I know where I am, and my close friends know as well. We are alert. Forewarned is forearmed. Get alert.

Learn how to run. "One day Joseph went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants were inside. Potiphar's wife caught him by his cloak and said 'Come to bed with me!' But he left his cloak in her hand and **ran** out of the house." (Gen 39:11-12). Try and get your mind off the image of this guy running out the house stark naked, and focus on the key word – "ran." The fight against sin is the only battle where if you run away you win.

Avoid places of temptation. Proverbs 7:6-9 tells a similar story of a young man who *walked passed* the house of a prostitute and the writer is quick to call this young man foolish. If you are tempted to steal jewellery, don't go near jewellery shops. If you are tempted when home alone with your girlfriend, guess what? Don't be home alone. If you are tempted to look at internet porn, trade in your smart phone for the original Nokia brick. Buy a backpack so you can carry it

[188] Col 3:2

around with, and hey presto, you can't go online so easily. You might be thinking, "Get real PJ. That's a bit radical." Exactly. This is a fight. You don't live in a demilitarised zone. You must fight to grow. And get **ruthless with little sins.** James 1:13-15 speaks of the subtle growth of small temptations into mighty sins that can ruin you. Little sins become big sins and big sins dominate. Put the bullet in when they are still small.

Also, **starve the flesh and feed the spirit.** A man had two dogs that he fought against each other. He would take bets as to whether the black dog or the brown dog would win. Each week a different dog won and the man made money because he always seemed to know which of his dogs would win. One day a friend asked him, "how do you always know which dog will win on Saturday?" The dog owner replied, "The dog I feed that week always wins." Feed the "Spirit dog" in you by prayer, Bible reading and fellowship with other Christians. Starve the "flesh dog" in you by only reading, watching and doing things that are good for you.

Someone once said that some temptations attack the busy person, but all attack the idle person. **Stay busy for God.** King David was a great warrior for much of his life, but there was one year when he got lazy and instead of leading his army on a campaign, he stayed at home, no doubt idle and bored around the palace.[189] It was then that he got tempted and committed adultery with Bathsheba. What can we learn from this? That a committed lifestyle of serving God will keep you occupied both in your time and your affections.

Also, **know some key Bible verses.** When Satan tempted Jesus He responded by quoting the Bible, saying "It is written…" [190] The psalmist adopted the same defence strategy saying "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." [191] Being familiar with what the mighty Word of God says about certain sins is a great defence against attacks of temptation.

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[189] 2 Sam 11:1
[190] Lk 4
[191] Ps 119:11

And crucially, **stay accountable to others.** Paul wanted his friends in Corinth to understand that "no temptation had seized them except that which was common to man",[192] and James encourages us to talk to other suitable Christians about sins that we are struggling with.[193] What a relief to know that others experience the same battles and that we can confess our failings and struggles to others who can sympathise and then spur us on to righteousness! It is good for each of us to have at least one other mature Christian that we can regularly chat to about our struggles.

Have you noticed that most people have one or two areas in which they feel particularly vulnerable? These are **stronghold sins,**[194] which as the name suggests are sins that seem to have a particularly strong hold on us. It might be fear or jealousy, or an addiction of some sort. Strongholds develop in different ways. Sometimes they develop into a habit by doing a certain sin so much for so long, or sometimes they develop simply because you seem especially weak in that area. It is important to get one or two trusted friends to pray with you into this area, to lovingly hold you to account, and probably get you into a short-term discipleship group that can help you identify the "sin beneath the sin" and help apply the Gospel to that area of your life.

Finally, **when you fail turn to God immediately.** The message of Jesus was, "Repent!" not, "Be better!" As Martin Luther said in the first of his 95 Theses: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance." So, echoing Luther, we affirm that all of the Christian life is repentance. Turning from sin and trusting in the good news that Jesus saves sinners isn't merely a one-time inaugural experience, but instead the daily substance of Christianity."[195] Boldly approach His throne of grace in your hour of need. He will forgive, love you and strengthen you afresh.[196]

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[192] 1 Cor 10:13. See also 1 Peter 5:9.
[193] James 5:16
[194] 2 Cor 10:4
[195] Justin Holcomb blog from The Resurgence.
[196] Heb 4:15-16

FIVE: **ADVANCING THE GOSPEL**

So far we have looked at what the Gospel is. We defined the Gospel very broadly in Chapter 1, then Chapters 2-4 dealt more specifically with how the "Great Exchange" aspect of the Gospel saves us, changes us and we can grow in understanding of this aspect of the Gospel. Now we turn to how to advance the Gospel. Bearing in mind our broad definition of the Gospel in Chapter 1, advancing the Gospel can take many forms, but I am restricting this chapter to advancing the Gospel from person to person with the aim of seeing them come to faith.

We will first look at the **theology** of mission, then some **hindrances** to mission, then some **provocations** to mission, then some **basic skills** for mission, and then we will get into the main business of **why and how to share the Gospel with our friends.**

a. **Theology of Mission**

Firstly, God is a missional God. The Father sent Jesus into the world on a mission to save people.[197] Then Jesus and the Father sent the Spirit[198] into the world on mission to empower us for mission. And now Jesus sends us into the world on mission.[199] Clearly, mission is at the heart of who God is, and at the heart of what He intends for us. Christopher Wright says the Bible is essentially a missionary document, and that instead of us talking about a "biblical basis for missions" we should talk about the "missional basis for the Bible".[200]

Secondly, mission is our origin. At the inauguration of God's people, God specified that we, as Abraham's descendants, would be a conduit of blessing for the unreached people of the world.[201] By very

[197] Jn 14:24
[198] Jn 14:26, Jn 15:26
[199] Jn 20:21, Mt 28:19-20
[200] Christopher Wright. The Mission of God.
[201] Gen 12:1-3

origin we are an outward-looking, other-oriented, soul-winning, mission-driven people. Mission is not an add-on. It is not an optional extra. It is at the core of who we are. The people of God don't have a mission so much as the mission of God has a people.

Thirdly, mission is the clear example of the early church. If our missional origins are in the Old Testament, our missional example is in the New Testament. Shortly before His ascension, Jesus gave the leaders of the early church a set of instructions that became known as The Great Commission.[202] They were instructions to be obeyed, not discussed. When I told my sons to tidy their rooms last week, they didn't say, "Interesting idea Dad. We will form a committee to discuss the feasibility of your proposal." They simply obeyed, as did the early church. Mission is the big idea. It is not a suggestion; it is a command. It is not to be discussed. Just obeyed. Spurgeon cuts to the chase saying, "Christians are either missionaries or imposters".

Fourthly, mission was the personal obsession of the apostolic leaders of the early church. Paul defined his own calling as helping people cross the line of faith.[203] That was his ultimate ambition.[204] It seems that the most fundamental definition of "apostolic" is to see people come to faith in Christ.

Fifthly, every single Christ-follower is called to be a missionary. Jesus mentions mission in the same breath as salvation saying, "Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men".[205] Do you see it? We get recruited into the mission of God the moment we cross the line of faith. Paul said something similar: "God reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation".[206] We are reconciled to God to help others be reconciled to God. So don't sit on the side of the field and watch, get straight onto the field and score some Gospel goals.

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[202] Mt 28:19-20
[203] Rom 1:5
[204] Rom 15:20
[205] Mk 1:16-18
[206] 2 Cor 5:18

George MacLeod, founder of the Scottish Iona community, can summarise this section on theology of mission:

"I simply argue that the cross be raised again at the centre of the market place, as well as on the steeple of the church. I'm recovering the claim that Jesus was not crucified in a Cathedral between two candles, but on a cross between two thieves, on a town garbage heap at a crossroads of politics so cosmopolitan they had to write His title in Hebrew and Latin and Greek, where cynics talk smut, thieves curse and soldiers gamble. That is where He died and that is what He died about. That is where Christ's people ought to be, and what church people ought to be about."

b. **Hindrances to Mission**

I have observed that the biggest hindrance to mission is **confusion about the priorities of the local church**. Healthy biblical church consists of many important aspects including worship, preaching, gifts of the Spirit, ministry to the poor, community life, caring for one another, and so on. But the question is *which aspect trumps the others*? In the absence of a clear answer to that question, the definition of successful church will be reduced to the aspect that an individual is most passionate about. Biblically, there is only one contender for the top spot for the age in which we live: mission. We know this because the Great Commission was not to worship, preach, do spiritual gifts, minister to poor, or care for each other, but to do *mission*, namely making converts and disciples.

We are *of course* to do these other aspects of church life with vigour and excellence, but remembering that they are a means to the ultimate end of mission. They are to be done in such a way that enhances, not erodes mission. The tail should not wag the dog. Now wonderfully, when mission does lead, all these other aspects of church themselves get enhanced, not eroded, because mission invigorates everything. Without unbelievers and new believers in the mix, church life gets **claustrophobic and incestuous**, and we start growing two heads, eleven fingers and three nipples because our

genes have no outlet. They cycle round and round inside the church, and we get weirder and weirder, and more and more boring, and better and better at answering questions that no one is even asking. Get clear. The church was formed *by* mission and *for* mission, and therefore mission should significantly shape the way we do church; our **missiology should significantly shape our ecclesiology.**[207]

The second biggest hindrance to mission, in my experience, is **confusion about the role of the Holy Spirit** in church life. As we saw in Chapter 4, the Holy Spirit empowers us in many ways, one of the most important surely being *for mission*. At the front end of His ministry Jesus said the Spirit was on Him for the mission of setting the captives free,[208] and on the back end of His ministry He told the disciples not to go on mission to set the captives free until the Spirit had come on *them*.[209] That said, I have noticed that either too much or too little emphasis on the Spirit hinders mission. Let me explain:

Those who especially love the presence and gifts of the Spirit can overplay the **experiential** aspect of the Spirit, and underplay the aspect of **empowering** us for mission. Again we have a case of both/and, but insufficient emphasis on the missional aspect of the Spirit can reduce the missional potency of a church. Conversely, others argue that doing the presence and gifts of the Spirit in a way that doesn't repel the unbeliever is virtually impossible, so they basically opt out in the name of mission. But this wasn't the biblical pattern, nor is it logical to expect unbelievers to be born of the Spirit without a truckload of Holy Spirit activity!

Clearly, neither of these either/or positions fit the biblical pattern where a definite expression of the Spirit was regarded as a non-negotiable, but where it was done in an ordered, intelligent yet fully supernatural way that assisted, not hindered, unbelievers.[210] We need lots of Spirit with lots of power with lots of thought.

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[207] Ecclesiology refers to our theology and practice of church.
[208] Lk 4:16
[209] Acts 1:4-8
[210] For example, see 1 Corinthians 14, especially verse 24-25.

The third major hindrance to mission is not a confusion as much as a sin: **selfishness.** Paul lays it out saying, "I have become all things to all men that by any means I may reach some".[211] Can you say that? Are you up for living life unselfishly and doing church unselfishly for the great goal of reaching people with the Gospel?

c. **Provocations to Mission**

Firstly, and quite brilliantly, **know that God is at work through us.** God Himself is making *His* appeal to unbelievers through us.[212] So don't feel that your missional actions and words to your unbelieving friends are impotent. You're a conduit for God. That's a strong team. You're the pipe and He's the power. The magnet of God is drawing people to Himself through you.

And, remember that God is deeply committed to winning people. From the moment that Adam and Eve sinned, God has been on an unrelenting mission to "seek and save the lost".[213] In His three years of ministry, the first thing Jesus did was to save His disciples, and the last thing He did before dying was to save the criminal on the cross. Then, before ascending to heaven He commissioned His followers to carry on where He had left off,[214] and now in heaven, rather than relaxing with His feet up being tickled by angels, He is earnestly praying that His people would be saved.[215]

Secondly, be provoked by the urgency of the task. The great evangelist Charles Spurgeon said, "If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. If they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees. Let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for."[216] Not a moment to lose.

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[211] 1 Cor 9:22. Paul is exhorting contextualisation of the Gospel without compromise.
[212] 2 Cor 5:20
[213] Lk 19:10, cf. 1 Tim 1:15
[214] Mt 28:18-20
[215] Heb 7:25
[216] Spurgeon to Pastors

d. **Basic skills for Mission**

Firstly, think all of life. Avoid compartmentalising your life into sacred and secular. Your conduct and attitudes at work and home are spiritual activities that not only interest God, but are an advert to unbelievers. All of life is mission. Your home is a mission station. It is not a place to escape mission but from which you can do mission. Paying off your mortgage has a missional purpose. Your job is a mission assignment. Your cubicle at work is a launch pad into the unreached people group around you. It's Missional Sunday *and* Missional Monday.

Secondly, connect. As a rule, people don't care what you know until they know that you care, so its important to connect with people before you begin to share new ideas with them. Jesus did this with the woman caught in adultery[217] and the woman at the well.[218] Paul did this in Athens.[219] For me this usually means building a meaningful friendship with an unbeliever before starting to share the Gospel with him. Another way to say it is be relevant before being right. Become friends, help them out, do stuff together, and take an interest in the things that they are interested in.

Thirdly, contextualise without compromise. Being relevant doesn't mean compromising your beliefs, but it does mean engaging with them in their world before you expect them to engage with yours. But along the way stay pure.

Fourthly, speak their language. A year ago I was invited by some unbelieving friends to visit their sick child in hospital. They said, "We desperately need some positive energy in the room, could you come along?" I said, "Sure, and lets pray, because God is the ultimate source of positive energy." This started a 12-month journey during which both parents crossed the line of faith. They reflect back on how it all began with a desire for more "positive energy". My point? Peter said that we should share our faith with gentleness and respect,[220]

[217] Jn 8:11
[218] Jn 4
[219] Acts 17:22-34
[220] 1 Pet 3:15

which I think means, where possible, framing the Gospel within their vocab at first. Paul did this in Athens by using a quote from one of their pagan poets to help explain the Gospel. Remember, understanding the Bible tells us what to say, but understanding people tells us how to say it. The Gospel message is timeless, but how we present it isn't.

Fifthly, know their questions. Another stroke of brilliance by Paul in Athens was to work out a pre-existing question that they had, and then frame his presentation of the Gospel as an answer to that question.[221] Your friend's question might be how to fix a problem in life, or overcome a disappointment, or how to succeed in a certain area, but it will usually provide a point of conversation that you can direct in a spiritual direction.

Sixthly, know their idols. We learnt from Chapter 3 that we are all worshippers. It is just a question of who or what we worship. What is your friend's idol? What is the thing in life that he is depending on to give him a sense of security and purpose? Is it his career, his kids or his girlfriend? This is vital intelligence to help you know how to show him that he will never find peace and satisfaction down that alley, and to point him in the direction of the only One who can truly satisfy him. To help you work out what questions and idols people have, try weaving the following three questions into conversation. At worst you will find out more about what makes them tick, and at best they ask you the same things. Game on.

1. What is the most important thing in your life? This might reveal their "doctrine of god," i.e. expose their main idol.
2. What is wrong with the world? This might reveal their "doctrine of sin."
3. What is the solution? This might reveal their "doctrine of salvation."

[221] Acts 17:23

e. **Why and how to share the Gospel with our friends**

The book of Acts shows people hearing the Gospel in two main ways: **public preaching**[222] and **personal sharing**. Regarding personal sharing, the Gospel was sometimes shared with a complete stranger (like Philip did on the street to the Ethiopian politician[223]), but more commonly it was shared on the back of a pre-existing friendship. Paul states the obvious, saying that people can't believe in Jesus unless someone tells them about Him.[224] That's the way it rolls. For example, Epaphras shared the Gospel with the Colossians through friendship;[225] The Corinthians learned it from Paul.[226] Paul shared it with the Thessalonians through friendship,[227] and Cornelius coming to faith caused his whole *household* to come to faith,[228] as did Lydia's conversion, as did the Jailor's conversion.[229] In those days "household"[230] referred to an entire social network – immediate and extended family, servants and their families, business associates and neighbours. Clearly, the Gospel must have spread through these social networks from **friend to friend**.

Which is better: "public preaching" or "personal sharing"?

The Bible records people coming to faith through both, so both ways are valid. But the "best" one is the one that works best in your context. In the context of today's modern Western cities, "preaching" alone is not cutting it, and friendship evangelism is needed more than ever before for three reasons:

Firstly, modern Western city dwellers place an extremely high value on authenticity, and are **suspicious of all things institutional**, especially when it comes to faith. As a result, they are more open to

[222] E.g. Peter preaching in Acts 2
[223] Acts 8:27
[224] Rom 10:14
[225] Col 1:7
[226] 2 Cor 10:14
[227] 1 Thes 2:7-9
[228] Acts 10
[229] Both in Acts 16
[230] The Greek word is *oikos.*

receiving spiritual truth from a trusted friend than a stranger such as a preacher.

Secondly, due to an increasingly secular world, most unbelievers have a **minimal grasp on the basic aspects of faith**. This means that they are unlikely to understand and receive the Gospel through a one-off sermon or conversation, rather needing many conversations and exposures to the Gospel, which is best achieved through a steady friendship with a believer.

Thirdly, due to our modern Western obsession with logic, unbelievers today can be quite thoughtful, and have several **presuppositional objections** that unless addressed, will prevent them from seriously considering Christianity. Objections such as "there cannot be only one way to God", or "the Bible is not reliable", or "how can a loving God let bad things happen?" all need some kind of response before they will be able to approach the line of faith. Again, addressing these objections is not easily done in a one-off sermon or conversation, but they can be over time through a friendship with a Christian.

All this means that the process of approaching and crossing the line of faith tends to take a longer time now, and is best done through a meaningful friendship with a believer. But here is the rub: whilst friendship evangelism is needed more than ever before, it is **not popular.** Church leaders don't like it because they can't control it; they can't "make" their people do it; they can't "programme" it. And, church members don't like it because it requires some effort, training and taking responsibility because they can no longer outsource evangelism to the preachers.

Preaching moments such as Sunday preaching, Carol Concerts, Easter Productions, Crusade Meetings, Alpha Courses and the like can be valuable, but must be done to ***assist*** friendship evangelism, rather than ***replace*** it. The enquirer will only usually come to one of these programmes if invited by a trusted believing friend, and will not usually respond to the Gospel at the first event he comes to so will need to keep discussing the Gospel with a believing friend, and even

if he does positively respond to the Gospel at the event, a meaningful friendship with a believer is essential to see him established in the faith.

Simply, churches and believers in westernised cities need to **recalibrate** to friendship evangelism. Actually, they need to recalibrate to *friendship*, not *friendship evangelism*, because evangelism will naturally flow from true friendship, and Jesus calls us to love people regardless of the Gospel outcome. But we will keep calling it friendship evangelism for now to keep the missional focus.

How can I do friendship evangelism?

I recommend 3 Steps and 4 Tools.

The 3 Steps are:

1. Pick. Pray. Prioritise.
2. Naturally engage on spiritual things.
3. Draw them into your church community.

Think of these steps as three aspects of the process more than three steps to be taken in exact order, but it is usually a mistake to jump prematurely to Step 3. Build the friendship first.

The 4 Tools are:

1. Personal Testimony
2. Answering Objections
3. Concise Gospel Presentations
4. Helpful Resources

Again, these are Tools can be used in any order as and when they are needed, but will probably all be needed in some way to help your unbelieving friend across the line of faith.

STEP 1
PICK. PRAY. PRIORITISE.

Pick them

The first thing is to choose a group of people that you will consider your priority group of friends to help across the line of faith. Think of these friends as being in the "incubator", steadily warming to the Gospel. You can, of course, adjust this group as time goes by, and it certainly doesn't mean that you neglect other friends, but the point is if you shoot at nothing that is exactly what you will hit.

Think about the different social networks that you are already part of:

- Family and relatives
- Neighbours
- Colleagues (co-workers, co-students etc.)
- Those with shared interests (sports, hobbies etc.)

The category of "friends" usually consists of those who naturally rise to the top of these four groups. So, choose 1-3 people from each of these networks who do not yet know Jesus, with whom you feel that you could grow a meaningful friendship, or with whom you are already in a meaningful friendship. Don't worry if one or more of these networks is non-existent in your life at present. Start with those people that God has *already* placed you amongst. And make sure you are sincere. Do not regard them as Gospel projects. Love and serve them as true friends, no matter what the Gospel result is.

Pray for them

Then, start to pray regularly for this group. Pray that you would be a faithful and excellent friend to them, and that God would use you to help them encounter Him. Pray for the various aspects of their lives. Pray that they would be increasingly open to the Gospel. Prayer is the

oil on the hinges of the heart. Prayer helps soften them and cause a thirst for the truth of the Gospel.[231] William Cowper said "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Saint upon his knees". Your simple prayers are powerful.

Prioritise them

Now that you have picked them and are praying for them, you need to prioritise your friendship with them.

Prioritise time with them: Life is busy and Satan is at work to distract you from starting and developing decent friendships with them, so you need to make a Missional Living Plan that ensures you can start and develop these friendships, build trust and credibility, and generally be an excellent friend to them. Developing a Missional Living Plan is more about learning to better use your existing rhythms of life rather than becoming more busy. Here are some examples of how to do this. Once you have read these ideas make a note of action points for yourself:

Gym. If you go to gym, in order to meet more people, go at the same time each day and you will begin to see the same people. After nodding at them a few times, it will feel natural to say hello, and in due course to strike up a friendship. Or, to build on an existing friendship with someone in your "incubator" group, could you go to gym with them regularly?

Hairdresser. If you went to the same one regularly, could he/she become an incubator friend?

Work. How could you better spend time at work, especially your lunch hour to start or develop meaningful friendships with your incubator friends?

Students. Join a study group to get to know other people, and/or deepen friendships with your incubator group.

[231] Philemon 1:6

School Parents. Think of your kids' friends' parents. How could you leverage that connection to either become friends or develop an incubator friendship?

Sport, watching sport and hobbies. Could you switch from running solo to running with a running club? If you are already watching the game on TV at home, could you invite people to watch with you, or could you invite yourself round to your friend's house? What hobbies do you have that can be used to start and deepen friendships?

Meals. You have 21 meals per week. How could you use these to make friends and deepen friendships?

And remember, be patient. Our culture is obsessed with immediate, visible results, but the Gospel often advances slower than we like. Jesus said that the Kingdom of God grows like a mustard seed,[232] which grows notoriously slowly. Be urgent and deliberate but also patient because it can take longer than we think for a friend to cross the line of faith.

[232] Mt 13:31

STEP 2
NATURALLY ENGAGE ON SPIRITUAL THINGS

Once you are in a meaningful friendship, you need to begin naturally to engage on spiritual things. Think of the following tips as necessary aspects of the process more than steps to be taken in exact order, but it is usually a mistake to jump prematurely to Number 6.

Firstly, let them know you are a Christian in a natural, unforced way.

Secondly, live an attractive life. This doesn't mean a perfect life, but if you are annoying, grumpy, and high maintenance then you will likely repel rather than attract them to Christianity. Remember, a picture paints a thousand words and our lifestyles are a powerful form of evangelism. We should aim to "live a life worthy of our calling".[233] Our good deeds help alert people to God.[234]

Thirdly, ask them about their faith, and just listen. You might say, "Are you a person of faith? What does that look like for you?" Don't show disapproval if you disagree with what they believe. Ask questions and listen with interest. This is not only an expression of love, respect and humility, but it will help you understand them better. It may also mean that in due course they are more open to hearing your view of faith.

Fourthly, listen to their problems; maybe offer to pray for them.

Fifthly, share your problems with them. Ask for their advice. Share how your faith helps you in your struggles.

Sixthly, as opportunity arises, use the four tools mentioned at the back of this booklet, which are all ways of explaining the Gospel message to a friend. You will need these tools as they naturally

[233] Eph 4:1, Phil 1:27, 2:15-16
[234] Mt 5:16

become more inquisitive about spiritual things, or as a crisis of some sort makes them reach for spiritual truth, such as fear of death, sickness, mid-life crisis and so on. Remember, crisis doesn't create their need for God as much as reveal it. Also, remember that as people get older, life's challenges generally increase, so be a faithful friend, hang in there, and guard your credibility for when the moment is right. But before studying and preparing these four tools, here is the third step in building a friendship that can carry the Gospel to a friend:

STEP 3
DRAW THEM INTO YOUR CHURCH COMMUNITY

Think of a two-part process: firstly, help your unbelieving friends **make friends** with your believing friends from church, then secondly, **invite them along** to suitable church events.

Exposing your unbelieving friends to your church friends should happen naturally as the friendship grows. A good place to start is by organising social times where your **church friends and unbelieving friends can naturally begin to mix** in a casual setting. This is usually a powerful way of exposing them to the Gospel, because Jesus said:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35; 17:21, 23).

Jesus is saying that the social interaction of God's people proclaims the Gospel to unbelievers. **Our corporate witness enhances our individual witness.** Without the Gospel even being verbally spoken, it gets proclaimed through our lives lived together and love demonstrated to one another, and interest in the Gospel message is created. Tim Chester says, *"To reach the many people today who have rejected church we need to take church to them by doing mission in the context of ordinary life. As people hang out with us, eat meals with us, do chores with us they will encounter a disparate group of people who somehow are family together, a community that challenges their priorities and provokes their questions."* [235]

The other great thing about having a group of believers befriending your unbelieving friend is that there are now more of you in the mix to "do" Step 2, namely begin to naturally engage on spiritual things. Remember, **your church is your mission team**. We are not called to fish alone. In Jesus' era fishing was done in teams, with nets being

[235] Tim Chester is a leader in The Crowded House.

put out and hauled in by a group working together, not by a solo fisherman with a rod. Your church fishing team has **different people with different expertise**. In Mark 2 it took a team of four friends to get a mutual friend to Jesus, and it is often just like that today. You may be the one to draw an unbeliever into your friendship circle, but it might be another one in the group who helps respond to their objections to Christianity, and another who demonstrates God's love to them by helping them through a tough time, and still another who actually articulates the Gospel to help them over the line of faith.

At some stage it will feel natural and appropriate to **invite them along to a church meeting** or event. The number one reason why people say they do not go to church is because... no one has ever invited them. Be relaxed about it. Say, "I would love to see what you make of it", or maybe, "We are in a series at the moment about…", or, "Let's get a bite to eat afterwards". Or, "A mutual friend is getting baptised and I reckon we should support him". Or, "Our church is doing something cool for Moms on Mother's Day…."

All this presupposes that the church you are part of is suitable for unbelievers in terms of the vibe, the people and the meetings that it has. If you are not confident that your church will assist you as you work to reach your friends with the Gospel, **then you need to change church to one that is geared for unbelievers.** I guess you could stay on a bit and try to change the church to be more seeker-sensible, but unless you are the church leader, you will probably fail. Leave with a clear conscience – think about it, a church not suitable for unbelievers is like **a hospital not suitable for sick people**.

Mission is at the heart of God and at the heart of the Church, so join a church that is deliberately missional. If a church seems perfect in every other area but is casual about advancing the Gospel to unbelievers, then don't be part of it. You need a church that is missional in its strategy, events and Sunday meetings. And importantly, it must be a church that continuously **trains, equips and provokes you to friend-to-friend evangelism**.

TOOL 1
GOSPEL-CENTRED TESTIMONY

Andrew said to Peter, "I think I have found the Messiah." The woman in John 4:29 told her friends, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did." The man born blind said, "Since I met Jesus I can see".[236] This is what it means to give your testimony. Testimony means "to bear witness to". You are now able to "bear witness to" what Jesus has done for you.

You need to prepare a **30-second** and **3-minute** version, both of which can be useful depending on the company and conversation that you are in.

Note that your testimony must be **Gospel-centred.** This means that you must major on **belief** not **behaviour** or **benefits**. Although many things in your life will have no doubt improved since coming to Christ, make sure that your testimony helps reveal the actual Gospel (belief and forgiveness) not the consequences of the Gospel (beneficial changes in life). Also, although behavioural change has happened in your life since coming to Christ, do not major on that as it reinforces the prevailing faulty belief that Christianity is a list of things to do rather than a gift to be received.

The following table gives examples of 30-second Gospel-centred testimonies that can be expanded to give longer, more colourful 3-minute versions. The **3-part structure** that is helpful in preparing and remembering a compelling testimony. Read all of them (left to right) to see how although different, each one is Gospel-centred. It is likely that one of these may match your testimony, or you can apply elements of these testimonies to yours. Make sure your testimony is **gritty and honest** not super-spiritual, sleazy, cheesy, or holier-than-thou.

[236] Jn 9:25

	A key aspect of your life before believing	**The process leading to belief**	**An aspect(s) of your life since believing**
Kim	I regarded myself as something of an intellectual, and rejected Christianity based on the lack of factual evidence.	Then I started coming across highly intelligent Christians. I began to investigate the rational basis for Christianity and was won over.	What started as cerebral has now moved to my heart. I am now enjoying the transforming work of Jesus in many aspects of my life.
Bill	I had a significant fear of death.	When I heard that believing in Jesus meant receiving the promise of eternal life, I leapt at it.	Since then I have realised that Jesus is not just about a ticket to heaven but about transformation on earth, and knowing God right now. I am enjoying the ride.
Rob	I was a hard-working, moral guy who was better than most and I just assumed that God would accept me on the basis of my morality.	Then a mate of mine explained that the Gospel was not a code to live by, but rather a gift of forgiveness to receive. It was about believing rather than doing.	I am gradually getting the Gospel idea that good works are done in *response* to salvation not as a means of *gaining* salvation.
Abby	I thought I was a Christian because I went to church, gave money away, read my Bible and prayed. I was even a Small Group Leader in the church.	I read the Parable of the Two Sons and to my horror realised that I was the older brother who assumed he was accepted by God because he was a do-gooder. But he was actually rejected by God!	I am relishing in the reality that I am accepted by God, not on the basis of my "good" life, but on the basis of Jesus' perfect life that is now credited to me. I am less critical of others, less driven, and more secure.

Jill	I went through a tough time.	I was amazed at the care of some Christian family members and friends. My heart softened towards God and I became aware of my sin and I asked Jesus to forgive me.	I am learning to keep applying the Gospel to different areas of my life. Most recently, I realised that my stingy attitude to money was based on fear that God would not look after me. But in the Gospel He gave His life for me, so I reckon He will look after me just fine going forward!
Ali	I went through a tragedy.	I came to realise that the tragedy didn't create my need for God, but rather revealed it.	What began as a "help me God" project is growing into a deep relationship with God.
Ozo	My life was boring.	I went to church and heard this preacher say that serving Christ was the greatest adventure ever. So I thought I would give it a go.	And I have found it to be true. The thrill of God inside me, changing me, the fight against sin and the thrill of telling my mates about Christ is epic.
Bo	I became friends with a Christian.	I gradually met his church mates, started to hang out with them and eventually responded positively to the Gospel at a church meeting.	I think the biggest challenge since believing that Jesus is Lord is to really get that He is Lord of every area of my life. I seem to have a lot to repent of, but I am secure in His unconditional love.

Ric	I was living flat out for my career. I thought that the recognition of success and the big bucks would be the secret of happiness. I told my Christian friend that I was not a worshipper like him. He replied, "Of course you are. You just worship something different."	I asked him what he meant. He explained that we "worship" (direct our energies towards) the thing that we think will make us feel complete. I realised that success and money would never quite do it…	I now worship Jesus. I still love my job but I am not looking to that as my saviour (the thing that makes me feel "saved" and good about myself). I now look to Jesus as my Lord and Saviour.
Al	I was living a life of crazy sin and to my amazement a Christian mate never, ever told me to change the way I behaved. When I asked him why he didn't, he replied "Because until you get the power of Jesus in you, you will have no motivation or power to live differently."	I was intrigued by this non-critical response and watched a sermon DVD he gave me called *A Dog's Faith* about how to become a Christian. I then went through a book called *Gospel Revolution* with him during our lunch hours. Somewhere through that process I believed in Jesus.	I am only feeling new bit by bit. I guess it is like driving into a new country: your passport gets stamped "new life" but the landscape only changes gradually. But I am thrilled that I am a completely righteous child of God, although learning to live righteous is taking a while!

TOOL 2
ANSWERING OBJECTIONS

Thoughtful enquirers into Christianity sometimes have some questions that need answering to some degree before they feel able to seriously consider Christianity. Here are some common objections and some bite-sized responses. They are not complete responses or the only responses, but they should point you in the right direction.

Objection: Christianity is exclusive and intolerant. There can't be only one way to God.

Answer: Any other view is equally exclusive and intolerant. Insisting there are multiple ways to God is exclusive and intolerant of those who believe there is just one way to God. If you claim that Christianity doesn't have a monopoly on spiritual truth then you are simultaneously claiming that you do have a monopoly on spiritual truth, because you would need to, to know that Christianity doesn't. Or to put it another way, Christianity claims that Jesus is the only path that leads to God, but others claim there are many paths to God. But, to know there are multiple paths, you would have had to see the whole map, the very thing that you are frustrated with Christians for claiming to be able to do.

Objection: Christianity is a straight jacket that will remove my freedom. It is too confining.

Answer: Freedom is not the absence of restrictions. Being free to do whatever we like sounds like freedom until you stop to think more carefully. Defining freedom as the absence of restrictions is shallow. Financial freedom is only attained through submitting oneself to the "restriction" of working hard to make money. An athlete restricts herself to training so that she might enjoy the freedom of success. A fish might look jealously at a bird in the sky and, craving that freedom, might leap out onto the beach. Now it is "free" from the restriction of water, is it actually free? More like dead. Clearly, freedom isn't the absence of restrictions; rather it is choosing to live

within the restrictions that actually free us. The restrictions of Christianity are for our true freedom and good.

Objection: I can't agree with Christianity because it is responsible for so much injustice.

Answer 1: That doesn't mean Christianity is wrong. Yes, wrong things have been done in the name of Christianity, but this doesn't mean that Christianity is wrong; it means that some people have done wrong things in the name of something that is right.

Answer 2: We don't use that logic for other issues. Violence in the name of a good cause isn't restricted to Christianity or even religion, as wars have been fought in the name of race, politics, and even human reasoning. Does that make those things wrong?

Objection: The Christian God can't be loving if he sends people to hell.

Answer: People choose hell. The Bible does teach that hell is a reality, but it teaches that in one sense, hell is for those people who have chosen it. When a person on earth rejects God, he owns that decision into eternity, which is hell. C.S. Lewis referred to hell as the "greatest monument to human freedom". He wrote, "There are only two kinds of people: those who say 'Thy will be done' to God and those to whom God in the end says 'Thy will be done'. All that are in hell chose it. No soul that seriously and constantly desires God will ever miss it." [237]

Objection: Christianity is false because the Bible is full of errors.

Answer: Please show me some, and I will get back to you. This is a serious answer to the objection because many people just assume the Bible is full of errors, but haven't ever actually looked into it. If they can point out some apparent errors, ask your church

[237] C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain. Pg. 116, MacMillan, 1961, and The Great Divorce, Pg. 69, Macmillan, 1963.

leaders for help and then get back to your friend, or to give them Tim Keller's book *The Reason for God*, which deals with this objection and many others.

Objection: God can't exist because if he did he would stop evil and suffering.

Answer 1: The issue is actually us. Ask the person what kind of suffering they mean. If they say something like a fatal car crash due to a drunk driver, point out that they are actually asking why God allows people to make evil choices. Then you could ask if they have ever made any choice that has caused suffering to another person. Yes. So, someone else is saying, "God, why did you allow that person to do that to me?" You are part of the problem. To remove the problem would be to remove you. Is that preferable to a world without evil? Are you willing to own such a "solution"?

Answer 2: Definition of evil points to God. Although reconciling the presence of evil and suffering to the existence of God is a challenge, it is a bigger challenge to reconcile it to there not being a God. Think about it: evolution tells us that disease and death are just part of natural selection, and so we should accept these "evils" as a natural part of life. But this is no answer at all, because everything inside us screams that these things are not natural. From where do we get our sense of natural and unnatural, right and wrong, good and evil, if not from God? Reflecting back on his atheist days, C.S. Lewis said, "My argument *against* God was that the universe seemed cruel and unjust. But how then had I got this idea of just and unjust? What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?" He's saying that our very definition of evil and suffering is more of an indication *for* God than *against* God.

Answer 3: Our minds are finite. Within this objection lies the assertion that if evil and suffering seem pointless to *me* then they must be pointless. This is a fair boast in one's cognitive abilities! Remember, if you have a God powerful enough to be angry with for allowing evil and suffering, then at the same time you have a God wise enough to have good reasons for allowing evil and suffering.

Answer 4: Why the cross? If God is a bad God, then why did He come earth to die on the cross, one day to bring about an end to all evil and suffering? One thing that we can't say after seeing the cross is, "God doesn't care about evil and suffering."

Answer 5: A blessing in disguise. The "blessing" of evil and suffering and death is that it forces us to face the reality of death, and causes us to think about God in a way that we otherwise probably wouldn't. What if God allowed earthly calamity to come our way to save us from the greater calamity of an eternity without him? Would that not be the action of a loving God?

Objection: I believe in science, which disproves Christianity.

Answer 1: Science is limited. Science cannot measure the supernatural world. By definition it can only measure or record the natural world. Trying to prove God through science is like trying to measure wind speed with a thermometer. And even then, science cannot measure much of the natural world. To say, "something is only true if you can measure it scientifically" is not true. For example, science can't measure love. "My girlfriend loves me" cannot be scientifically proven. Rather, we believe things because they make the most sense of the world as we see it. We conclude our girlfriend loves us because that makes most sense of her behaviour. So the real question is "does belief or non-belief in God make *most sense* of the world around us?" This leads us into the second part of the answer:

Answer 2: A world without God takes more scientific explanation than a world with God. The intricate nature of creation, our awareness of good and evil, our conscience, the occurrence of miracles, the fact that God-awareness (in some form) is present in all cultures, all take more explaining (or are impossible to explain) if there is no God. Denying the existence of God causes science more problems than it solves, which is why through the centuries many famous scientists have been Christians.

Objection: I am already a Christian because I try to live a good life.

Answer: Christianity is fundamentally not about moral living. Whilst a Christian will hopefully live a "good life", it is not what makes him a Christian, and to be clear, the Bible is full of stories of people living good lives who are rejected by God. In the Parable of the Two Sons, the Good Boy stayed at home working the farm, and the Bad Boy hit the road plunging into sex, drugs and rock 'n roll. The shocking punch line of the story is the Good Boy being rejected by God and the Bad Boy being accepted. If you rely on moral living to get right with God, rather than on His gracious mercy, the Bible says that you are cursed and severed from Christ.[238] Good people and bad people are equally undeserving of God's grace. The Gospel is not a list of *things to do*; it is a *gift to be received*.

Objection: I am already a Christian because I was brought up in a Christian home.

Answer: Being born and raised on a farm doesn't make you an animal. Being born and raised in a garage doesn't make you a car. Being born and raised in Christian home doesn't make you a Christian. God doesn't have grandchildren. Just children. You must respond to the Gospel for yourself.

[238] Gal 3:10, Gal 5:4

TOOL 3
CONCISE GOSPEL PRESENTATIONS

Here are five different Gospel presentations to help you explain the essence of the Gospel to a friend in a just a few minutes:

1. Eternal Life
2. The Great Exchange
3. World Renewal
4. Sin is idolatry
5. Grace vs Works

Why are there five options?

Because the Gospel is so multi-faceted[239] there are many different ways of explaining it to someone. Jesus presented the Gospel in different ways to different people: He used the metaphor of *rebirth* with Nicodemus in John 3, but the language of *satisfaction* to the Woman at the well in John 4. To the paralytic He spoke of *sin* directly, but to the Rich Young Ruler He spoke of the folly of trusting in *good works*. Clearly, we should present the Gospel in a way that works best for the person to whom we are talking.

Which presentation for which person?

Eternal Life and **The Great Exchange** both deal with sin, forgiveness and eternal life, and are suitable for children, some teenagers, and adults who are morally traditional in their thinking and comfortable with the concept of right and wrong. The strength of these outlines is their focus on the individual's need for forgiveness before a holy God. Their weakness is that they present a rather "individualistic" Gospel.

World Renewal works towards the need for personal renewal within the greater context of world renewal. It presents the Gospel along the lines of Creation-Fall-Redemption-Consummation, i.e. how Man's

[239] See Chapter 1 for a definition of the Gospel.

wrong choices have steadily turned the world into a mess, and how through the Gospel God has already begun the process of world renewal, and how one day He will complete the process. This outline is suitable for hippies, tree-huggers, herbal-tree drinkers, and basically any modern person who has some kind of social conscience and admits the world is in a mess!

Sin is idolatry is suitable for the modern Westerner whose individualism and relativism has dulled his conscience to right and wrong, especially if defined by someone other than him, even God. Because of his cultural conditioning, he is resistant to the head-on "you are a sinner" approach, but more open to the "sin is idolatry" approach, which is the most fundamental definition of sin. The Bible defines sin as "doing bad things" (or failure to do good things) and also "making good things ultimate things," i.e. idolatry. When he hears that it is impossible to be satisfied and happy through building his life on anything other than God (such as career, money, relationships, pleasure), he tends to offer less resistance, because he is usually already aware of the anxiety involved in the pursuit of happiness from earthly things, and has probably already experienced the feeling of emptiness that comes soon after achieving a goal. Simply, due to his cultural conditioning, he is able to see sin more easily as "worshipping something other than God" than he is "doing bad things."

Grace vs. Works is best for people who mistakenly think that they are Christians because they live a good life. Tim Keller calls this group "older brothers" after the do-gooder older brother in the Parable of the Two Sons who missed salvation because of his misplaced trust in his moral living.

How can I start the conversation?

Either you initiate or you respond. You could initiate by saying something like, "Hey, you know I'm a Christian, right? I have been meaning to ask if I could take a couple of minutes to show you what that is." Or, they will say something in a conversation that gives you a way in. They might ask you directly what you believe, or they might

say something like, "Of course, I try to pray and go to church but I don't think I am cut out for religion." To which you could respond, "Well that actually isn't what Christianity is about. Let me show you a couple of verses that briefly explain what it means to be a Christian."

How should I do the presentation?

Get these five presentations into your head so you are "always prepared to make a defence for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15) and are able to steer a conversation about spiritual things towards one of these options. Ideally, if you can remember the Bible verses, you'll be able to point your friend to where these things are said in the Bible. Or, you could print out one of the presentations and simply talk him through it saying something like, "I have a few verses here that show what it means to be a Christian…".

Here are the five presentations:

ETERNAL LIFE

The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus. (Rom 6:23)

Wage
Wage means "consequence". We earn money from our boss for working, and death from a holy God for sinning. Before a holy God sin is that serious.

Death
Death means being spiritually dead towards God in this life, and eternally dead to God in living hell when we die.

Eternal life
God has a gift for us of eternal life. This is the exact opposite of the death that we have just talked about. It means becoming alive to God in this life, and living with God for eternity.

Gift
Eternal life is a gift for us from God. Can you earn a gift? No. This gift cannot be earned through moral living, but only gratefully received as a free gift.

In Christ Jesus
This is the key part. Eternal life comes in the "package" of Christ Jesus. So, if you want to receive eternal life you must receive Jesus. This is why people sometimes talk about becoming a Christian as "receiving Jesus". Eternal life comes "in Christ Jesus" because eternal life is only possible through the forgiveness of sin, and forgiveness of sin is only possible by gratefully believing that Jesus took your place and died for your sin. Because of your sin you must die. But on the cross, Jesus died as your substitute. He took your wage of death. If you gratefully believe that, and repent of your sin, forgiveness and eternal life is yours.

THE GREAT EXCHANGE

Jesus Christ, who knew no sin, became sin, that we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21)

Martin Luther considered this verse to be one of the best portraits of the Gospel, and he called it, "The Great Exchange." The two characters in the plot are a **holy God** and a **sinful human race**.

God is altogether **holy**, and he abhors **sin**. Sin is so serious that not only can God have nothing to do with it, but He demands the punishment of death for all sinners. And the Bible is clear that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Note that God does not compare us to other people, but that everyone, from Hitler to Mother Teresa, has fallen short of His glorious **holiness**, and are **sinners**. Certainly, some people sin more than others, but just one sin is enough for us to fall short of God's glory.

God is not only **perfectly holy**, but He is **perfectly merciful**, and in love He hatched a plan to ensure that the full sentence of death against sin was carried out, but that there was a way of escape for sinners. The plan was the Great Exchange. Jesus the Holy One, took the sin of each sinner on Himself, and died on the cross as a substitute for all who would believe in Him.

He became what we are, sinners, so **we** might become what He is, righteous. **He** got what we deserve, death, so that **we** might receive what only he can give, life. When you trust in Jesus and His work on the cross, your sins are forgiven and you are declared righteous by God, the ultimate judge. The perfectly righteous life of Christ is attributed to you as if you lived it. The Gospel is not a record of good people earning God's blessing, but bad people receiving God's blessing because Jesus earned it for them. The Gospel is that God treated Jesus the way we deserved and He daily treats us the way Jesus deserved.

WORLD RENEWAL

The world was once perfect
God made the world perfect with no evil, sickness or death (Gen 1:25).

Then Man's evil ruined it
In the Garden of Eden, and continuing now on a daily basis, Man chooses to live in a manner contrary to God. The inevitable result is a world in a mess, full of pain, injustice, and environmental destruction. As a result, "all creation has been groaning up until the present time" (Rom 8:22).

Then Jesus came to earth to begin the process of renewal
Jesus not only preached about the Kingdom of Heaven, but demonstrated it by healing people, speaking justice, and bringing peace to relationships.

And Jesus will return to completely restore it
God has placed a limit on this era of earth, and in due course Christ will come again to complete the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21 and Col 1:20), and create a new heavens and new earth that will be a place of perfection, void of suffering, pain and death (Rev 21:3).

Individuals can become part of this renewal right now
The message of the Gospel is that each of us can plug into this process of cosmic restoration now. But being included in this renewal is not automatic – we need to make sure we're included. All of creation will one day be **born again**, but God has begun this process by offering new birth to people right now (Jn 3:3,7). Those who accept this offer by faith not only enjoy God's life within starting now (2 Cor 4:16), but they are assured of a place in the perfect future age. And as renewed ones, they get to know God now, and get to participate in the process of restoration by working for justice, fighting poverty, caring for the environment and so on. Essentially, they get to bring something of heaven to earth now.

SIN IS IDOLATRY

Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? (Isa 55:2)

Psychologists say our deepest need is to feel a sense of identity, purpose, and significance. Simply, we long to be satisfied. To this end we pursue (worship or idolise) things we believe will satisfy us such as success, money, career or a relationship. But we soon realise that these things can't satisfy us. Everyone knows that empty feeling that follows achieving that goal, that promotion, buying that car, getting that girlfriend, and so on.

Jesus said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry." (Jn 6:35)

In contrast to all these things that leave us still feeling empty, Jesus offers total personal satisfaction and fulfilment. Life satisfaction can only be found in Him because only the Creator can ultimately satisfy the Created.

The First Commandment: You shall have no other gods before me. (Ex 20:2)

Note that the most fundamental definition of sin is not "doing something bad" but looking for meaning and satisfaction from any place other than God. Making a good thing into an ultimate thing is idolatry, which is the essence of sin. So, what is the answer?

You turned away from idols to serve the true and living God, Jesus Christ. (1 Thes 1:9)

The answer is to turn from building our lives on these things and build them on God. "Turning" means to repent of giving your love and devotion to anything other than Jesus Christ, and to now worship him and look only to Him for identity, purpose and peace. This is what you were designed to do and how you were designed to be happy. This is what it means to become a Christian.

GRACE VS. WORKS

For it is <u>by grace</u> you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the <u>gift</u> of God, <u>not by works</u> so that no one can boast. (Eph 2:8-10)

From a young age we learn that we get what we deserve for what we do, whether it is which class or team we are in at school, or the level of our pay-grade. This causes us to think that God divides the world into *deserving* and *undeserving* based on the things that we do. And if we do more good things than bad things, or more good things than other people, then God will surely accept us. But this is not how the Gospel works. The Gospel is about **grace**, about getting what we don't deserve, not about getting what we do deserve. God's acceptance of us is a **gift**. It is **not by works**. We have nothing to boast about except God's mercy to us.

A shocking punch line (Lk 15:11-32)

Whilst a Christian will hopefully increasingly live a "good life", it is not what makes him a Christian, and to be clear, the Bible is full of stories of people living good lives who are rejected by God. In the Parable of the Two Sons, the Good Boy stayed at home working the farm, and the Bad Boy hit the road plunging into sex, drugs and rock 'n roll. The shocking punch line of the story is the Good Boy being rejected by God and the Bad Boy being accepted.

If you rely on moral living to get right with God, rather than on His gracious mercy, the Bible says that you are cursed and severed from Christ.[240] Good people and bad people are equally undeserving of God's grace. The Gospel is not a list of *things to do*; it is a *gift to be received*.

[240] Gal 3:10, Gal 5:4

TOOL 4
HELPFUL RESOURCES

It can be very helpful to give an enquirer a resource that they can read, listen to, or watch, especially if it is prefaced with, "I found this particularly helpful and I think you might too." Three important resources to stock up on and keep in supply are:

1. A resource that presents the Gospel

You need a resource that clearly explains what it means to become a Christian. We recommend the booklet *Crossing the Line of Faith*, and the DVD/CD/Download of a message I preached called *A Dog's Faith*. Both available at the GodFirst website.

2. A resource that develops the Gospel

You need a resource that goes beyond simply presenting the ABC of Gospel salvation, and shows more of how the Gospel changes a person's life. I recommend *Gospel Revolution* for this, as it is useful for the unbeliever, new believer and seasoned believer. You could say to your friend, "This short book has helped me to access the power of the Gospel in my life. Let's each read a chapter a week, and do the study guide, and meet up for half an hour each week to discuss the learnings from that chapter."

3. A resource that defends the Gospel

There are a handful of objections to Christianity that the thinking unbeliever may need answering, or partly answering, before being able to cross the line of faith. Helpful books to give them include *The Reason for God* by Tim Keller, and *If God then what?* by Andrew Wilson. Another, more philosophical read is *A Shot of Faith to the Head* by Mitch Stokes.

SIX: **DEFENDING THE GOSPEL**

The Bible presents the Gospel as something that we should fight for, not literally with violence, but through holding to the purity of the Gospel message, and not allowing it to be warped by **opposing worldviews**. Paul said that we should contend[241] for, and defend[242] the Gospel, because it can be perverted,[243] counterfeited,[244] and opposed.[245] Four of the most substantial opponents of the Gospel are **relativism**, **moralism**, **religion** and **materialism**. They are all counterfeit gospels that work to pervert the true Gospel. We will look at each of these in turn:

Opponent 1: Relativism

Relativism teaches that truth is relative. It is what you want it to be. Make up your own rules and do whatever feels right. It has existed in many forms over the years, most recently as post-modernism. It targets both unbelievers and believers.

Unbelievers and Relativism

Relativism works to keep the unbeliever out of the Kingdom of God by teaching four main things:

1. There is no absolute truth so there is no God. Starting with the premise that truth is what we think it should be is obviously an exercise in self-deification, because we are assuming the God-role of defining right and wrong, true and false. And self-deification is essentially God-elimination. No absolute truth means no absolute God. Critics of relativism raise their hands straight away and ask the relativist whether there is someone out there doing something that

[241] Phil 1:27
[242] Phil 1:7, 16
[243] Gal 1:7
[244] 2 Cor 11:4, Gal 1:6
[245] 1 Thes 2:2, 2 Pet 2

they think that person should stop doing, although that person thinks it is fine to keep doing it. The answer is inevitably "yes," indicating to the critic that even the relativist does actually believe that there is some kind of absolute truth out there that is not defined by us. The most reasonable source of this truth is a God. From where do we get our universal, innate sense of right and wrong if not from God?

2. Christianity's exclusive claim on spiritual truth is absurd. In John 14:6, Jesus claims to not just know all truth, but to actually *be* Truth. Then, further exasperating the relativist, He proceeds to claim that He is the only true path to God! The relativist retorts, "Aha! Just as I thought. Christians claim an exclusive monopoly on the nature of spiritual truth!" This is true, but crucially, it is no more of an exclusive claim than the one the relativist is making, namely that spiritual truth is relative. The relativist's claim that spiritual truth is relative is very much an exclusive claim about the nature of spiritual truth. He too is claiming a monopoly on understanding the nature of spiritual truth.

Am I making sense? If you claim that Christianity doesn't have a monopoly on spiritual truth then you are simultaneously claiming that you do have a monopoly on spiritual truth, because you would need to, to know that Christianity doesn't. Or to put it another way, Christianity claims that Jesus is the only path to God, and Relativism claims that many paths to God. But, to know that, the relativist would have had to see the whole map, the very thing that he is frustrated with Christians for claiming to be able to do.

3. Relativism brings inner peace and Christianity brings inner turmoil. Relativism says that rules and rights and wrongs lead to inner turmoil, guilt and a tormented conscience. By contrast, being able to make up your own rules and rights and wrongs leads to inner peace. British rocker Lilly Allen is not convinced. In her hit song *The Fear*, she sings of the tyranny of Relativism:

"I don't know what's right and what's real anymore.
And I don't know how I'm meant to feel anymore.
And when do you think it will all become clear?
'Cuz I'm being taken over by the Fear."

Why might the lack of absolute truth produce fear? Because humans are designed to **embrace truth** not **invent truth**. Pilate's question[246] during Jesus' trial, "What is truth?" illustrates our longing for an exit from the labyrinth of relativism. Little did Pilate know that Jesus, *the* Truth, *the* Prince of Peace, was but metres from where he stood.

4. Relativism brings freedom and Christianity brings restrictions. Being free to do whatever we think is right or wrong certainly sounds like freedom, until you stop to think. Defining freedom as the absence of restrictions is shallow. Financial freedom is only attained through submitting oneself to the "restriction" of working hard to make money. An athlete restricts herself to training so that she might enjoy the freedom of success. A fish might look jealously at a bird in the sky or a person on the beach and, craving that freedom, might leap out onto the beach. Now that it is "free" from the restriction of water, is it actually free? More like dead. Clearly, freedom isn't the absence of restrictions; rather it is choosing and living within the correct restrictions that actually free us. Tim Keller refers to these as "liberating restrictions". Imagine God is a watchmaker and you are a wristwatch, and He has made you non-waterproof. You would not, in the name of craving freedom, submerge yourself in water. That would lead to damage not freedom. Similarly, God has made us non-sin-proof, and so submerging yourself in sin will not lead to freedom, but rather to damage. The only restrictions that Christ lays on us are for our good, for our freedom.

Let's turn now to see how believers must also guard the Gospel within them from the influence of Relativism.

[246] Jn 18:38

Believers and Relativism

Not to miss the obvious, the believer needs to guard himself from slipping into believing any of the four above-mentioned tenets of Relativism to any degree. When his faith is a bit low, traces of Relativism in him could weaken his faith in the existence of God, or weaken his resolve in the exclusive claims of Christ. Or maybe when feeling vulnerable to temptation he can slip into relativist deception and think that Christianity is a killjoy: a straightjacket stifling who he really is. Alternatively, he might begin to pick and choose which parts of the Bible he believes. Believers must beware Relativism.

Let's turn to another opponent of the Gospel:

Opponent 2: Moralism

Moralism teaches that the meaning of life is essentially about doing good. The definition of good varies from Moralist to Moralist. For some, honesty and generosity loom largest, for others sexual ethics are the key area, for others it is environmentalism, and so on. It can pervert the Gospel for both the unbeliever and believer. Here's how:

Unbelievers and Moralism

Moralism works to keep the unbeliever out of the Kingdom of God by teaching that:

1. God accepts do-gooders. Assuming the Moralist is God-aware, he will expand this thesis to God accepting or rejecting people based on their level of "goodness". Closely linked to this is the second tenet of Moralism:

2. God compares us to other people. Moralists imagine that God places everyone on a morality graph, with Mother Teresa at the top, Hitler near the bottom and Justin Timberlake fans right at the bottom. And then we imagine ourselves somewhere in the top half, and assume that God will, at some point into the future, divide it

approximately in the middle banishing the bottom group to hell and welcoming our group into heaven.

This worldview is of course the **antithesis of the true Gospel.** As we spent all of Chapter Two saying, the Gospel is not about good people *earning* God's favour, but bad people *receiving* it because Jesus earned it for them. And, God does not compare us to the performance of other people, but against the sinless standard of a Holy God.[247] In Luke 18 Jesus tells the story of two men praying. The first man, a Moralist, prayed an eloquent prayer telling God how good he himself was, and concluded by thanking God he was not as bad as the man praying next to him. The second man, a dishonest social outcast, prayed a humble prayer to God asking for mercy. Guess which one Jesus said was approved by God?

The moral of this parable is not that "bad" people are automatically accepted by God, but that moral people certainly aren't. The true Gospel teaches that good people don't go to heaven. Forgiven people do. In fact, good people don't actually exist, as all have fallen short of God's sinless standard. Christianity is not good behaviour to be done; rather it is good news to be believed. And, when you believe in Jesus, you are placed "in Him" and His perfectly good, ultimately moral life is accredited to you.

In the absence of grasping these Gospel truths, the Moralist will remain unsaved considering himself to be either **above** or **beyond** God's grace. If, like the first man in this parable, he thinks he is doing better than others, then he is *above* needing Jesus as his Saviour, because he already has one – himself. Alternatively, if he considers himself worse than others, he concludes he is *beyond* the reach of God's grace. Either way, He misses out on an eternity with God and has to face the terror or the coming judgement[248] without the assurance that Christ is his Saviour.

[247] Rom 3:23
[248] 1 Thes 1:10

Believers and Moralism

Once you cross the line of faith, you still need to guard yourself against Moralism. Moralism tries to sneak into and pervert the Gospel by telling us that God approves of us more if, for example, we pray more. As we found out in Chapter Four, praying and other such "spiritual disciplines" are to be encouraged and are certainly activities that God approves of, but Moralism will go a step further and imply that God's *fundamental* approval of you increases in proportion to the amount that you pray.

Moralism is often rife in Sunday School where kids are taught that they should pray because **God loves children that pray**. Of course God loves children who pray, but the mistake is implying that God loves children *because* they pray. Rather teach them that because of Jesus' great act of love on the cross, we are now friends of God, and can talk to Him through prayer.[249] And wonderfully, whether we pray or not He loves us just the same. Doesn't that just make you want to pray?

Moralism can easily sneak in and distort the purity of the Gospel in the preaching of any passage in the Bible. Take the **story of Jonah**: a moralistic approach teaches that disobedient people get swallowed by whales, or similar, so don't be disobedient! That is a counterfeit, moralistic gospel. The true Gospel lesson of Jonah is that God so loved the Ninevites that He even used a grumpy, disobedient believer to share the Gospel with them. And God graciously uses us even when we are disobedient. Given that glorious Gospel truth, let's cheerfully obey our wonderful God!

Or what about **David and Goliath**? Moralism teaches that I am David and that if I imitate David's courageous example then I too can overcome the giants in life. This approach is not altogether void of merit, but the problem is that it is void of Jesus, and you can get the same message from Dr Phil, Oprah or the mosque down the road. It is possible to preach the Bible without preaching Jesus and when you

[249] Ex 33:11

do that, all you've got is Moralism: an attempt at changing behaviour without the Jesus factor. Do you see how Moralism tries to make us the hero of every story, whereas the true Gospel makes Jesus the hero of every story, which in turn empowers us to live a godly life?

Simply, moralism makes the believer miserable. It forces him into one of two states: if he thinks he is doing quite well at the moment he will be self-loving. Or, if he thinks he is under-performing he will self-loathing. This will make him either proud or depressed, and depending on which, he will probably either ooze a vibe of superiority or inferiority. **Moralism is miserable.**

Opponent 3: Religion

The word "religion" is sometimes used positively in the Bible (as in James 1:27), but here I am referring to **false religion** denoting some kind of striving for acceptance with God through works. In many ways Religion is a form of Moralism, and it can pervert the Gospel for both the unbeliever and believer. Here's how:

Unbelievers and Religion

Religion is Satan's most potent weapon in keeping people from crossing the line of faith, by making them think that they already have. Religious people mistakenly think they are saved because they have believed the counterfeit gospel of religion that teaches:

1. We get saved through behaviour. In keeping with this belief, the religious person will do certain religious activities such as church attendance and charity, and will therefore conclude he is saved. The true Gospel of course teaches that we believe to be saved, not behave to be saved. Behaviour will follow belief, but the saving bit is believing, not behaving.

2. We get righteous through giving things to God, such as our devotion and our money. The true Gospel tells me I get righteousness

through receiving the free gift of righteousness from God.[250]

3. We get righteous through our own efforts. The true Gospel tells me I get righteousness because of Jesus' effort in living the perfect life and dying the death that I deserved.

Listen, if anyone approaches God in a religious way, no matter how "good" or how sincere they are, God will not accept them. Parable after parable teaches that religious, moralistic people are heading straight for hell. Whether it is religious people, hookers, dishonest tax collectors, or social outcasts, every time it is the religious guy who misses salvation. Jesus said the way is narrow,[251] and that not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord" is really saved.[252] Beware Religion. Revert to Chapter Two repeatedly to underline how the Gospel saves us.

Believers and Religion

It is possible to get genuinely saved by believing the true Gospel of grace, but to then slip into legalism because of the strong influence of Religion, and then start to incorporate religious aspects into your relationship with Jesus. This happened to the Galatians who Paul commended for beginning by grace, and then called them fools for "now trying to attain your goal by **human effort**".[253] We know from Chapter Four that making an effort is an essential part of Gospel growth, but the Galatians had got into religious-driven effort, not Gospel-motivated effort.

To switch analogy, they had inappropriately started to incorporate aspects from their previous marriage with **Mr Religion** into their new marriage with **Mr Grace**.[254] Mr Religion was a tyrannical husband who demanded never-ending human effort from them, and even then he wasn't satisfied. They could never do enough. But then, through their death and resurrection "in Christ" they were released from that

[250] Rom 1:17, 3:20-22
[251] Mt 7:14
[252] Mt 7:21
[253] Gal 3:3
[254] An illustration that Paul uses in Rom 7:1-7, first brought alive to me by Terry Virgo.

awful marriage, and married again into a wonderful new marriage with Jesus, Mr Grace. His unconditional love motivated them to the kind of Gospel-motivated effort we read about in Chapters Three and Four. But tragically, a couple of years into their new marriage, a subtle shift occurred. Remembering how they had to make frantic efforts to retain the affections of Mr Religion, they got confused, and started to suspect that their grace-fuelled efforts within their new marriage to Mr Grace were crucial to fundamentally retaining the affections of Jesus. They foolishly began to weave some old religious thread into their new tapestry of grace.

Many years after crossing the line of faith, the great apostle **Peter** fell victim to religion in a similar way, until his friend Paul sorted him out.[255] Reflecting on his religious past, Peter got confused and started to think that certain religious activities were actually a helpful part of the Gospel package, so he started to avoid certain foods and certain people. Whilst having the appearance of godliness they added no value to the Gospel at all,[256] and served only to shroud the purity of the Gospel message of grace. Peter developed a counterfeit Gospel equation along the lines of:

Jesus + Religious Activities = Righteous

How good is your Gospel math? What is your Gospel equation? Remember, the human heart is so inclined to religion that we can easily find unlimited ways to add things to the Gospel.

For instance, when you meet God you may **feel better about yourself** if you have read your Bible and prayed today, and you may feel worse about yourself if you haven't. Maybe you look down on others who don't go to church as often as you do, or think those who do lots of social action are better Christians than you. Whilst prayer, Bible reading and social action are commendable and to be zealously pursued (see Chapter Four), if you think that your heavenly Father's fundamental delight in you is altered by doing or not doing these activities, then you have probably slipped into stinking religious

[255] Gal 2:1-21
[256] How Paul describes religious activities in Col 2:23.

thinking. Don't do it. **Resist religion**. Guard the purity of the true Gospel equation:

Jesus + Nothing = Righteous

Religion produces nothing of the freedom Jesus declared in the Gospel.[257] On the contrary, **religion makes me feel rubbish**. C. J. Mahaney gives the graphic analogy of the how religious thinking can make a Christian into a **plate-spinner**. You know, the circus trick where plates are kept spinning on upright rods? The artist steadily starts to spin different plates, and the excitement mounts as more and more plates are set in motion, whilst the initial plates begin to slow, wobble and crash… unless he gets back to them in time to give them another spin. He tears frantically around the stage trying to keep all these plates spinning. Impossible. Are you frantically trying to keep up with the endless things that you could do to express devotion to Jesus and His cause? Impossible. And miserable.

You see, when religion is driving you, you can never win, because there is always more that you can do. You might have prayed for an hour a day this week, but why didn't you pray for longer? You might be giving about 10% of your income per month to the mission of your local church, but if you *really* loved Jesus it would be more, wouldn't it? Or, having read your Bible every day for a month, you find yourself getting proud. You sinner! Even your good deeds ended in sin!

Religion doesn't enhance holiness. Grace does.[258] **Religion sucks**. Religion tries to con you that your obedience results in God's acceptance. The Gospel tells you that God's acceptance of you results in your ever-increasing obedience towards Him.[259] Religion says, "I love you if you are good. But not if you are naughty. It all depends on you". The Gospel says, "I love you if you are good. I love you if you are naughty. I love you all the time".

[257] Jn 8:36, Gal 5:1
[258] Rom 3:20, Rom 7:8, Gal 3:21, Titus 2: 1-12
[259] 1 Cor 15:10

Opponent 4: Materialism

This is the final opponent of the Gospel that we will look at, and a formidable one it is too. Materialism champions the material aspect of life, particularly money, the currency of material things. At least, materialism is about "looking out for No.1" and can extend all the way through to "get rich or die trying".[260] Jesus Himself acknowledged the power of this Gospel opponent by giving money the status of a rival god:

No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both ***God and Money****.*[261]

Your heart is only big enough for one God: will it be Jesus or Money, the Gospel or Materialism? In the previous verses Jesus said that if we do not break free and stay free from the power of money then He will not be able to trust us with greater responsibility.[262] The stakes are high. Like the previous opponents of the Gospel, Materialism targets both the **unbeliever and the believer** with its false gospel.

Unbelievers and Materialism

In one of His most famous parables, Jesus made a statement to the effect that the "deceitfulness of riches" can "choke" (kill off) the growth of the Gospel in a person.[263] Money is that powerful. Through some type of deception, it can stop someone from getting saved, keeping him or her in a state of unbelief. Materialism deceives the unbeliever by telling him basically one main thing: **Money will be your God so you don't need Jesus.**

As Jesus said in Luke 16, Money is a rival God. And, if Money can convince you that he can offer as much, or more, than Jesus can, then you will not entertain the true Gospel of Jesus. Money makes all manner of god-like promises: he promises to open doors of

[260] Album title by singer 50 Cent.
[261] Lk 16:13
[262] Lk 13:11
[263] Mt 13:22

opportunity for me, such as promotion, wealth and travel. But it's a lie. The only doors that Money might open can close in a flash. It is Jesus who opens doors that no man can shut.[264] Money also claims it can **set me free** from various things such as dependency on others. It says it can make me free to do what I want when I want, not to mention free me to sleep well at night. Liar. More money usually brings more worry, not more freedom. The Son of God is the only one to give true and lasting freedom.[265] And money claims to give me **status.** It might, but it will be hollow and insecure. Real status is found in the Gospel where we are seated in heavenly places with Jesus.[266] That's status. Another of Materialism's favourite lies is, "Just a little bit more money and you will be **satisfied**". Rubbish. "Enough" is never enough. Only Jesus satisfies.[267]

As you can see, like any idol, Money makes all sorts of promises that he can't keep. Probably the greatest god-like promise Money makes is this: **I will provide for you so you don't need a heavenly provider.** Because provision (food and shelter and so on) is one of the essential needs of life, and because money is the currency to buy food and shelter, pursuit of money is a natural instinct. Whilst the Bible certainly exhorts us to be responsible in providing for our needs and the needs of others, it tells us that we are foolish ultimately to look to Money for provision.

The Gospel gives both **pragmatic and spiritual reasons** for looking to the true God – not money – for provision. Pragmatically, Jesus said that money can so easily depreciate and get stolen.[268] Whether in stocks or shares, in banks or under mattresses, money is definitely not able to deliver in terms of provision. Conversely, keeping money in its proper place, and using it for the advance of God's Kingdom results in huge blessing in heaven.[269] Spiritually, the Bible teaches that an inappropriate dependence on Money usually leads to being "pierced through with many griefs".[270] Paul doesn't elaborate on

[264] Rev 3:7
[265] Jn 8:36
[266] Eph 2:6
[267] Jn 6:35
[268] Mt 6:19, 1 Tim 6:17
[269] Mt 6:20, 1 Tim 6:19
[270] 1 Tim 6:10

exactly what that means, but it doesn't sound pretty. But the major point here is that if you believe the promises of materialism then you will register little need for Jesus, the true God, and **remain in an unsaved state of unbelief**. Let's turn now to look at how Materialism also targets the believer.

Believers and Materialism

The believer has become a believer by believing the Gospel, namely that Jesus Christ is the true God, the only Saviour from sin, and the only lasting source of satisfaction. But as we saw in Chapter Three, believers must constantly guard their hearts from idols[271] such as Money, which is done by purposefully and specifically refusing the lie that Money truly satisfies and provides, and purposefully and specifically by believing the Gospel truth that Jesus alone, not Money, truly satisfies and provides. **Here are five new things that we are given in the Gospel** that we need to believe to guard against materialism:

The Gospel has given me a **new provider.** One of the biggest hindrances to generosity can be fear that if we give money away, we will not have enough at the end of the month, or in retirement. But the Gospel assures us that we are now children of God, and that our Heavenly Father will "supply all our needs according to His riches and glory".[272] Believe it. You have His Word on it.

The Gospel has given me a **new promise.** Jesus assures me that what I will sow what I reap.[273] The Gospel promise is, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be poured into your lap. For with the measure that you use it will be measured back to you".[274] God promises the giver a fantastic return on what he gives. Often this return will be financial, although sometimes it will be something even better than finance. God is very happy to give us more money both for our enjoyment and to give more away, but He wants us to acquire it

[271] 1 Jn 5:21
[272] Phil 4:19
[273] 2 Cor 9:6
[274] Lk 6:38, and see Paul's echo of this in 2 Cor 9:6.

through "sowing and reaping" to ensure that we stay free from the love of money. John Bunyan said, "There was a man, some called him mad. The more he gave the more he had." This is the Gospel law of sowing and reaping.

The Gospel has given me a **new goal,** the goal of being effective for Jesus. But as we read previously in Luke 16, money and all it represents, contends with Jesus for the throne of our lives. Paul echoes this saying that pursuit of riches can plunge us into destruction and grief, because "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." [275] Listen carefully: The only sure way to ensure that money does not compromise our new Gospel goal of living flat out for Jesus is to give money away. Actually give it away. And give it to God's purposes on earth as "where your treasure is there you heart will be also".[276] Beware a "materialistic gospel" that is sadly preached it many churches. It over-elevates the truth within the Gospel that God wants to bless us, to the place where the Gospel message becomes "God wants to bless you by making you wealthy, healthy and successful in worldly terms." That is a false gospel often called a "prosperity gospel."

The Gospel has given me a **new mission.** We unpacked this mission in Chapter Five, but the point here is that this mission costs money. Like water, the Gospel is free but the plumbing isn't. Our money is missionary ammunition that should fund our local church's mission to see people saved, added and discipled into the Gospel. Most believers find it a helpful discipline to decide on a monthly amount that they give to the mission of God through their local church. My wife, Ashleigh, and I always give a minimum of 10% of our gross income each month, as we find this a doable amount, even in lean seasons, and a very helpful discipline to keep us free from the love of money.

The Gospel gives me a **new example of giving.** Jesus said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son".[277] When provoking

[275] 1 Tim 6:9-10
[276] Mt 6:21
[277] Jn 3:16

the Corinthians to give, Paul reflected on this Gospel action of God saying, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich." [278] Jesus gave all of Himself for us. This is magnificent motivation to give our money away to advance His cause on the earth and answers the question, "how much should I give?" Give as much as you possibly can! Like anything that we are serious about, we need to set goals and targets to help us maintain effectiveness.

Check out these magnificent verses:

"And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints." (2 Cor 8:1-4)

What a great attitude! They saw giving as a privilege to contend for and they even gave "beyond" their ability. What a thrilling way to live. Do you see how the Gospel empowers us to **live free of the snare of Materialism**?

A Final Word

Although Chapter Six has officially ended, I want to wrap up the Gospel Revolution by saying a few things by way of summary:

Like Paul, **be unashamed of the Gospel**.[279] Do not be ashamed of it as you speak about it to those who may not believe it, and do not be ashamed of it for yourself by doubting that it really is the solution to every problem. It is. Jesus is.

[278] 2 Cor 8:7-9
[279] Rom 1:16, 2 Tim 1:8,12

Secondly, **give your life completely for the Gospel**,[280] like Paul considering yourself a servant of the Gospel.[281] Paradoxically, by giving your life to Jesus you do not lose it, but you gain it.[282] Plugging into the mission of God frees me from the suffocating smallness of a life centred around me. In Christ I find out who I really am, what I was really created for,[283] and how really to live.[284]

Thirdly, **stay accountable in the Gospel** in the sense that you constantly check with other mature believers that you are correctly believing, applying and growing in the Gospel. Even Paul checked out the validity of the Gospel he was preaching with other senior leaders in Jerusalem.[285] One of the best ways to stay accountable in the Gospel is the next point.

Fourthly, make sure you are **part of a Gospel community**, a local church. Local churches display "the manifold wisdom of God" and the "purpose of God through Jesus Christ."[286] Make sure it is a Gospel-centred church that is "double impact" in the way that it holds out a pure Gospel to both unbelievers and believers. Make sure it is not riddled with any of the enemies of the Gospel from in Chapter Six.

Finally, **get convinced of the Gospel yourself**. Paul spoke of the Gospel of Jesus as "his Gospel",[287] which is how it should feel for you. Understand it and own it for yourself. You have been entrusted[288] with it. Proclaim it and defend it. J.D. Crowley may have the final word:

"I want to take my last breath having guarded the Gospel, proclaimed the Gospel, suffered for the Gospel, and having passed it on unchanged to the next generation."

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[280] Rom 1:1, Eph 3:7, Mk 8:35, Mk 10:29, Eph 3:7, 2 Cor 8:18, Phil 1:12, 2 Tim 1:8
[281] Eph 3:7
[282] Mt 10:39
[283] Eph 2:10
[284] Jn 10:10
[285] Gal 2:1-11
[286] Eph 3:7-12
[287] Rom 2:16, Rom 16:25, 2 Tim 2:8. And also "our Gospel" in 1 Thes 1:5 and 2 Thes 2:14
[288] 1 Thes 2:4, 1 Tim 1:11, Gal 2:7, Rom 1:1-2

STUDY GUIDE

The purpose of the study guide is to help you **grasp and apply the key concepts**. It is divided into three parts: *Scratching the Surface; Going Deeper;* and *So What?* The answers to the *Scratching the Surface* questions can be found within the text. *Going Deeper* draws you into interpreting what the text means, and the *So What?* section helps you apply what you have learned to everyday life.

Some of the questions are challenging, and some are fairly straightforward, but all assist in what Martin Luther referred to as **"beating the gospel into our heads".**

With the Gospel being of "first importance" (1 Cor 15:3), doing this study guide with diligence and faith will help you become a Gospel-centred believer who increasingly **thinks, speaks and lives** the glorious Gospel.

ONE: **DEFINING THE GOSPEL**

Scratching the Surface

List the three main Gospel themes that run from Genesis to Revelation. Can you think of any others?

What do you understand by the "full" Gospel?

In your own words explain why it is so important to understand the "personal" aspects of Gospel *within* the "universal" aspects of the Gospel.

Going Deeper

A major Gospel theme is that God wants a *People*. How does this revelation affect how you outwork your Christianity?

Is the mega-theme of God's presence / Spirit something you saw before? How might it impact your life?

How is your worldview and lifestyle impacted by understanding the "renewal of all things" element of the Gospel?

Give a few reasons why can we say, "the Gospel is Jesus".

If Jesus is at the centre of Gospel, how is the Cross at the centre of the centre?

So What?

Which of the nine aspects of the Gospel have been the biggest revelation to you, and why?

Can you point to a moment when you first believed/accepted the Gospel? If yes, how did it feel?

TWO: **SAVED BY THE GOSPEL**

Scratching the Surface

Give four key words to describe how we are saved by Jesus.

List three reasons why we need to receive God's righteousness.

What are the two ways to "miss" salvation?

What happened in the "Great Exchange"?

According to Rom 10:9, what must you do to receive Jesus' righteousness (be saved)?

Going Deeper

In your own words explain how Christianity is not essentially about "being good".

What do you understand by "saved by grace"?

How can you be sure that you are really forgiven and accepted as God's child forever?

What does it mean to be *united* to Christ?

Why is it important to be baptised as a believer?

So What?

In terms of "seeing Jesus", what are some of the things God has used to open your eyes to see who Jesus really is?

If you were asked the question: "Have you received God's gift of righteousness?" What would you say?

If you have not yet responded to the Gospel, is there anything that would stop you from responding right now?

Have you been water baptised since you received the Gospel? If not, what is stopping you?

THREE: **CHANGED BY THE GOSPEL**

Scratching the Surface

What are our two sources of behaviour that the Gospel is able to change?

What are three key aspects of our new Gospel identity?

What are three important things to understand about our hearts?

Going Deeper

Explain how truly believing your new Gospel identity should affect the way you behave.

How is the Gospel able to "win" a wayward heart (a heart that always pursues happiness)?

How is the Gospel able to "win" a hard heart (a heart that resists rules but receives the Gospel)?

Why does the heart worship things other than Jesus?

In your own words, explain the three layers of sin.

So What?

In each of the tables below, give a real-life example of a sin in your life, the idolatry driving that sin, the disbelief in the Gospel driving that idolatry, and the aspect of the Gospel that you need to believe to change your attitude and behaviour.

Sin/struggle	
Idolatry	
Gospel disbelief	
What part of the Gospel do I need to believe?	

Sin/struggle	
Idolatry	
Gospel disbelief	
What part of the Gospel do I need to believe?	

FOUR: **GROWING IN THE GOSPEL**

Scratching the Surface

List the five ways you can be positioned to grow in the Gospel.

List the three motivations to grow in the Gospel.

What are the two things mentioned that can obstruct your growth in the Gospel?

Going Deeper

Which of the five ways of staying positioned to receive the Gospel do you feel strongest at, and weakest at?

Do you have a regular time and place to read the Bible and pray? If not, how could you build this into your daily rhythm?

Are you stronger at planned or spontaneous prayer? How could you do more of the one you are weaker at?

Which of the benefits of worship do you appreciate most, and why?

Pick one of the three motivations to grow in the Gospel and briefly explain how it motivates you to grow in the Gospel.

So What?

Try using a passage of Scripture to help you worship and pray. Did it help you?

Are you confident that you are filled with the Spirit? If not, what is your next step in that direction?

Are you a member of a church? If not, do you have one in mind that you could join?

Knowing yourself better than anyone, if you were the devil, how would you attack you? How could you get stronger in this area?

FIVE: **ADVANCING THE GOSPEL**

Scratching the Surface

List five biblical bases for a theology of mission.

List three hindrances to mission.

List two biblical provocations to mission.

List six basic skills for mission.

Give three reasons why modern city-dwellers need a Christian friend to help them come to faith.

Going Deeper

What was your standout moment in the section on the theology of mission? Why?

Which of the three hindrances to mission hinder you the most?

So What?

List your "incubator" friends, and some action points on how you can better leverage your existing rhythms of life to ensure you prioritise friendship time with them.

How could you "better engage on spiritual things" with each of these friends?

Prepare and practise a 30 second and 3 minute gospel-centred testimony.

Get familiar and practised in answering the objections to Christianity.

Which Gospel Presentation(s) is most appropriate for your group of friends? Practice that one(s) until you feel confident and fluent.

Which resources do you need to stock up on so that you are ready to give them to others?

SIX: **DEFENDING THE GOSPEL**

Scratching the Surface

List the four things that relativism teaches.

Finish the sentence: Moralism teaches that the meaning of life is essentially about….

List the three teachings of (false) religion that trick people into thinking they are saved.

Mention three of the lies that Materialism tells.

Going Deeper

In your own words, describe how Relativism is the antithesis of the Gospel.

Explain how the Moralist would consider himself to be either above or beyond God's grace.

How can religion keep someone from entering the Kingdom of God?

What do you understand by the concept "Jesus + Nothing"?

In your opinion, what is the biggest lie that Materialism tells?

So What?

How could you respond to someone who claimed that all truth is relative?

How could you respond to someone who claimed that the restrictions of Christianity limit a person's freedom?

Illustrating from your own life, how can Moralism or Religion influence a believer?

There are five "new" things that we are given to believe in the Gospel that will help safeguard us against Materialism. Which of these do you struggle to believe and apply the most?

After the end of Chapter Six, five things were mentioned by way of summary. Which of them do you need to work on the most at the moment?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Gospel Revolution works very well in a group setting, such as a Small Group in a church (both for new believers and established believers.) We suggest the group meets **once a week for six weeks,** covering one chapter per week.

Before you meet together, each person must read the chapter and do the study guide.

Then **when you meet,** watch the DVD (for the chapter that everyone has read before coming, and completed the Study guide for). After watching the DVD, ask people to share: (1) their personal highlights from the preach, and (2) some/all answers from the *"Going Deeper"* and *"So What?"* sections of the Study Guide. Allow this to generate discussion and shared learnings. Close with a time of prayer for each other along the lines of the theme of the chapter.

Then **before leaving**, ask everyone to read the next chapter, and do the study guide for that chapter, before returning next week.