

GROUNDED



AN
EIGHT-WEEK
JOURNEY



GROUNDED

An Eight-Week Journey

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**COMMUNITY BIBLE
CHURCH**

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Scan the QR code to watch an intro video for each week's reading and to find a free digital copy of this book.

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Introduction

*Centering our whole lives on Jesus
as we make disciples wherever we are*

Have you ever met someone who *retired from following Jesus*? You must know at least one. They never missed a church service, they prayed every prayer, memorized every verse, and shared the Gospel with everyone they ever met, and now... *they're retired!* Out there, somewhere, there must be a relaxed old Christian who doesn't need to pray anymore... or read their Bible... or gather with the Church... or share their faith with others... because their Christian career ended and they no longer need to follow Jesus.

... Can you imagine?

The truth is, we never outgrow our need for Jesus. *Christians never retire!* Psalm 1 says that godly people are like trees, and just like trees need constant watering, godly people need constant watering too – from God's Word (Psalm 1:2-3). We need it every decade, every year, every month, day, hour, minute, second, and millisecond. Jesus put it like this: "People don't just need food to live, they need every word that comes from God's mouth" (Matthew 4:4).

The moment a tree stops needing water is the moment it begins to shrivel. And, well, the moment a Christian stops needing Christ is the moment our souls start to shrivel too. *So, is your soul thirsty?* How much do you need God? Do you need Him every millisecond or just 70 minutes on Sunday? Are you growing, like a spiritual tree? Is there any

fruit growing from your branches? Or have you outgrown your need for Jesus? Are you, perhaps, a bit... *shriveled*?

At CBC, it's our mission to *center our whole lives on Jesus as we make disciples wherever we are*.

"Centering our whole lives on Jesus" is about *investing in our growth and engaging with purpose*. It's about being like trees planted by streams of living water – people who are constantly nourished by Christ through prayer, the Word, and Christian community.

"As we make disciples wherever we are" is about being generous people who aren't scared to *give it away or make room for one more*. It's about bearing fruit like healthy spiritual trees. It's about living lives of obedience. Healthy trees scatter seeds and make more trees, and healthy followers of Jesus are the same: they scatter Gospel seeds and make more followers of Jesus. *Disciples make more disciples*.

Over the next 8 weeks, we want you to feel "Grounded." We'll go on a journey to root our faith more deeply in the basic-yet-mind-blowing essentials of the Christian faith. No matter how long you've been following Jesus, you'll never outgrow your need for Him.

We don't want you to just read through 8 weeks of information. This is meant to be one small part of your long journey towards becoming like Jesus. We hope to stir your thirst for Him and equip you to water the roots of your life with His Word, staying grounded in the rich soil of the Gospel so that your life will be abundantly fruitful.



Week 1

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

Before you read, as a group, take ten minutes and answer this question: How would you explain the Gospel in:

- 1 paragraph?
- 1 sentence?
- 3 to 5 words?

Have someone write these down and be prepared to share them with everyone else.

What do you mean by "Gospel"?

When Christians talk about *the Gospel*, what do they mean? Maybe they're talking about the **word** "gospel" (which literally means "*good news*"). Or maybe they're talking about the **four books** Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (which are called "Gospels" and retell the story of Jesus' life and ministry).

Normally, when Christians refer to "The Gospel," we don't just mean the *word* or the *four books*. When we talk about *The Gospel*, we're talking about a **Message** of Good News.

Notice, it's not just a good "story" – some tale about something that happened sometime way-back-when. The Gospel is good news! It's relevant *RIGHT NOW*. It's front-page, extra-extra-read-all-about-it, don't-ignore-this, did-you-hear-what-happened, this-is-amazing kind of NEWS.

So, what's the news? You can say it a lot of different ways. It can be short or long. It can be told matter-of-factly or in a way that's deeply personal. Here are a few different ways to sum up the Gospel using just a few words:

- *God saves His enemies!*
- *The King has come to adopt rebels into His family!*
- *God is making earth like heaven again!*
- *God loves, wants, came for, died for, is adopting, and is now living with sinners!*
- *Jesus came, died, and rose to bring you into a relationship with God forever!*

The Gospel is good **news**, which means this message is relevant **right now**.

These are loaded statements that need to be unpacked. For the person who didn't grow up around church (and even for some of us who did), these statements might just lead to more questions, like:

- *"Okay, but who is God?"*
- *"Who is Jesus? Why is He so special?"*
- *"How can I know a God I can't even see?"*
- *"What does 'saved' mean? Saved from what?"*
- *"What does it mean that God has a family?"*
- *"What does it mean that God died?"*
- *"God died for me? What does He want in return?"*
- *"God rose from the dead?! HOW?!"*

In some ways the Gospel message is simple enough that a small child can understand it, but in other ways it's so profound that even the most brilliant Bible scholars could never grasp all it means for us.

Essential Elements of The Gospel.

So, what are the essential elements of the Gospel? What Gospel-building-blocks are so critical that if you removed even one of them the whole Gospel-structure would come crashing down? The list below is a humble attempt at naming the core components of the Christian Gospel. Let's take a minute to consider them:

1. **God is Triune.** The one singular God has existed eternally as three distinct and equal Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Deut. 6:4; Gen. 1:26-27, Matt. 28:19).

2. **God created humans in His Image.** Every human has value and dignity regardless of class, gender, race, or behavior (Gen. 1:26-27; John 3:16).
3. **Humans were created to glorify and enjoy God,** and extend His rule on earth (Gen. 1:28; Is. 43:7; John 10:10).
4. **Every human being has rejected God's rule in their lives.** All humans are, by default, enemies of God, spiritually dead, and deserving of death and eternal separation from God (Is. 53:6; Rom. 3:23, 5:12).
5. **Humans cannot save themselves** from the consequences of their sins (John 15:5; Rom. 3:10-12).
6. **God the Father sent God the Son** to reconcile humanity to Himself (John 3:16; Col. 1:20-22).
7. **God the Son took on human flesh** in fulfillment of the Scriptures, was called "Jesus," and lived a completely sinless life. He is fully God and fully human (1 John 4:2; Rom. 8:3; Phil. 2:6-7; Heb. 4:15; Col. 1:19).
8. **Jesus died in our place for our sins and was buried;** Jesus was crucified (1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 3:18).
9. **God raised Jesus back to life on the third day** (1 Cor. 15:4; Rom. 8:11; 1 Pet. 3:18).
10. **Anyone who repents and believes can be saved and have a friendship with God;** not by their own works, but by God's sheer grace alone – through placing one's faith in the work of Jesus (Rom 10:9; Eph. 2:8-9).
11. **Those who repent and believe are justified;** declared righteous before God (Rom. 3:23-24, 5:1,9).
12. **Those who are saved are adopted into God's family;** a community of true Believers called the "Church" (Eph. 4:4-6).

13. **Jesus has given the Church a job and His authority** to spread His rule by making disciples from all nations, baptizing and teaching them to obey His commands (Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 2:14-17).
14. **Jesus ascended to heaven, was given authority by God the Father to rule all things, and is enthroned** at the right hand of God and rules over all things right now (Dan. 7:13-14; Acts 1:8-11; Phil. 2:9-11).
15. **God the Father and God the Son have sent God the Spirit** to His people in order to help them become more like Jesus, empower them in their mission, and to be with them forever (John 15:26; Acts 1:4-5, 2:33).
16. **After death, the righteous and wicked will be judged.** Those who trusted in Christ as Lord and Savior will resurrect to eternal life with God, those who did not will resurrect to eternity in hell (John 5:26-29).
17. **God the Son will come again as the final Judge** to fully establish His Kingdom and rule forever. (Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Tim 4:1; Rev. 19:11-16, 20:12-15).

Now, ask yourself... "How would it change the Gospel's message if any certain point on this list *wasn't really true*?"

What if humans weren't made in God's image? What if Jesus didn't really die or resurrect? What if there isn't really a final judgement? If that were the case, then ***it would be a different message altogether.***

GROUP QUESTION

Are there any points on the list of *Essential Elements of The Gospel* that you thought didn't need to be there? Any that you felt were missing? If so, what and why?

Now, all this begs the question: ***“Do I have to precisely believe each of these 17 points in order to be saved?”*** That’s a great question, and one that would be well worth discussing more around your table at the end of this reading. Here’s a short answer: not every point on the list must be *perfectly understood* at the moment of someone’s salvation...

But listen to this: the Gospel isn’t just about being saved from hell – it’s WAY more than that. It’s especially about living in a restored relationship with God *right here and now!* And living in friendship with God will mean growing to embrace these truths more and more.

The Gospel Saves (and changes) You.

The Bible says **the Gospel is the only news that can save someone.** Consider these three verses:

- Mark 16:16 – *“Whoever believes will be saved... but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”*
- John 14:6 – Jesus said, *“No one comes to the Father except through me.”*
- Romans 1:16 – *“The gospel... is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.”*

From these verses, can you sense how exclusive the way of Jesus is? ***There’s just no other way to be saved*** except through responding to the Good News about Jesus. This is why Jesus said, *“The gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it”* (Matthew 7:14).

Maybe you're asking, ***"What are we saved FROM?"***

- *We're Saved from Eternal Death* – We've all broken God's law and the consequence is death that never ends. But God the Son willingly died in our place. When Jesus resurrected, it was a guarantee: if we accept His gift, we'll be saved from the punishment we deserve. We'll all die one day, BUT, like Jesus, death won't be able to hold us. The debt we owe God is cancelled. The word Christians sometimes use for this is: *"Justified."* (Rom. 6:23; 1 Pet. 3:18).
- *We're Saved from Being God's Enemies* – By default, every human is considered an enemy of God, but the Gospel says that we can be God's friends, and that we can even be adopted into His family. God can be our Father and our Friend – that's astounding! The words Christians sometimes use for this is: *"Adopted"* and *"Reconciled."* (Romans 5:9-10, 8:15; John 15:13-15).
- *We're Saved from Slavery to Sin* – Humans aren't just "sinners" – but "slaves to sin" and "dead in sin." Yikes. But the Gospel says we can be saved from sin's hold on us. God's Spirit changes and revives our hearts so that we actually WANT to obey Him! The word Christians sometimes use for this is: *"Regenerated."* (Romans 6:15-23; John 8:34; Ephesians 2:1-9).
- *We're Saved Forever* – The Gospel says that once someone is truly saved, there's no way for them to be

un-saved. God's faithfulness and sustaining power (not ours) keeps us saved. The word Christians sometimes use for this is: "*Preservation*" or "*Perseverance*" (John 10:28-29; Romans 8:38-39; Philippians 1:6; 1 Peter 1:5).

Now you might ask, "***But HOW can someone be saved?***"

Romans 10:9 provides the clearest instructions for how to be saved: "*If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*" You can think of it using ABC:

A - Admit that you are a sinner in need of salvation.

B - Believe that Jesus is the Risen Lord.

C - Commit your life to living as if it were true.

Finally, you might ask, "***Okay, I'm saved... NOW WHAT?***"

This Good News doesn't only save us from hell; ***it also changes us to be like Jesus***. Consider these three verses:

- Galatians 5:22-23 – "*The Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.*"
- John 15:5 – "*I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit.*"
- Romans 6:22 – "*But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification.*"

So, God's Spirit is making us more like Jesus by constantly reminding us about the Gospel. If that's true, then ***we can never outgrow our need for the Gospel.*** It's good news for the person who was saved five minutes ago and it's good news for the person who was saved ninety-five years ago. The Good News of being saved might be a one-time event, but the Good News of becoming more like Jesus happens as we believe, understand, and respond to the Gospel-message over the course of our lives.

The fact is: ***someone who has been truly saved will inevitably change.*** Why? Because God's Spirit lives in them – constantly reminding them that they're no longer God's enemies but God's child (Romans 8:15) and then empowering them to actually *behave* like God's child. So, if we're not acting more and more like God's children, we need to ask ourselves "Why?"

Four Deficient Gospels.

Since the Gospel can save us and change us, there will always be forces in our world that seek to distort its message. ***There are many false gospels.*** Some are easier to spot than others. Here's an example: "Jesus was a good teacher, miracle worker, and maybe he even died for sins... *but he wasn't God.*" This false gospel has been repackaged many times ever since a man named Arius first preached it in the early 300's AD.

It's the Church's job to identify and protect believers from false gospels (Colossians 2:8; 1 John 4:1). Why? Because Christians don't just believe any old gospel. Christians believe THE Gospel – the one, true and

undistorted message about who God is and what He's done for us. Consider what Paul once said:

"Let God curse anyone – including us or even angels – if they preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you at first. We'll say it again: If anyone is preaching a gospel to you that is contrary to the one you first heard, let them be cursed." (Galatians 1:8-9)

The most convincing false gospels are not entirely false – they're just deficient. These gospels may be false because they **subtract** a critical truth from the Gospel (like Jesus' divinity) or because they **add** a small untruth that corrupts the whole message (like needing to contribute a little of your own good works for God to save you). *A deficient gospel is ultimately a false Gospel.* Let's consider four popular deficient gospels that many of us have believed at some point. Consider the first one:

1. "You're a sinner, so God died for your sins."

Think about it: What about this statement above is "Good News"? *God's own son was killed because you are a depraved, broken, crooked, rebellious, failure... a sinner.*

Everything in this statement is *true*, but none of it is *good news*. In fact, **it's all horrendously bad news!** You stink and God the Son is still dead in a grave. This truncated summary of the Gospel will never be "Good News" on its own. It's a *deficient gospel* (notice the lower case "g") because it's missing all the things that make the True Gospel good.

Calling this news "gospel" is like putting a handful of flour in front of someone and calling it a "cake." A handful of flour isn't merely a "deficient cake" – it's just flat-out *NOT* a cake! A "gospel" that can't save a person is not merely a *deficient* gospel it's just flat-out *NOT* the Gospel. It's a *false* gospel because the hope it gives is false.

... Someone who believes this false gospel will likely experience guilt, fear, and anxiety in their spiritual life.

2. "Come (and stay) just as you are."

"Come just as you are" is a way of saying, "No matter who you are, God welcomes you to start following Him today." It's true! But something vital easily gets lost when this is our definition of the Gospel. What people often hear is: "Come **and stay** just as you are."

In this gospel, God would NEVER tell you to change – that would be judgmental, rude, mean, and bigoted. In this gospel God has no opinion about your lifestyle. He's a fun uncle, not a Good Father – His highest hope for you is to have fun and stay safe.

This gospel is not *good* news but ultimately *disappointing* news because, like we've already explored, ***the true Gospel is the Good News that God's Spirit will inevitably change you!***

...Someone who believes this false gospel will likely experience purposelessness, misplaced confidence, and apathy in their spiritual life. Not to mention their view of God will probably be very low.

3. "You'll go to heaven when you die."

This gospel is good news *someday*, but not right now. It says, "become a Christian and you'll get to spend eternity in heaven." It misses how the Gospel is the Good News of a purposeful relationship with God *right here and now*.

... *Someone who believes this partial gospel will likely feel jaded, apathetic, despondent, and cynical. Their view of God is that He's distant. They're often grumpy and obsessed with how bad-off things are in the news.*

4. "You just need Jesus AND..."

This gospel says that, in order to be saved, you just need Jesus *PLUS something*... Maybe:

- Jesus AND... some amount of good works.
- Jesus AND... the "right" Bible translation.
- Jesus AND... to do communion and baptism "right."
- Jesus AND... to avoid the "really bad" sins.
- Jesus AND... to avoid certain clothes or music.
- Jesus AND... the "right" tradition or liturgy.
- Jesus AND... to believe the "right" things about the end times, women in ministry, alcohol, spiritual gifts, or predestination.

This deficient gospel says ***Jesus' work on the cross isn't enough to make you a child of God***... But think about it: children don't become children because they *behave well* but simply because they *were born*. Jesus once said that's the same way people become "children of God" – not by

good behavior but by being "born again" (John 3:3). **We could never possibly do enough for God to save us.** Salvation is simply a life-changing *gift* God gives.

...There's no telling all the negative impacts of believing a "Jesus AND" gospel. It's likely they'll feel exhausted, anxious about whether they've done enough, and upset at anyone who doesn't do things "right" like they do.

GROUP QUESTION

Have you ever believed a deficient gospel? What were the negative consequences for you?

Good News.

God made you, loves you, and even though you were His enemy He still wanted you so much that He went to unfathomable lengths to get you back. He became a human, lived a perfect life, died in your place, and rose from the dead to give you confidence that death doesn't have to be the end. He's offering to forgive your sins and adopt you into His family, and He's inviting you to join His mission to heal the world. He's ruling from heaven right now. He promises to send you His Spirit to help you live the fullest possible life, and He wants to enjoy a friendship with you today. He said He'll return one day to make all things right again and bring you to live with Him forever. Not because you're so good... But because HE'S so good!

(Article written by Pastor Kyle Donn)

Week 1 – Group Discussion Questions

1.) What stood out to you from this reading, and why?

2.) What do you think: does someone need to completely understand all the “Essential Elements of the Gospel” (from pages 13-15) in order to be saved? Why or why not? What does someone need to know to be saved?

3.) As a result of this reading and discussion, has your perspective about the Gospel shifted, deepened, changed? If so, how?



Week 2

WHO IS GOD?

Before you read, take 3-5 minutes with your group and brainstorm as many attributes or characteristics of God as you can think of. Designate someone to write them all down.

Afterwards, have the writer tell the group how many attributes you were able to list. Then, ask:

- Which attributes would you consider to be God's "core" attributes?
- Are there any on the list that you have questions about? Any you especially like? Any you dislike?

Who is God? Understanding the Divine Revelation.

Today, people make all sorts of passionate truth-claims. Social media has created a runway for people to declare, shout, and often argue their truth. Even our clothes are mobile billboards, branded with words that declare our opinions, our affiliations, our likes and dislikes... all without even opening our mouths. Opinions and theories catch fire and whip through social media until those claims (founded or unfounded) get accepted as absolute truth. People speak with authority when they literally have no credentials or knowledge to do so.

A simple search on a popular digital platform with the question "Who is God?" produces a million impassioned voices chiming in with a million different answers. Many start with the phrase, "**To me**, God is..."

"We don't get to decide who God is."

– Francis Chan

But, like Francis Chan says, "**we don't get to decide who God is!**" What a relief! We don't have to determine who God is because **He has already declared who He is to us!** He declares Himself through His creation, His words, His deeds, and ultimately through His Son, Jesus. His own declaration leaves no room for opinions or theories.

GROUP QUESTION

What are some common false claims about who God is? How can you and I be sure that we're not believing in a false God?

God's Own Declaration: "I am God."

God Himself says, "I am God and there is no other; besides me there is no God" (Isaiah 45:5). Talk about an authoritative declaration! These words were written in the same world we live in today, albeit thousands of years ago. The world brimmed with people who worshipped gods of their own making, gods of legend and tradition and ancestors. The Bible says these gods are *"made of silver and gold, by the work of human hands. They have mouths but do not speak, eyes but do not see. They have ears but do not hear, noses but do not smell. They have hands but do not feel; feet but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat"* (Psalm 115:4-7).

These gods are counterfeit, pale imitations, twisted versions, shadowy opposites of the One True God. There's no other God beside Him – no one even remotely like Him.

GROUP EXERCISE

Pair up with someone and list a few modern counterfeit gods. Do you ever find yourself tempted to believe in any? Why? How these fail compared to the One True God?

Look at how God explains His "otherness" in Isaiah 55:8-9 –

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the Earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Or look at how Paul describes it in Romans 11:33-36 –

“Oh, the depths and the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgements, how inscrutable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, and who has been His counselor? Who has given a gift to Him, that He might be repaid? For from Him, and through Him and to Him are all things! To Him be glory forever!”

There's none like Him. He's the only unfathomable, eternal, powerful, sovereign God. His existence and glory are on full display.

God Reveals Himself Through Creation.

It should be clear that God does not owe us mere human beings anything. He's not beholden to created things as though He owes us an explanation or as if He's obligated to prove His existence to us. His declaration should be enough. Yet, every time we open our eyes and look at the world around us, God generously gives us a mountain of evidence – proof after proof of His existence and character.

Romans 1:20 tells us,

“For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”

Paul says the invisible God makes His existence clearly visible to human beings. He reveals Himself in the rising and setting of the sun – and in the intricate inner workings of our eyes, designed to take in the explosive colors. He reveals Himself in the vast ocean which is pushed and pulled by the moon - forward and backward like clockwork, every day for as long as the earth has existed. He reveals Himself through the night sky, filled with stars, meteors, planets, and galaxies. He reveals Himself in the geese flying in V-formation, impossibly arranging themselves as they harness the wind to serve their journey. He reveals Himself in the intricate design of the human body – from the isotopes in the finest strand of your hair to the 6.4 billion bits of data in a single strand of your DNA. We can see Him everywhere IF we open our eyes.

There's none like Him. He's the only unfathomable, eternal, powerful, sovereign God. His existence is on display. How much clearer could He make it for us?

GROUP QUESTION

Name two or three ways you could take better notice of God in creation this week.

Romans 1:20 says creation can tell us enough about God to rightly condemn us for rejecting Him. But creation doesn't reveal enough about God for us to be saved. So, to be saved, **we need God to reveal even more about Himself.**

God Reveals Himself Through Words and Deeds.

Even though creation reveals all that we need to see who God is, in His generosity, He didn't stop there. From the beginning, **God has spoken directly to people**. He spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden, to Moses at the burning bush, to Elijah in a gentle whisper, and to many others. **He has also written His words** – inspiring human authors to write the things that were on His heart. Every single word in the Bible is God's. We'll discuss this more in chapter 4.

He has also revealed Himself through His deeds. His actions. Supernatural wonders documented for us in the pages of the Bible. He sent plagues on Egypt and then parted the Red Sea to communicate both His greatness and goodness. He closed the mouths of lions, sent fire from heaven, led His people by pillars of cloud and fire, opened barren wombs, swallowed up people in the earth, and rained down food from heaven so His people could live as they wandered in the desert. These just scratch the surface of the record of the mighty acts of God.

Well, after hearing all this, how in the world are human minds supposed to relate to a God this big, this powerful, this terrifying? Answer: because He doesn't merely act in power and might before His people. There's a lot more to God than just His power. Consider what God says about Himself in Jeremiah 9:24 –

"I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight."

Our God is a "delighting" God. Do you believe this? Do you experience God as a God of delight? He's both just and gentle, steadfast and strong, patient and powerful. Yes, He is absolutely powerful, but He also delights in being full of immovable, unshakeable, irrevocable love for His people.

But there's one *Word* and one *Deed* that completely reveals who God is. This Word and this Deed tells us more about what God is like than anything else ever could. Consider Hebrews 1:1-3:

*"Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days **he has spoken to us by his Son**, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. **He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.**"*
(emphasis added)

Want to know *exactly* what God is like? Look at *Jesus*. Let's turn our attention to Him now.

God Reveals Himself Through Jesus.

This invisible God who has revealed Himself in creation, words and deeds, **took an even more unfathomable step to reveal Himself to us.** "For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son." God reveals Himself in His Son, Jesus.

God the Son – our eternal creating Savior, came to earth as a man – fully God AND fully man. He didn't just drop in and make an appearance so we would believe who He was – no. He grew in the womb of a woman and was born of her body. God, wrapped in soft, vulnerable, sweet

infant skin. God, who learned to walk and talk and use utensils. God who laughed with His siblings and had runny noses and cuts and bruises and sore feet and slept under the roof of Joseph and Mary as their son. He grew to be a man.

Isaiah 53:2 tells us He wasn't much to look at, there was nothing about His looks that stood out. **He didn't look heroic or noble or kingly.** And yet, this God-man had come to rescue the entire world. To seek and save the lost. God the Son took "the form of a servant... And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7-8).

Even though Jesus had never sinned, He died on a cross for people who didn't know Him, love Him, or honor Him. On the cross, Jesus took God's punishment for our sins – He drank God's wrath down to the dregs. All the while, we were still sinners. Jesus paid our debt and nailed the cancelled certificate to the cross. Paid in full. Jesus, fully God, fully man, paying for the sin done against Him by His own creations. There are just no words to adequately describe this. How can it be?

And then Jesus rose from the dead. Only God holds power over death! Jesus revealed Himself to hundreds of people, alive and well – offering still more proof of His identity as God.

With all authority, He gave His people a charge that is also for us: *"Go and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey all that I command and baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matt. 28:19-20).

Soon after the words left His lips, He ascended into Heaven before their very eyes and "He sat down at the right hand of God" (Mark 16:20).

GROUP QUESTION

Why is it Important that Jesus was fully God AND fully man? How does that impact the type of relationship we're able to have with God?

God Reveals Himself Through The Holy Spirit.

Amazingly, God's work of revealing Himself to us did not end after Jesus ascended to heaven. Maybe you noticed at the end of the last page that Jesus said, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

As astounding as it was that God came to earth as a human, imagine how startling it was when Jesus told His disciples (in John 16:7) that *it would be **better** for Him to leave!* He said that He would go to heaven and then send them the Holy Spirit who would actually live with His people forever. One writer said it like this: *"Our God is a household God. He lives with us."*

Consider this verse.

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, whom you received from God?"

Besides taking care of our physical bodies, what else does this verse teach us? (Reference: 1 Corinthians 6:19)

The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Trinity and is fully God, just as the Son and the Father are fully God. He continues to reveal God to people, dwelling in us, teaching us, transforming us, convicting and comforting us. He empowers us to live for Him in a world that is against Him. He IS with us continually, He has sealed us for eternity, declaring that we are rescued from sin and death and have been adopted into the family of God as sons and daughters. He will carry us through this life to fulfill the will of God and His purpose for our lives.

Conclusion: The Full Revelation of God.

God has revealed Himself to us through creation, words and deeds, through His Son, and now by His Spirit living in believers. He doesn't reveal Himself to us because He owes us something but because He loves us so much.

Unlike other religions, the One True God is *knowable*. He desires a relationship with us, not just cold religious devotion. In a world full of opinions about who God is, a world that suppresses the truth of what God has already made clear, we can marvel that He still reveals Himself to people who have rejected Him, as we once did. He will continue to reveal Himself until the end comes, and we see Him face to face. This is grace. This is love. This is God.

(Article written by Shannon Wilson)

Week 2 – Group Discussion Questions

1.) What stood out to you from this reading, and why?

2.) Isaiah 55:8-9 says God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours. What comes to mind when you think about God's "otherness"? How does it make you feel?

3.) Which of God's attributes is most challenging for you, and why?

4.) What are ways the Holy Spirit works in your daily life? Why is it so easy to forget that we are the temple of God, the place where He dwells? What are some ways you can stir up your affection and attention for the Spirit?



Week 3

WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?

Before you read, in your group, take 5 minutes and discuss these two questions:

1. *What did being a "disciple" mean in Jesus' time?*
2. *What does it generally mean to people today?*
3. *If you think there's a difference, how do you think it got that way?*

"As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come and follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' At once they left their nets and followed Him." Mark 1:17-18

It was an ordinary day of work for Simon and Andrew until Jesus changed everything with an invitation to follow Him. That's what a disciple is: a *follower*. Someone who's compelled to look and act like their *leader*; and who helps other people follow along too.

In Bible times, when someone decided to follow a teacher (a *rabbi*) they would come to know him intimately. They would learn his ways and, over time, *become like him*. That's what Jesus was offering Simon and Andrew – to become like Him. To become "fishers of people."

A disciple's goal was not merely to understand their rabbi's teachings, but to change their entire lifestyle in order to *live like* their teacher. A disciple didn't just hear lectures, they intimately shared in their teacher's life. A disciple came to understand their teacher's thoughts, their deepest purposes, and watched to see if he lived out his words. It was a disciple's ultimate goal to fully emulate his rabbi. That's why Paul told others to "Imitate me, just as I imitate Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

A Jewish blessing that captures the picture of a disciple says, *"May you be covered in the dust of your Rabbi."* It was a way of expressing that a disciple should walk **so closely** to their rabbi that the dust from his footsteps could cover them – and their lives.

The Traits of a Disciple.

Now, let's seek to understand the traits and qualities Jesus expects His disciples to display. Jesus spells them out clearly in the four Gospels.

Trait #1 – Followers of Jesus count the cost of following

Him. In Luke 14:25-33 Jesus said a person shouldn't even *consider* being His disciple until they've considered how much it will cost them:

"Don't begin following me until you count the cost. For who would begin constructing a building without first calculating the cost to make sure there's enough money to finish it? If you don't, you might only complete the foundation before you run out of money. Everyone would laugh at you and say, 'There's the person who started a building he couldn't afford to finish!' Or what King would ever go to war without sitting down first to consider whether his army is big enough to defeat the enemy? ... You must know this: you can't follow me without giving up everything that is most dear to you."

GROUP QUESTION

Do you think you've fully counted the cost of following Jesus? How have you given up the things most dear to you in order to follow Him?

To be one of Jesus' disciples means your life is no longer about you, but about *Jesus*. That's difficult to swallow. In fact, not just difficult – it's *impossible* on our own. In John 15:5, Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches, if you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit, for apart for me you can do nothing." Jesus knows we need Him, so He tells us to stay close to Him (to "abide" with Him).

WE CANNOT become like Jesus just by trying really hard. We become like Him through *abiding*, not *striving*. It's a life of utter dependence on God – whose Spirit lives in us. Among the names given the Holy Spirit in Scripture are "Helper," "Counselor," "Spirit of Wisdom" and "Paraclete," which means "One who comes alongside of." You can't become like Jesus alone, but God Himself *wants* to help you – isn't that good news?

Trait #2 – Followers of Jesus love God more than anything else and worship Him exclusively. Jesus didn't only come to be your friend, but your King. He wants to sit on the throne of your life – and He will not share His seat with anyone else.

"If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else – your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters. Yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple." - Luke 14:26

*"You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength."
- Mark 12:30*

You can know all about God and think all the right things about God, but you'll never become like God unless you're abiding with God. Unless you love Him deeply. Authentic discipleship comes from a person's deep love for the Teacher. We must come to radically love our Rabbi, Jesus Christ, if we are to live the radical lives He's called us to.

GROUP QUESTION

What happens when a Jesus follower allows other things to share the "throne" of their life with Jesus? Try to share a personal example.

Trait #3 – Followers of Jesus are unwaveringly committed to obeying Him. Obedience is not optional for a disciple. How do you know if you really love Jesus? Answer: If you obey Him. If we love Him, we'll study His word in order to learn His ways and endeavor, with His help, to obey them.

*"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me."
- Matthew 11:29.*

*"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."
- John 14:15.*

*"Whoever has my commandments and keeps them,
it is he who loves me." - John 14:21."*

"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him." - John 14:23.

Trait #4 – Followers of Jesus are servants, like Jesus.

In our world, the “greatest” people have many people serving them. Assistants, maids, and butlers. But Jesus told his disciples that the greatest people in His Kingdom are those who serve others.

“But whoever would be great among you must be your servant; whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:26-28.

He says that being His follower is about giving up your own definition of ‘the good life’ and exchanging it for His. He said it like this:

“If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross every day and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it, but if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what benefit do you gain if you gain the whole world, but you are yourself lost or destroyed?” Luke 9:23-25.

When you give up your life – your definition of greatness, success, and comfort – you’ll find that Jesus’ way of life is so much more fulfilling. It sounds backwards, doesn’t it? Jesus challenges everything we’ve been taught about what will bring us the most fulfillment in life. His way of life is the way of serving others.

And Jesus doesn't merely *teach* about serving others. He Himself set the highest example of what it means to serve others. Philippians 2:5-11 says that even though Jesus was in the form of God, He chose to take the form of a

A follower of Christ does not make life about his or her plans, desires, or interests. Life is no longer about us; our life is about Him.

human *servant*. And how did He serve us? He died in our place. He was punished for our crimes. There's no greater act of service.

And, perhaps you recall, that the night before Jesus died, after he'd eaten dinner with His followers, how He knelt down and began to wash their filthy feet... like a *servant*. If the Son of God – our Lord and Teacher – wasn't too proud to serve others by washing their feet, then is there anyone we're too good to serve? (John 13:1-20)

A follower of Christ does not make life about his or her plans, desires, or interests. Life is no longer about us; our life is about Him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it well: "When Jesus calls a man, He bids him to come and die." Roy Hession said it this way, "The thing that makes us most miserable in life is our refusal to die to self." As Jesus' followers, we die so that we can experience life.

Trait #5 – Followers of Christ love others unconditionally.

In the Old Testament, the word most often used for God's love was *hesed*. It's a type of love that is relentlessly loyal and committed – the type of love that goes far beyond its obligation. It's the tenacious, indefatigable, unshakable,

loyal, mighty love of God. Remarkably, Jesus calls us to love others with this same kind of love.

*“A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, **just as I have loved you**, you are to love one another. By this all people will know you are my disciples.” - John 13:34*

*“The first and most important command is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. And this second command is like the first: you must love your neighbor as yourself.”
- Mark 12:29-31*

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” - Luke 6:27

It's radical. Christ has called us to love **everyone**, including our offenders, enemies, and betrayers. To love rich people, poor people, pretty people, and ugly people. To love our polite neighbors and our grumpy neighbors. To love them with a generous, kind, unconditional, merciful, enduring, relentless, loyal love. This kind of love lets the world know that we are followers of Jesus.

Trait #6 – Followers of Jesus are deeply committed to prayer. They're committed to prayer because Jesus, their Teacher, was committed to prayer.

*“Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”
– Luke 5:16*

Disciples do what their teacher does. If Jesus prays, then we should seek to become a people of prayer too. And did you know that Jesus is still praying? Even though He's in heaven with the Father, He's still talking to the Father about us and for us.

"Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God interceding (praying) for us." - Romans 8:34

"Jesus is able, once and forever, to save anyone who comes to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf." – Hebrews 7:25

Jesus also gave His followers specific instructions about how to pray... and how *not* to pray.

GROUP EXERCISE

Open your Bibles to Matthew 6:5-15 and have two volunteers read it out loud (one after the other). Then, as a group, consider these questions:

- What instructions does Jesus give about how to pray?
- What about how *not* to pray?
- How does this challenge you?

Following our Teacher and becoming like Him means praying. Unlike other gods, the One True God wants to be with you. Prayer is fundamentally about being present with Him. Sitting and speaking with God will inevitably build your trust in Him.

When we pray, it's less about asking for what we want and more about asking God what *He* wants. In prayer, we don't just *inform* God about our situation, we welcome God to *transform* our hearts even in the midst of our situation.

Prayer is more than just asking for things. Anytime we choose to communicate *anything* to God,

that's prayer. It can include praise, thanksgiving, lament, confession, repentance, listening, contemplation (talking to God about His Word), examination (reviewing your day with God), intercession (praying for others), and imprecation (asking God to bring justice to a certain situation). Mother Teresa captured the essence of prayer by calling it *a frequent conversation with the One we love*.

In prayer, we don't just *inform* God about our situation, we welcome Him to *transform* our hearts even in the midst of our situation.

Trait #7 – Followers of Jesus make more followers of

Jesus. Said another way: *Disciples multiply*. The final thing Jesus said to His disciples before He ascended into heaven was: "Go make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you and behold I am with you always, to the end of the age."

Final words matter. Jesus' last words must be our first priority. This command is known as "The Great Commission." Not the great "suggestion" or the great "extra credit." Jesus expects *all* His followers to do this. Including you. Are you seeking to make disciples?

Now consider this: Jesus didn't command us to make *converts*, but *disciples*. Conversion is a one-time-event, but Jesus said He wants us to *teach others to obey all that He's commanded*. Making disciples is a sustained commitment to lovingly, prayerfully, and actively train up other believers.

Disciples are actively engaged in training people who in turn will train others.

Disciples are actively engaged in training people who will in turn train others. That's how Christ Himself did it – He trained eleven men who spent the rest of their lives training others. Consider what Paul once said to his younger disciple, Timothy:

"You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.." - 2 Timothy 2:2

Conclusion.

The cost of being a disciple is high. Jesus once said, "The road is narrow, few find it" (Matthew 7:14). And yet, following Jesus is the greatest adventure known to mankind. The more we die to ourselves, the more alive we become to the grand purposes God has for our lives. And like the disciples who left their nets, whatever we must leave behind to follow Jesus will pale in comparison to the "abundant life" that we'll come to experience as we become more and more like Him.

(Article written by Jayne Lessard)

Week 3 – Group Discussion Questions

1.) What stood out to you from this reading, and why?

2.) Jesus once served His disciples by washing their dirty feet. Why would He do that? How does that affect your attitude about serving in "lowly" ways?

3.) What's the hardest type of person for you to love. Why?

4.) Making disciples was the final command of our Savior. How do you feel about this command? How do you feel you're personally doing obeying this command?

After-Reading Group Prayer

Pray for Yourself, Together

Following Jesus means becoming more like Him. As a group, spend 60-seconds in silence. **Each person should write down one way in which they'd like to become more like Jesus** based on the article we just read.

Often, when Christians meet, they "take prayer requests" – going around in a circle with each person explaining what they'd like prayer for, then each person in the group prays for someone else in the circle.

However, for this time in prayer, each person should **take a turn praying out loud for themselves**. Ask God to help you grow in the area that you wrote down – trust that the rest of the group will be silently praying in agreement with you.



Week 4

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

Before you read, have two or three people attempt to summarize the story of the *whole Bible* in 60 seconds or less (you might use a timer for this challenge). There's absolutely no need to get it perfect. Just give it a shot.

Then, as a group, answer the question: *Why is it important to know that the whole Bible is ONE story?*

The Bible... Has Shaped the World.

Civil rights, education, hospitals, major advances in science, medicine, music, literature, and modern art – you may not know it, but all of these flow directly from one singular source: *The Bible*. Every part of our society has been shaped by Scripture. Even the way we judge *time* is centered around the Bible's main event (*BC* means "Before Christ," and *AD* stands for "*Anno Domini*" which means "In the year of our Lord"). There is no world-influencing document that holds a candle to the Bible. Not the Qur'an, not the Communist Manifesto, and not even The US Constitution.

The Bible... Is a Library.

The word "Bible" literally means "books." Not "book..." but "books" (plural). What's the point? The point is that the Bible isn't just one book, but a *library of books*. Sixty-six books to be exact. You know them: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and so on... all the way to Revelation.

These books were written over a 1,500-year period on three different continents by more than 40 authors in 3 different languages (Hebrew, Greek, and a little Aramaic). They were written in all sorts of places, from prison cells to royal palaces. Some were written during times of economic prosperity, others during times of enslavement. Some by kings, some by shepherds.

This Library is divided into two big sections: the "Old Testament" and the "New Testament." The word

"testament" means "covenant" or "agreement." So, the first part of the Bible is the story of an "Old Agreement" that God made with humanity, and the second part is about a "New Agreement." In the *Old Agreement* God gave a **Law** to help people obey Him. But in the *New Agreement* God forgave people's crimes against His law by paying their debt for them – and then He gave them **His Spirit** so that they would have the desire and ability to live lives that please Him. What a relief to be New-Agreement people!

About half of churches around the world (including CBC) recognize 66 books of the Bible. Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches recognize an additional 7 books called the *Deuterocanon*. However, the Jewish community and many early church leaders don't recognize these 7 books to be legitimate Scripture.

The Bible... Is One Story.

Daniel and the lion's den, Noah and the ark, Jesus walking on water, David and Goliath, Jonah and the big fish, the empty tomb... You've probably heard of at least a couple of these stories. But, besides the fact that they're all in the same big book, how are they related to one another? Here's the secret: **They're all ONE story.** Yes. One singular, big, grand story, from Genesis to Revelation.

And the climax of this story – the crescendo, the main part – is *Jesus*. And that's not just the "Sunday School Answer" – the whole story is *actually* about Jesus!

The Story of the Old Testament.

It starts like this: God created everything, including His most special creation: human beings. It was perfect... until the humans rejected God's definition of truth and started defining "right" and "wrong" for themselves. They broke their relationship with God – the source of life. Without God, they were doomed to pain and death. But God promised a human Savior who would come and set everything right.

Humanity's rebellion grew worse, and God could've ended the story right there. But instead, He revealed His patience, love, and justice. He rescued people over and over – sometimes allowing their rebellion to bring consequences. But even after dramatic interventions – a flood, laws, judges, and kings – they kept turning from Him to their own definitions of "truth."

Early in the Old Testament, God made an agreement with one man, named Abraham – and his descendants, (called *Israel*). If they would live by His truth, He would bless them so much that all nations would be drawn to Him. *They were to be blessed in order to bless the whole world.*

But Israel never kept their side of the agreement. The negative consequences of their disobedience made the rest of the world think their God was a joke. Still, the story carried a flicker of hope: throughout the Old Testament, over 300 promises pointed to *Someone* who would rescue not only Israel but all humanity.

The last book in the Old Testament closes with anticipation: the promise of a Savior who would restore humanity's relationship with God and fulfill the plan begun in the very first pages of Scripture.

The Story of the New Testament.

The Old Testament ended anticipating the Rescuer, and now the New Testament opens with His arrival. So, who is the Rescuer? The New Testament contains the startling news that the Rescuer is none other than *God Himself!* Of course! Go back and re-read the predictions and you'll see that clear signs were there all along: no one else could rescue us human beings from our problem.

Out of unfathomable love *God became a human*, named *Jesus* (which means "God saves"). He lived a completely perfect life, yet *He was punished for all our wrongdoings!* Jesus was willingly executed by crucifixion as a substitute for us – He took the punishment we deserve.

Because He's *fully human*, Jesus can be our *substitute*. And because He's *fully God*, His death is *sufficient* (more than enough) to pay the sin-debt for ALL humanity – past, present, and future!

And how do we know that Jesus' death really fixed our problem? Answer: He rose from the dead. *Normal people don't just do that!* His resurrection proves His victory over sin and death and confirms that all His words are true.

After Jesus rose, several important things happened. First, He gave all His followers a job to go make disciples from *every nation*. Through Jesus, the promise He made Abraham (to bless all nations) is coming true! Next, He sent His Spirit to give His followers power to fulfill the disciple-making mission He'd given them. Finally, Jesus returned to heaven, promising to return one day and judge the earth – making all things right – and to set up His kingdom forever.

The remainder of the New Testament follows the rapid multiplication of Jesus' followers despite persecution. It's especially full of letters from early Church leaders encouraging believers to remain faithful to God's truth. Read them and you'll be encouraged too. The book of Revelation closes the Bible with the assurance that, no matter how dark things get, Jesus will ultimately win – and His followers win with Him.

The New Testament's upside-down message is that victory comes not by asserting our rights, but by laying them down, like Jesus did (Matt. 16:24-25). For now, we're waiting for Jesus to return like He promised. But when will He come back? No one knows! So, live like it could be today and remember that we all have a job to do: make disciples of all nations.

The Bible... Is One Story... that Points to Jesus

Everything in the Bible is pointing us to Jesus. Jesus is God in a human body, creating a way for human beings to come back into a friendship with their Creator. A helpful way to consider this is with the acronym *AMPEC*:

A – Anticipation: The entire Old Testament *Anticipates* the coming of the Savior.

M – Manifestation: The 4 Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) reveal exactly who that Savior is and how He *was Manifested* (or *came*) into the world.

P – Proclamation: The book of Acts is the story of the Church's early days (right after Jesus ascended) and how they started to *Proclaim* the news about the Savior.

E – Explanation and Expectation: Romans to Jude is a collection of 21 letters by Jesus' earliest followers, *Explaining* the Gospel more deeply and exhorting the church to *Expect* Jesus' return.

C – Culmination: The Book of Revelation includes sections that help us picture what it will be like when Jesus returns and fully establishes His Kingdom – the *Culmination* of all history.

The Bible... Is Reliable.

Critics say that the Bible can't be trusted because it's thousands of years old. But if it's God's primary way of revealing Himself then wouldn't He want to ensure its preservation? History shows He has.

Now, perhaps you're asking, "*Do we have any of the original copies of the Bible?*" That would sure settle things! Sadly, the original authors weren't thinking about us in the 21st century. Their original copies had to survive being thumbed through countless times – not to mention survive wars, economic collapses, and being carted off into slavery over and over again.

Though we lack the original manuscripts, we possess over 24,000 (that's twenty-four-THOUSAND) ancient manuscripts of the New Testament! One of those manuscripts was copied as little as 35 years after the events of the New Testament. And the oldest Old Testament manuscripts we have are from 600BC (when Old Testament events were still happening)! And *despite being 2,600 years old, the words on the oldest manuscripts are identical to the Bibles we read today!*

Here are a couple other reasons we can trust the Bible:

Archaeology. Hasn't someone been digging around in the sands of Israel and found something that contradicts the Bible? No. No discovery in archaeology has *ever* contradicted the Bible – in fact, such discoveries have only *supported* its claims.

Wisdom. Anytime someone applies the truths of the Bible by obeying what it says, their lives and the lives of others around them dramatically improve in the exact ways it promises.

Christians believe that the Bible is the primary way that God chose to reveal Himself to humanity. Sure, He could've done it some other way - painting lines in the sky or manifesting Himself in everyone's bedroom like a ghost on their tenth birthday (freaky!). But if you really think about it, this Library of books is a remarkable way to do it.

GROUP QUESTION

Is there a better way God could reveal Himself to the world today other than through the Bible? If you were God, how would you have chosen to reveal yourself? Why?

A Few More Things About the Bible...

The Bible is "Inspired." *Inspired* means that God's Spirit led specific individuals to write specific words, while preserving their personalities, emotions, and writing styles

(2 Peter 1:20–21). Inspired does NOT mean that someone's eyes rolled back in their head and they began madly scribbling in a possessed frenzy.

The Bible is "Infallible." *Infallible* means "not able to fail." God's words have never failed and will never fail (Isaiah 55:11; Matthew 5:18). Infallible does NOT mean that God will give you every single thing you ask for.

The Bible is "Inerrant." *Inerrant* means "without error." The Bible is completely accurate in everything it intends to teach in its original manuscripts. This does NOT mean that people won't disagree over the meaning of certain passages, but that at the end of time, when all facts are known, the Bible, properly interpreted, will prove to be completely true in everything that it says. (Psalms 12:6, 19:7; Proverbs 30:5; Titus 1:2).

The Bible is "Authoritative." *Authoritative* means that the words in the Bible cannot be broken, annulled, denied, abolished, or done away with. This does NOT mean that you can't try to ignore or defy the truths in the Bible, but that the Bible is still true and its promises will still come true whether you believe them or not (Heb. 4:12; Is. 40:8).

The Bible is "Transformative." *Transformative* means the Bible is more than a law book or interesting story. When people filled with God's Spirit submit to God's Word, it has the power to *change* them. To *transform* us. To make us *something else*. But make us what, exactly? The Bible has the power to make Jesus-followers **more like Jesus**.

What a surprise and a relief! You and I – sin-scarred and self-centered – can be changed to be more like the most loving, powerful, consistent, self-controlled, patient, and awesome Person in existence!

This does NOT mean we all become the same exact person, without any unique personalities of our own. CS Lewis said it like this: "the more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become..."

"The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become."
- CS Lewis

"Oh, the joys of the person who enjoys and meditates on God's Word all day long! That person is like a flourishing tree – constantly being watered by a stream, always strong and always exploding with the sweetest fruit – even in winter!"

(Psalm 1:1-3, paraphrased)

GROUP QUESTION

How have you seen God use the Bible in the past to change (transform) you to be more like Christ?

Tips for Reading Your Bible.

There are a lot of different ways to approach reading the Bible... some are helpful and some are not. We aren't prescribing one particular way, but as you open your Bible, here are some tips:

- 1. Pick a Bible Translation that you'll read.** The best Bible is the one you read. Most major translations are great, but if you're unsure just ask a pastor.
- 2. Where to start?** If you've never read it before, you might consider starting with one of the life biographies of Jesus (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John).
- 3. Start small, then stretch yourself.** Reading the Bible regularly takes discipline, so we can't expect to become experts overnight. Start with one chapter a day (about 3-4 minutes). If you missed yesterday, just ask God's forgiveness and read today.
- 4. Read cover-to-cover.** 2 Timothy 3:16 says "ALL scripture is God-breathed and is useful..." Not "some" or "most," but "ALL!" The Bible is our manual for life. It might take years, but we should all aim to read the whole Bible.
- 5. Use a paper Bible.** Your paper Bible will never interrupt you with a notification or tempt you with videos of other people's pets. Digital Bibles are a great quick resource, but they're not a good replacement for a paper Bible in your devotional life.
- 6. Buy a Bible that you like the look and feel of** – one you'll enjoy keeping on you as often as possible (if you're a grown adult, it might be time to retire your colorful "kids study bible").

- 7. Read one book at a time.** If you're always jumping from book to book, you'll probably feel lost. If you have a "study bible" then read the "introduction" to a particular book before you read the first chapter.

- 8. Read it with others.** Even if you're the smartest person in the room, others will see truths in God's Word that you'd miss on your own. Sign up for a group Bible study or ask someone to disciple you whose further along in their walk with Jesus.

- 9. Pray.** A lot of people read the Bible... but not everyone that reads it becomes more like Jesus. If God's Word is going to change us, we need His help.

- 10. Meditate on it.** Read a passage. Then read it another two or three times. Sit in silence. Chew on the words. Talk to God about it. This will drive the passage much deeper into your heart.

Week 4 – Group Discussion Questions

1.) What stood out to you from this reading, and why?

2.) Do you think we can trust the Bible today? Why or why not?

3.) How do you tend to read and study the Bible? If you don't read the Bible much, how do you idealize reading it? Share some of your best Bible-study tips and tricks with the group.

4.) The Bible is *authoritative* and *transformative*. What's an area of your life you need to be more submitted to scripture's authority so that you can experience its transforming power?



Week 5

WHAT ARE THE SPIRITUAL RHYTHMS?

Before you read, pair up with another person and look at the list of spiritual “rhythms” below. Share your answers to the following questions. Which of the rhythms is:

1. Your favorite?
2. Your least favorite?
3. The one you’re most curious to practice (more)?

The Spiritual Rhythms:

Bible

Witnessing

Sabbath

Prayer

Service

Solitude

Fellowship

Confession

Fasting

“Rhythms” ... What are they?

I think back to my childhood friends and how much their personalities rubbed off on me. The way they spoke, how they dressed, the things they liked, and the music they listened to – all these changed me... How *I* spoke, how *I* dressed, and what *I* liked and listened to. Lifestyles are contagious. You can probably resonate with this. We don't make a conscious decision to let our friends impact us; it's just a byproduct of the relationship. Over time, we start looking and sounding more like the people we follow. We might not even notice the changes in ourselves, but others do.

Spiritual Rhythms are about copying the lifestyle of Jesus. It's about having such a close daily friendship with Him that we begin to look more like Him, maybe without even noticing. *Spiritual rhythms* have also been called *spiritual habits* or *disciplines*. They're the things we do that form and shape us over time.

We're all being formed and shaped. We're all becoming more and more like *something*. It's not a matter of *whether* it's happening... Oh, it is happening! The question is what, or rather *who* are you becoming? Are your life habits, your *rhythms*, helping you to become more like Jesus or more like the world? There's no neutral position. If we're not moving towards Jesus, then, by default, we're moving away from Jesus. If we're not being *formed* to be more like Him, then we're being *de-formed* – looking less and less like Jesus over time.

The Impact of Having Rhythms.

We *all* have rhythms built into our lives. Often, we don't consider what our rhythms are, or how they're forming us. Some of the rhythms we likely have already are:

Our morning and evening routines.

Social media and how much time we spend on it.

Our hobbies and what we do with our down time.

Everyone's got rhythms and routines, the things you do throughout your day (often without even thinking about it). Think about the things you choose to "make space" for. When you make space for one thing, you are, by default, choosing not to make space for something else. Our rhythms feel so natural and normal to us that we rarely question or consider their impact.

GROUP EXERCISE

Pair up with someone and ask: What are your ordinary life-rhythms? The things you do daily, weekly, monthly, or annually? (*Example: mowing the lawn or walking the dog*)

Our Rhythms Can Change.

Our rhythms have a great deal of influence over who we are and who we're becoming. They're either forming us to be more like Jesus, or they are de-forming us, making us more like the world. The great thing about our rhythms or habits is that *we can change them!*

If our goal is to become more like Jesus, then we should exercise the rhythms He did. This means we need to swap out our rhythms for His. The spiritual rhythms are exercises in getting closer to Jesus; and when we stay close to Him, His personality will inevitably rub off on us.

Consider what Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:22-24 –

“Put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

The “old self” is the us we used to be before we started following the way of Jesus. The “new self” is who we’ve become since then. The old self was God’s enemy, the new self is God’s friend. The old self was a slave to sin, the new self is a child of God. Paul says that becoming more like Jesus is a choice to continually put off the old self and put on the new self. This is active. A choice needs to be made.

Some aspects of putting off our old self are easy. When we were new believers, many of us experienced Jesus quickly changing certain areas of our life – like our language, attitude, or friend-group. However, in other areas of life where sin is deep-seated, it can be more difficult to put off the old self. Maybe you still feel a need to control your circumstances when your security feels threatened. Maybe you continue to struggle with lust, greed, or envy. But with time and intentionality, change is possible.

Consider how Paul encouraged the Believers in Phillipi:

“Not that I’m already perfect, but I press on... Forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us. Let those of us who are mature think this way.” (Philippians 3:12-16)

Paul uses the term “press on” twice. Becoming like Jesus is a continual, on-going effort, not just something we do once or twice. It requires intentionality and regularity.

GROUP QUESTION

What parts of your “old self” were easier to “put off” when you began following Jesus?

Which parts have been harder to “put off”?

Who We’re Becoming.

As we practice the spiritual rhythms it’s important to evaluate *why* we’re doing this. What are our *motives*? Rhythms aren’t a set of rules we’re trying to keep so that God will love us more... He already loves us! **We’re not trying to earn something; we are *becoming* something.**

Rhythms slow down the pace of our lives – a pace that often makes it difficult to experience intimacy with God. They’re a way of making space to be with Jesus. And as we draw near to Jesus, the natural result will be that we become more like Him.

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What are the "right" motivations for practicing the spiritual rhythms?
2. What should we do when we realize we've been practicing them for the wrong reasons?

On the next page, you'll see a list of some spiritual rhythms found in the Bible. As we seek to practice these spiritual rhythms, we're not just trying to make our spiritual lives busier or add more things to our spiritual to-do list. Instead, we're just creating space to experience a deeper relationship with Jesus.

Spiritual disciplines are similar to physical disciplines: when you want to put a new spiritual discipline into practice, you must start where you are, not where you want to be.

For example, if you don't currently spend time each day praying or reading the Bible, commit to getting up a few minutes earlier, maybe 15-20 minutes, and spend it in the Word and in prayer. The Lord will be honored, and He will use your time to draw close to you. Over time, that commitment to 15-20 minutes will be a catalyst to growing closer to Him. It's not important **where** you start... It's important **that** you start.

Rhythms aren't a set of rules we're trying to keep so that God will love us more... He already loves us! **We're not trying to earn something; we are becoming something.**

Descriptions of the Rhythms.

While this is not an extensive list, these are some of the most essential rhythms we see in scripture. Below, you'll find a short description of each rhythm, with a couple Bible references to consider.

The Spiritual Rhythms:

Bible	Witnessing	Sabbath
Prayer	Service	Solitude
Fellowship	Confession	Fasting

1. Bible

A relationship with Jesus requires we spend time listening to Him, His thoughts, His character, His *words*. The Bible is God's *Word* – and when we read it, the things that are important to Him start becoming important to us. Over time, as we spend time with Jesus in His Word, He transforms us from the inside out.

There are many ways to engage with the Bible. You can read it, study it, meditate on it, memorize it, write it, listen to it, pray it, and more. This is a vital spiritual rhythm that mature Christians do daily.

"Oh, the joys of the person who delights in and meditates on God's Word all day long!" – Ps. 1:1-2

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." – Matt. 4:4

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." – Col. 3:16

2. Prayer

Prayer is the act of conversing with God. It involves speaking as well as listening.

- *“Pray continually.”* – 1 Thess. 5:17
- *“Pray about everything.”* – Phil. 4:6
- *“Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.”* – Col. 4:2

Some people find it helpful to use an outline to guide the order of their prayer time. A common outline is “ACTS.”

A - Adoration: Praising God for His attributes, greatness, and glory.

C - Confession: Acknowledging our sins and seeking forgiveness from God.

T - Thanksgiving: Expressing gratitude to God for His blessings and provision.

S - Supplication: Making our hopes and needs known to God – seeking His help, intervention, and guidance.

3. Fellowship

Fellowship is more than hanging out with friends. The Bible says that the bond we have with fellow believers is profound... so profound that other Christians are called our “brothers” and “sisters.” Christ brings us into the same family – a relationship that will last forever. Fellowship is a critical part of the Christian life that we’ll explore more deeply in chapter eight. (Ps. 133:1; Acts 2:42-45; 1 John 1:7)

4. Witnessing

Witnessing is more than just inviting a friend to church. It's the rhythm of sharing the good news with others – the news of what God has done through Jesus and how it's affected you personally. Witnessing isn't just a rhythm for pastors, but a matter of obedience for *all* Christians (Matt. 28:16-20). We'll explore this more deeply in chapter six.

5. Service

According to 1 Corinthians 12:4-11, each one of us is given spiritual gift(s) for the building up of one another and the church. When we use our gifts, it helps build God's kingdom, blesses others, and is used by God to help us look more like Jesus. Remember, Jesus served others. (Matt. 20:25-28; Rom.12:6-7; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; 1 Pet. 4:10-11)

6. Confession

Confession means openly, verbally, and specifically admitting your sins to God and others. Of course, every sin is first and foremost against God – but confession includes admitting your sin to those who were impacted by it.

Confession keeps us from being tempted to believe our sin is “not a big deal.” Remember, our sins were so significant that God the Son had to be crucified for them. Confession keeps us humble before God and others.

It's important to immediately follow confession with *repentance*. Repentance is when we take real steps to stop sinning. Repentance isn't just about feeling sad but *changing* our behavior. (1 John 1:9; James 5:16; Matt. 3:8)

7. Sabbath.

Sabbath is an intentional day of *rest* once a week. It's more than a nap; it's resting *with God*. In Genesis 2:2-3, God Himself rested, not because He was exhausted, but because rest is good. Rest is essential to our relationship with God. It's not just a suggestion – it's one of the Ten Commandments (see Exodus 20:8-11).

People need rest. John Mark Comer says, "*Many of us operate at dangerous levels of tired[ness], so much that we can't sense God's presence or hear his voice.*"

Sabbath rest sensitizes us to God's presence in our lives. In sabbath, we intentionally celebrate how He's provided for us and trust that He will keep providing for us – even if we take a day off. Sabbath is *worship*. (Mark 2:23-28)

8. Solitude

Our world is busy. Terribly busy. Solitude is the intentional pursuit of undistracted space with God. It's something Jesus did regularly.

"Jesus would often withdraw to lonely places and pray." - Luke 5:15-16

Solitude is more than praying while you're on a drive. It's about clearing *all* the distractions and potential interruptions (phone, computer, tv, etc.) to spend time with the most important Person in the Universe. What would it look like if we purposefully set aside time to silence all the noise that we're continually exposed to? I think we'd start to recognize just how our smart devices are forming us... or rather, *deforming* us. (Mark 1:35; Matthew 14:23)

9. Fasting

“Intermittent fasting” may be the popular weight loss trend right now, but it’s been a Christian rhythm for thousands of years and has nothing to do with getting a “summer bod.” Fasting is withholding from something for some amount of time in order to seek God.

You can fast from all sorts of things – food, phones, tv, tablets, social media, smart devices, etc. You can fast for varying periods of time, short or long. People also fast for all sorts of reasons – to seek wisdom, healing, repentance, to express your grief, or just to worship.

Jesus Himself once fasted for forty days (see Matt. 4:2). So, if our Teacher fasted, then we should fast too. It’s a profound way to enrich your prayer life. Whenever your body wants to go towards the thing you’re fasting from – your stomach growls for food or your hand reaches for the phone – it’s a reminder to reach out towards *God* through prayer instead. (Ezra 8:21-23; Ps. 35:13; Acts 13:2-3)

Conclusion

What would it take to convince a world-famous celebrity to *move in with you*? And if by some miracle you *could* successfully convince them to move into your home, you’d probably be in a constant state of disbelief! You’d pinch yourself often just to make sure it was real.

Are you excited that the most famous and important Person in the history of the universe has moved in with you? Do you pinch yourself at the idea that God would promise to *never* leave you. Are you elated that He doesn’t just make Himself available to you for a few minutes each

day, but that He wants to be with you every minute of every day?

The wonder of the Gospel is that the most famous, influential Person in existence wants to be with you despite how pitiful and powerless you are. He pursued you to be His housemate, even though it cost Him dearly.

But sadly, we often treat God like a roommate that we've grown to tolerate, not treasure. We bump into Him a couple times a week, but often we don't want to bump into Him more than we have to. We've grown bored with our Superstar Suitemate.

Do you believe experiencing more of God is the most fulfilling experience a person could have? The more you experience of Him, the more like Him you'll become. The spiritual rhythms are the *only* way we can consistently experience more of God. They're not about trying hard to earn His favor – God's Spirit became your housemate before there was anything you could do to convince Him. The rhythms don't make *God* love *you* more... they make *you* love *God* more!

The rhythms
don't make *God*
love *you* more...
they make *you*
love *God* more!

So, you probably like the idea of experiencing more of God... I mean, who would say "no" to that? It's a nice *idea*... But do you *want* more of God enough to alter your behavior so that you can actually *have* more of Him? God wants to give more of Himself to you, so will you give more of yourself to Him?

(Article written by Mike Wagner)

Week 5 – Group Discussion Questions

1.) What stood out to you from this reading, and why?

2.) Do you have any life habits (rhythms) that are deforming you? Why do you think you allow those specific habits to stay in your life?

3.) Now that you've read all the descriptions of the rhythms, what's one that you could start doing that would help form you to be more like Jesus?

Personal Take-Home Exercise

Spiritual Rhythms 'Personal Action Plan'

Spend 10-15 minutes developing a Personal "Action Plan" for how you could begin integrating one spiritual rhythm more deeply into your life.

First, on your own:

1. **Pick ONE of the Spiritual Rhythms** that you think could help form you to be more like Jesus over time (it should be one that you don't currently practice or practice much). Write it down: _____

2. **Answer these questions:**

- What's a **realistic goal** for how much time you could spend practicing this rhythm each day or week?

- What are the things that would have to change for you to begin integrating this? (ex. "I'd have to wake up 15 minutes earlier," or "I'd need to set reminders on my phone").

- **What obstacles do you foresee** and how could you address them? Here are some examples:
 - *"I hate waking up early, **but I will** put my alarm outside my bedroom so I have to get up."*
 - *"I quickly lose motivation on my own, **but I will** invite three friends to do this with me."*
 - *"My Bible is hard to understand, **but I will** buy a more readable translation")."*

Obstacle: _____

But I will: _____

Obstacle: _____

But I will: _____

Obstacle: _____

But I will: _____



Week 6

HOW DO I SHARE MY FAITH?

Before you read, as a group, briefly discuss the following questions:

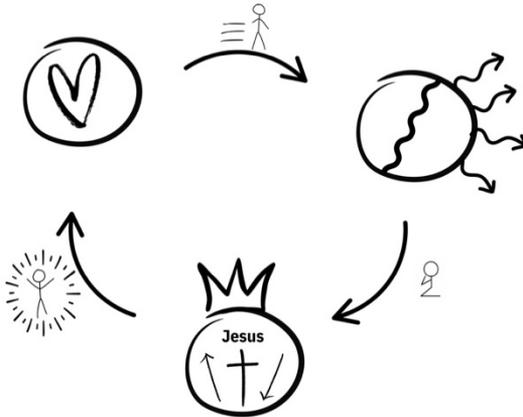
1. How important is it to share our faith with non-Christians? Why?
2. For you, what's the most uncomfortable or scary part of sharing your faith? Why?
3. How equipped do you feel to share your faith effectively right now? What would you need in order to feel more confident?

Intro

During Week 1, we considered what the Gospel is. This week, we want to look at how to effectively share the Gospel with others. When you experience Jesus Christ through the Gospel, it's natural to want to introduce others to Him – it's a genuine expression of love. There's no "one" or "perfect" way to share the gospel with someone; the best tool for sharing the Gospel is the one you use.

One Approach: *The 3 Circles.*

We want everyone in our church family to feel equipped and comfortable sharing their faith, so here's *one* simple and memorable way to help your non-Christian friend understand and respond to the Gospel.¹ You can visualize it like this:



For this chapter, you'll want a piece of paper and a pencil.

¹ The "3 Circles" Gospel Presentation Method was developed by Jimmy Scroggins and has been adopted and promoted by the North American Mission Board (NAMB). You can find resources such as training materials, mobile apps, and conversation guides that assist believers in sharing their faith on NAMB's website.

Part 1: God's Design

In the beginning, God created a world full of beauty and order. There were mountains, rivers, trees, birds, fish, and animals. It was a creation of abundance and life.

Yet God was not done. God's crowning work was humanity. God made us in His image to live with Him and take care of His creation. In the beginning, He made us in love so that we could love Him, and others, in return.

(Reference: Genesis 1-2; Psalm 19:1)

Now draw the first circle and draw a heart inside it. *This circle represents God's perfect design for the world. God and people in relationship.*



Part 2: Sin

The story quickly takes a terrible turn. Humanity chose to reject God's design. Instead of trusting God's definition of "right" and "wrong," we've chosen to trust ourselves instead. That's what the Bible calls sin. We've all done it. We've all run from God and live as rebels, believing we can define "truth" better than He could.

(Reference: Genesis 3; Romans 3:23)

Draw an arrow away from the circle. Add a person above the arrow. This demonstrates humans choosing to walk away from God's design.



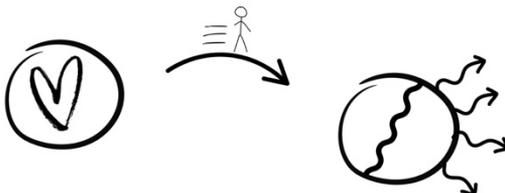
Part 3: Brokenness

Because of sin, the world is broken. Things in this world seem off because they *are* off. Natural disasters, violence, fractured relationships, and deep personal struggles all point to the disorder sin has brought.

And we feel that brokenness in our insecurity, pride, fear, anger, and anxiety. We try to escape brokenness through success, wealth, relationships, substances, and distractions, but nothing truly heals. We've broken God's world and the penalty we deserve is death.

(Reference: Romans 6:23; Hebrews 9:27; Romans 1:25)

Draw a second circle. This circle represents *brokenness* – put a crack down the middle of it. Also, draw arrows coming out from this circle – they represent all the ways we try to fix our own brokenness.



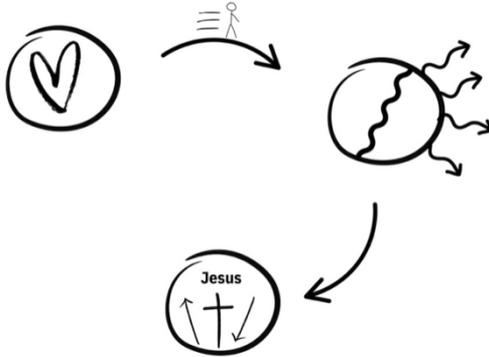
Part 4: Good News

We were broken but God didn't abandon us! He came into our world as a human named Jesus. He lived in our broken world with all of us broken people, *but He was not broken*. He lived in a way that honored God completely. He never sinned, so He didn't deserve death.

But He *chose* to die. He was killed on a cross in place of sinners like you and me. He took the penalty for our sins. Then *He rose from the dead*, proving that He has power over sin, brokenness, and death.

(Reference: John 3:16; Colossians 2:14; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

Draw an arrow to a third circle. This circle represents the Good News. Write "Jesus" in the circle. Add a cross and two arrows to show how Jesus came down to earth and died (↓) then rose from the dead and returned to heaven (↑).



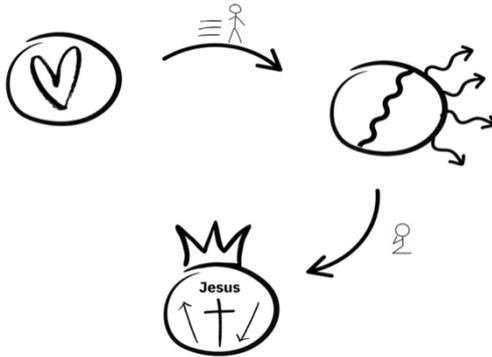
Part 5: Our Response

To receive this gift, Jesus said we must "*repent and believe*" (Mark 1:15). "Repent" means turning from our sin and self-rule. And "believe" means trusting in the Good

news that Jesus died in our place. When we do this, Jesus becomes the King of our lives. He's in charge.

(Reference: Mark 1:15; Romans 10:9; 1 John 1:9)

Draw a person praying next to the arrow that leads from brokenness to Jesus. Put a crown on the circle representing Jesus to show that He's the King in charge of your life.



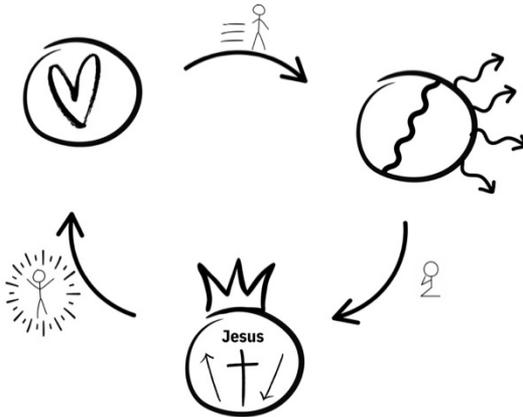
Part 6: New Creation

When we trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we're saved from the punishment our sins deserved and our relationship with God is restored. God comes to live with us and helps us live as He intended us to – His Spirit starts healing our personal brokenness and, as we live the way He intended, we begin to experience His hope, joy, and peace.

He created us in His image – to show the world what He's like. Now, through Jesus, we begin to reflect His image more clearly again.

(Reference: 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:20)

Draw one last arrow leading from the Gospel circle back to the circle representing God's design. Add a stick person with lines in a circle around them to signify "new life."



Part 7: What Now?

The Gospel must move from a *message* to an *invitation*. You've shared the Gospel, invited conversation, asked thoughtful questions, and answered theirs. **Now you get to ask a vital question:** *"Would you like to turn from your sins and trust in Jesus right now?"*

There may be a little awkward silence as they consider that question. You've just invited them to embrace a totally new life – so give them a few moments to respond.

If they say "no," you can follow up with a question or ask them to continue talking another time. But if they say "yes," ask them to share what they now believe, and rejoice with them! Finally, help them pray out loud to God – expressing their desire to trust and follow Him.

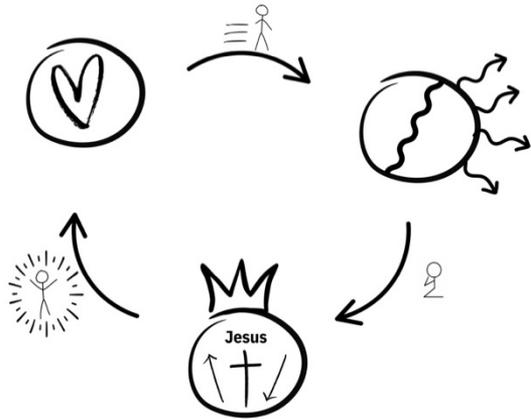
Asking them to make a decision might be a bold move, but it's worth the risk - it could change their eternity.

Mid-Reading Exercise.

Let's pause here. We've just learned a simple approach to sharing the Gospel. It's not the only approach, but it's designed to be memorable and easy-to-understand.

Take 10-minutes and, as a table, try to draw the circles and lines from memory. Here's one last reminder:

1. God's Design
2. Sin
3. Brokenness
4. Good News
5. Our Response
6. New Creation
7. What Now?



Now, close your book and let's give this a try!

Sharing His Story.

Another powerful tool that you can use as you seek to reach others with the Gospel is **your story**. Every Christian has a story of how they became a follower of Jesus – and every one of these stories is powerful, because **it's not our story... it's HIS!**

Your story is your personal eyewitness account of how God rescued you from sin and death and changed your life. When you share your story, you show others what He's like and how He could change their life too.

Be Ready.

Whether you're in line at the grocery store, sitting with a family member, or posting on social media, the Bible calls us to "always be ready" to explain your hope in Christ with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15-16). Even though it's your own personal story, it's easy to forget details or get sidetracked. Preparing and practicing will help you share clearly and avoid confusion.

Putting Your Story Together.

Here are four basic parts for telling your story:

1. **"The Opening."** Describe your life before Christ. What did it revolve around? Show your need for a Savior without unnecessary details.
2. **What Happened?** Explain why and how you became a Christian. Share in a way that listeners understand how they can become a Christian too.
3. **What's Changed?** Share one or two ways He's changed your life, especially in your character or perspective. Be honest: we still struggle, but there is real change.
4. **"The Closing."** Recap your story and connect it back to your "opening." You might say, *"I used to struggle with X, but then I met Jesus and now I have Y."*

TIPS FOR ORGANIZING YOUR STORY:

- Ask for God to help your story to be clear.
- Write your story down (write the way you speak).
- Be honest. Not overly negative or positive.
- Be careful when criticizing the church.
- Avoid overly religious terminology.
- Keep it short – 3 to 5 minutes is ideal.
- Practice telling your story until it feels natural.
- Ask God for opportunities to share.

How Will You Know When to Share?

It's not a matter of "if" but "when" to share. Psalm 107:2 says, "Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out!" Growing as a Christian means relying on God's Spirit. Pray for a desire to share and for opportunities to step out in faith. Think of the people you interact with every day. Who might the Holy Spirit want you to share your story with?

What's Holding You Back?

If you're hesitant to share your faith, you're not alone. There are a lot of reasons we're scared to share our story.

GROUP QUESTION

What scares you about sharing your faith with other people? What are your greatest hesitations?

The best way to fight fear is with truth. Here are some common hesitations and reminders of truth to help you move forward.

Hesitation: *My story is boring.*

Maybe you think your story would be more compelling if it included a gritty past, a colorful conversion, or a dramatic leap of faith. Never underestimate the power of your story because, again, it's His story. No matter the details, when you placed your faith in Christ, you became part of "a chosen people... that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Hesitation: *What if I don't know the answer to a question?*

When you feel unsure, pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help you. Jesus says, "Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time, you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matthew 10:19-20). You can rely on the Holy Spirit to help you know what to say.

If you don't have an answer now, it's OK to say, "I don't know." You can offer to investigate it together or get back to them later.

Hesitation: *What if sharing my story makes things awkward between us?*

If your faith is an important part of your life, it should come as no surprise that you want to talk about it. There's nothing inherently awkward in talking about something so central to who you are. When Peter and John were told to stop talking about Jesus, they said, "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).

Like Peter and John, we can't help but speak about God's work in our lives — it's only natural, and too wonderful not to share! If you sense awkwardness after talking about your faith or sharing your story, ask the other person about it. *"Hey, is this awkward for you?"* Addressing any tension with humility will clear the air quickly and create space for them to respond.

Hesitation: *How do I get the conversation started without being weird?*

It's not inherently awkward to share your faith... but there ARE awkward WAYS to share your faith. Cornering someone in the breakroom, trying to talk in the bathroom, or sharing with garlic-breath are awkward situations that you can avoid. On the other hand, there are more natural ways to ease into a conversation about faith... like:

Co-worker: *"How was your weekend?"*

You: *"It was great! I hung out with my family, mowed the lawn, and went to church... Have you ever been to church?"*

Co-worker: *"Yeah, when I was a kid... It was weird though."*

You: *"Really? Why's that?"*

Asking good questions and being a good listener is the quickest way around the awkwardness we all fear. There's no silver-bullet, but as you stay prayerful and open to the Spirit, a good question can have tremendous potential:

"I'm curious, what do you think about spiritual stuff?"

"Have I ever told you about what my life was like before my faith became a priority?"

"Hey, I was wondering: what do you think about God?"

Keep it simple, open and curious.

Though preparation is essential, no conversation needs to be perfectly scripted. A key to sharing is *listening*. And remember, you don't have to fit everything into one conversation. Allow room for the other person to ask questions and share their experience. Treat them like their story is significant (because it is!) and let them know you're willing to share more of yours, even if it means scheduling a future conversation.

Hesitation: What will this person think of me?

Desires for acceptance, approval, or success can keep us from following the Spirit's lead. But it's what *God* thinks of you that matters most. Your identity in Christ is unshakeable. Paul wrote, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The way others respond to your story doesn't define you.

If this is a person you have an existing relationship with, trust that they'll believe in the best of you. When in doubt, make your intentions clear and ask if they'd like you to share more. If they say "no," then honor that. Clarity and gentleness are your friends. Pushing someone past their boundary may damage their willingness to listen in the future.

It's unlikely that people will respond as you fear. It's more likely that your vulnerability will deepen your relationship with them. Of course, some people responded to Jesus poorly – some got sad (Matthew 19:22), others got mad (Luke 4:28-29), still, many others became glad when they met Jesus (Luke 17:15-16, 19:6). If someone responds poorly to you after doing your best to be loving and truthful, that's okay – you and Jesus would have that in common.

Week 6 – Group Discussion Questions

1.) What stood out to you from this reading, and why?

2.) What did you think about the 3-Circle method for sharing the Gospel? What did you find helpful? Unhelpful? What might you change to improve it?

3.) How many times do you think you'd have to practice the '3-circles' before you could do it naturally from memory? Would you be willing to put in some time to do this? Why or why not?

4.) Who is someone who is not a Christian that you could have a Gospel conversation with? What's one practical thing you could do to move towards making it a reality?

3-Circles Resource:

The 'Life On Mission' App is a simple and user-friendly application for your smartphone that takes you step-by-step through the 3-circles. Give it a try by searching 'Life On Mission' in your app store or by ***scanning the QR code below:***



Week 6 – Take Home Assignment

Write Your Story

IN THE NEXT 2 WEEKS, intentionally set aside time to write down the story of how you became a follower of Jesus. Aim for 3-minutes. Use the questions below to help guide you.

**If you're not a Christian, use the guide on page 101.*

(We'll be sharing our short stories together on week 8).

What was your life like before you started following Jesus?

What event(s) led you to place your trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior?

Jesus said that to be saved we must simply "repent and believe." How did you "repent"? What did you "believe" in?

What about the Gospel is especially "good news" to you?

Have you been baptized? Why or why not? If so, when, and what did that mean to you?

How have you changed or grown since becoming a Christian?

Why do you think other people should follow Jesus?

How could you summarize your story in one sentence? (i.e. "I used to struggle with X, but then I met Jesus and now I have Y.")

***** Using your own notebook, write a 3-minute version of your story. Come ready to share it at our next meeting.**



Week 7

WHAT IS THE MISSION?

Before you read, have everyone take 2 minutes to write down the top five goals you would like to see begun and/or completed by the time you cross the finish line of a successful and God-honoring life.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

As a Group: Go around and let everyone very briefly share their five goals for a successful life.

Were You Made for More?

It's the middle of July, you're at the beach, soaking in the rays, and you look around, noticing all kinds of people. You notice people playing football, and others are catching a wave. But then you see a brother and his younger sister. They each have a bucket in one hand, a shovel in the other, and a broad smile from ear to ear. After a few hours, a pile of sand turned into a royal castle. Even though there were arguments and a few tears, the kids left the shore that day deeply fulfilled and proud of their masterpiece. Returning the next day, they were crushed. The tide had erased their work. The sandcastle they built at low tide did not last.

When you think about your life, what are you building? What consumes the days of your life? Have you spent your lifetime developing the next great invention, pursuing wealth, or preparing for the retirement of your dreams?

... Are you building sandcastles at low tide?

"Grass withers and flowers fade..." Inventions rust, finances run dry, vacation homes decay, and exotic memories grow dim. Why? Because "heaven and earth will pass away" (Matt. 24:35). But three things remain: God, His Word, and human souls. When we build temporary things in temporary places, our work will eventually wash away. It's when our lives are built around God, His Word, and human souls, that our lives have eternal significance.

God has greater plans for your life than you can imagine. Are you willing to lay down your buckets and shovels and follow Him?

A Life-Altering Call.

Jesus made a similar call to His first followers. Some fishermen were in a boat washing their nets after a long night's work when Jesus walked by on the shoreline. It wasn't a random afternoon stroll – Jesus was on a mission to gather followers. The people He wanted to call were not the spiritual elites. These fishermen didn't know all the answers. He wanted ordinary people like me and you.

Rather than waiting for them to come to Him, He pursued them and invited them into a new way of life. He told them, "*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men*" (Matt. 4:19). If these fishermen would follow Him, He promised to make them "people fishers." If they embraced Jesus' call, they would step into a life full of purpose – a life of *fishing for people*.

At the end of his ministry, Jesus made it clear to His disciples that the time had now come to fish. He said, "**Go** therefore and make disciples of all nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **teaching** them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20a, emphasis added). After three years of on-the-job training, they were ready. The disciples now had a grand purpose to their lives. That's why this passage is rightly called "The Great Commission." It's a commission that is radically great! They were to go to people who were far from God, baptizing those they won to the faith and teaching them how to live out the commands of Jesus. This band of brothers had become a team of disciple-makers with three priorities: *go, baptize, and teach*.

These two passages are not only significant historical events in the lives of a handful of Jewish men in the first century. They are also vital for your life today. If you are a Christian, you have already embraced Jesus' invitation to follow Him. You know that following Jesus in faith is the central pursuit of your life. And whether you realize it or not, Jesus makes a promise: as you follow Him, He will equip you to reach others. The Spirit will empower you to live out the Great Commission. There are no exceptions. You were made to *follow* Jesus and to fish for people as you go, *baptize*, and *teach*.

At Community Bible Church, we say it this way: our mission is "Centering our whole lives on Jesus as we make disciples wherever we are." Making disciples is our mission. It's your mission. If you have embraced Jesus as your Savior and Lord, this is Jesus' life-altering plan for your life, too.

Fishing For Men.

Whether you like fishing or not, imagine this: You walk up to the edge of a lake, and as you look into the water you see dozens of fish swimming under the surface. Some are big; others are small. Then, you look upward and pray, "Oh Lord, let me catch a fish." *Then, you sit back and wait for a fish to jump out of the water and into your hands!*

Of course, fishing doesn't work that way. It takes skill, discipline, and a whole lot of patience. It's the same with fishing for people. Often, we wait for people to come to us when God has called us to go to people – to cast our net.

The world is full of people who are very far from God. Very far from God, *but very close to us*. They're our co-workers, neighbors, cashiers, baristas, friends, and family. The people God wants you to reach are in your backyard.

Pause here. Take a moment and write down five people you know who are far from God but close to you:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

If you can't think of five, that's okay. That's your starting point: praying for names. Then commit to pray daily for "BOB" - Burden, Opportunity, and Boldness. Ask the Lord to give you a *Burden* for their salvation, *Opportunities* to share your faith with them, and the *Boldness* to take hold of every opportunity He gives you.

As you pray, think about ways you can develop a genuine connection. You might invite them for coffee, host them for dinner, or go to a local baseball game. As you seek to develop an authentic relationship, take the risk to ask about their faith. If they don't know Jesus, share the gospel (perhaps using the 3-circles). Invite them to church with you. Bring them into the fellowship you experience with God and other Christians. God is calling you to take bold steps of faith as you invite others into a saving relationship with Christ.

GROUP EXERCISE

Take a quiet moment and answer this question alone:

What's one bold step of faith I could take this week to engage in the Great Commission?

My next step this **week** is:

After a couple minutes, regroup and allow space for a few people to share their goal with the group.

Teaching Them to Observe.

Sharing the gospel is only the beginning. As Jesus said, we're called to *go, baptize, and teach*. When someone comes to Christ, it's a miracle! On that day, there's a party in heaven (Luke 15:10), and we join in. New believers become a part of God's family and proclaim their faith through baptism. But the Great Commission doesn't end with "going" and "baptizing." The Church is not merely a conversion-factory; we equip others to follow Jesus.

If someone trusted Christ tomorrow and looked to you for help, would you be ready? **Do you have a plan to equip a new Christian to follow Jesus?** Take a moment to truly consider it. Do you have a plan to help them grow? Could they use your plan as they look to disciple others?

We make plans for things we think are important. Things like retirement, putting the kids through college, and vacation. We know we won't get what we want out of

life without a clear plan. Making disciples is no different. If we're honest, many of us have never seriously embraced Jesus' command to make disciples because it's not very important to us. We've never made a plan that we're determined to follow.

Let me ask it this way: If you were going to equip a young believer to follow Jesus by discussing a few basic aspects of the Christian life, what aspects would you prioritize? Could you think of six?

GROUP EXERCISE

On your own: What six aspects of the Christian Life would you prioritize teaching a new believer so that they could faithfully follow Jesus? Take 1-2 minutes and list them.

Aspect of the Christian Life

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

As a Group: *Go around and let everyone very briefly share their six aspects.*

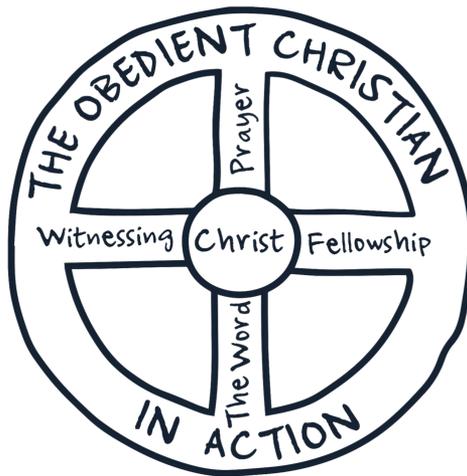
Was that easy? Difficult? Were you racking your brain to develop six or struggling to narrow it down? Do you

think you could give a couple Bible verses to support each of the aspects you chose?

At Community Bible Church, we've embraced a disciple-making tool called *The Wheel*.² It's a simple tool that can help people grow in their faith and even equip them to go be disciple-makers themselves.

The Wheel Overview.

The Wheel is made of six components: Christ the Center, Obedience to Christ, The Word, Prayer, Fellowship, and Witnessing.



- **Christ is at the center.** Why? Because Christ should be the center of our very *lives* – daily shaping our identity and priorities.

² 'The Wheel' was developed by Navigators® Ministries.

- **The vertical spokes** – The Word and Prayer – help us relate with God.
- **The horizontal spokes** – Fellowship and Witnessing – shape our relationships with others.
- **The outside of the wheel is Obedience.** This is where the “rubber meets the road.” Our love for Christ should lead to Spirit-empowered *obedience*.

Maybe you’ve known Jesus for years. But don’t dismiss this as a basic tool. Use it to evaluate your spiritual life and where you have room for growth. **Here are some questions to ask yourself:**

- *Christ the Center:* Does Christ shape my identity and my priorities during every moment of the day?
- *Obedience to Christ:* Does my love for Christ shape how I live?
- *The Word:* Have I heard from God in His word today?
- *Prayer:* Do I pray fervently and regularly throughout the day?
- *Fellowship:* Are other believers speaking into my life?
- *Witnessing:* When was the last time I shared the gospel?

If many of us are honest, we must admit that these six core realities don’t fully shape our lives. You might read the word daily and pray, but you haven’t shared the gospel with a non-believer in decades. Or you’re committed to gathering with the church, but you’ve never learned the practice of daily feeding on the Word of God.

GROUP EXERCISE

Take a quiet moment and answer this question alone:

"What's one aspect of The Wheel that needs attention in my life?"

This **month**, I will focus on this aspect of my spiritual life:

After a minute, regroup and let a few people share the area they'd like to focus on.

Your Story Can Start Now.

While there's much more that could be said about the mission of God, we'll end with this: God is inviting you to participate in His mission. He wants to use you as you already are. When you look in the mirror, you may see someone who is inexperienced, unskilled, and immature, and say to yourself, *"There's no way that I'm ready to be used by God to reach people."* But Jesus says, *"Follow me and I'll make you a fisher of people."*

In John 4, Jesus meets a woman who is not only ill-equipped; she's not even a believer. As Jesus shares who He is and what He offers, this woman comes to believe He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world. She moves from outsider to Jesus-follower and immediately starts reaching others. She doesn't know much, but that doesn't stop her from sharing all she knows about Jesus with people in her backyard. And God uses her. "Many Samaritans from that

town believed because of the woman's testimony" (John 4:39).

That's not a unique story. Throughout the history of the church, it has happened time and time again. And it could happen to you too. You might not understand it all – but it's not *what* you know, it's *Who* you know! You know the King of the universe, and you get to invite others into his kingdom of love, peace, justice, and grace. Are you bold enough to believe that God wants to use you to reach those near you?

You've heard Christ's call on your life – it's time to cast the net.

Week 7 – Group Discussion Questions

1.) Have you ever been intentionally disciplined by another person? If so, who was it and how did it impact you? If not, what would you want out of a discipleship relationship?

2.) Which of the four "spokes" – (1) The Word, (2) Prayer, (3) Fellowship, (4) Witnessing – do you feel strongest in? Weakest? Why?

3.) After reading this article, how do you feel about discipling others? How would you guide a new believer to follow the way of Jesus?

4.) How do you feel about *The Wheel*? Is it too basic? Is it too complicated? Why?



Week 8

WHAT IS THE CHURCH?

Before you read. In groups of 3 to 6, take three minutes per person and share your story (testimony) with the group. Please pay attention to time – perhaps consider using a timer.

If you're feeling uncomfortable, that's okay. The point isn't to give a grand speech for people's approval, but to give glory to God by retelling HIS story and to get a little more comfortable sharing it out loud.

What Is the Church?

When most people think about *church*, they tend to think of a *building* – steeple, pews, and pulpits. We think of “church” as a place we *go* to. But in the Bible, church is not a *place*, but a group of *people*. It’s not something we “go” to, but a living community we’re a part of.

Today, many Christians see gathering with other Christians as *optional*. Many have embraced a view of faith that says “*All that matters is my personal relationship with Jesus. I don’t need others.*” The result? We live as if church is a non-essential add-on.

Scripture calls Church God’s “*Family*” – fellow believers are your “brothers” and “sisters.” This means that the Christian life is a life lived *together*. Being part of God’s family means you belong to others (Eph. 2:19). Sadly, many Christians choose to be estranged from their Family.

Scripture also teaches that the local church (believers who gather together *in person*) is the main way God is advancing His rule in the world. It’s not merely a club or a gym membership, but a *gathering of God’s Ambassadors* – the group of people ruled by King Jesus, who are sent by Him to proclaim His Message to the world (2 Cor. 5:20).

So, the Church is a group we *belong* to (family), AND a community we have *responsibility* with (ambassadors).

The Church is tremendously important to Jesus – after all, He calls the Church His “Bride.” But if we’re honest, many Christians don’t think Jesus’ Wife is very important. They think of Jesus’ Bride as “take-Her-or-leave-Her.”

Jesus is King, and, in the words of Michael Horton, “*Kings do not offer suggestions.*” The Church is essential,

not optional, for our spiritual growth – the Bible does not present any alternatives. Through the Church, God puts His glory on display to the world and grows us as His followers.

Our hope for this reading is that you discover the local church is not simply another voluntary society, like a Peloton workout group or the Boys Scouts or a summer pool membership at the Elks Lodge. Our hope is that you feel – deep within – the importance of the Church, because it's the group of People He uses to show the world what He's like.

GROUP QUESTION

How is the Church connected to our spiritual growth?

Try to share an example of how your connection to the Church has been critical to your spiritual formation.

Biblical Metaphors for the Church.

The Bible uses a variety of metaphors to describe the Church. These metaphors enrich our view of what the Church is, what the Church does, and how the Church relates to God and the World.

"Flock"

Like a good shepherd, Jesus knows us intimately. And, like a flock of sheep, we respond to our Shepherd's voice (John 10:1-15). This image emphasizes God's care, guidance, and tenderness. It emphasizes our need for Him and how we belong to Him. (Ps. 23:1; 78:70-72; John 10:1-16; Matt. 10:6; Luke 15:4-7; John 18:16-18)

"Building"

The Church is not a building, but it is *like* a building in several ways. Buildings need cornerstones, foundations, and walls – and so does the Church. 1 Corinthians 3:11 says Jesus is the *cornerstone* of the Church. Ephesians 2:20 says the apostles and prophets are the *foundation* of the Church. And 1 Peter 2:5 says that believers are "living stones" built on top of that good foundation.

These stones are all dramatically different from one another – men, women, children, city people, and country bumpkins. In Jesus, the whole "building" is being fitted together (Ephesians 2:21), which emphasizes that Jesus is actively constructing this amazing "building" *right now!*

Just like buildings grow as their builders add material to them, the Church is a *living* building that grows every time Jesus adopts a new person into His Family. 2 Corinthians 6:16 calls us a "temple of the living God."

"Bride"

Jesus loves His Church like a groom loves his *bride*. It's a picture of intense passion, loyalty, care, and devotion. This metaphor reminds us of God's deep affection for the community of believers and calls us to love Him with devotion and passion in return (Revelation 21:2).

Perhaps you picture God more like a distant father who tolerates you because he "has" to. But this metaphor shows us that God doesn't merely tolerate us, rather, He delights in us with unfathomably deep love and devotion. (*Matt. 9:15, 25:6; Rev. 21:2*)

"Body"

The church is like a *body* — it has many different parts (hands, legs, eyes, ears, etc.) but it's still *one* body – unified in purpose. We're all incredibly different from one another, but we're still *one body* – unified in purpose. Like a body needs all its parts, we need each other.

Believing you don't need the Church is like a limb believing it doesn't need the rest of the body – limbs don't tend to last long after they've been amputated. (*Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:4-27; Eph. 4:1-7, 5:23; Col. 1:1;*)

Other Metaphors

The metaphors above are only a few that Scripture uses to describe the Church. The Bible also calls the Church *God's field, garden, and vineyard*. The Church is described as *salt, light, and a city on a hill*. This multitude of descriptors tells us something about the beauty, complexity, and importance of the Church.

GROUP QUESTION

How do you feel about these metaphors for the Church? Which one do you connect with most? Why?

Who Makes Up the Church?

Put simply: the Church is God's people. It's made up of anyone throughout history who has been saved by grace through faith in Jesus and is filled with the Holy Spirit.

The Church lives “*Coram Deo.*”

The Latin phrase *Coram Deo* means “before the face of God.” To live *Coram Deo* means living your entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God, as one called into fellowship with God. The Church is a community of people whose primary characteristic is that God is *with them* and they are *with God*.

The Church is an “*Ekklesia.*”

The Greek word *Ekklesia* literally means “called out ones” – it’s the Word translated as “church” in the Bible. Christians are people who have been “called out” by God to be holy and set apart – not to escape the world, but to live differently in it (Romans 1:7; Ephesians 1:4).

The Church is called together as one Family.

The Church is God’s Family (Ephesians 2:19; Galatians 6:10). God is our “Father” (Matthew 6:9) and we’re even invited to call Jesus our “brother” (Hebrews 2:11). Because we’re a family, we’re expected to love and care for one another and have a shared commitment to what binds us together: Jesus.

We weren’t adopted into a single-child family. We’ve been called together. We were saved into a community. A big family.

The Church gathers regularly.

We gather to:

- Worship the Triune God .
- Proclaim His Word.

- Engage non-Christians with the Gospel.
- Disciple each other.
- Care for one another through prayer and giving.
- Stand both for and against the world.

What the Church Is Not.

Now that we've explored what the Church is, let's consider what the Church is not. The church is *not*:

- A club where membership is optional.
- A spiritual service provider catering to consumers.
- A loose group of individuals pursuing private religious experiences.
- A place, program, performance, or party.

Wrong views of the church lead people to:

- Attend indefinitely without committing.
- See communion as a private experience.
- Isolate their faith from their everyday lives.
- Make major life decisions with no regard for their church community.
- Avoid responsibility for others' spiritual well-being.

But if Jesus is the Head of the church, then **obedience to Him means deep commitment to His Body** – the local church.

GROUP QUESTION

How has being involved in the local church made a difference in your relationship with Jesus?

Why You Should Join a Local Church.³

- 1. It's Biblical.** New Testament believers knew who belonged to the Church. They submitted to leaders, carried burdens together, and practiced discipline and encouragement. (Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 13:17)
- 2. It's How You Represent Jesus.** Church membership is how a local church body affirms your faith and publicly declares you as a representative of Christ to the world.
- 3. It's How You Live Out the Metaphors.** Being a body, a building, or a bride isn't something we can do alone. You can't live out these metaphors without being part of a local community.
- 4. It's How You Serve Others.** Membership helps you know who to love, support, warn, and encourage (Ephesians 4). We have a special responsibility to serve the people God places in our church. (Romans 12:13; Galatians 6:10)
- 5. It Helps you Follow Leaders.** Godly leadership requires relationship. You can't submit to a podcast or a book. Real accountability and care happen in a local church context. (Hebrews 13:17)
- 6. It Puts the Gospel on Display.** Jesus said the world will know we are His disciples by our love for one another (John 13:34-35). Membership shows the world what redeemed relationships look like.

³ Jonathan Leeman, *Church Membership*, p. 79-81.

Conclusion

Your spiritual growth and maturity in Christ are directly tied to your connection with the local church. The church is where you are formed, equipped, encouraged, and sent out. So, whether or not God's called you to Community Bible Church, we urge you to **plant your life in a gospel-centered local church** – one that values Scripture, authentic community, and the mission of Jesus. Don't just attend. Join. Belong. Commit.

(Article written by Pastor Aaron Martin)

Week 8 – Group Discussion Questions

1.) Did anything in this reading challenge or strengthen your perspective on the local church?

2.) Based on this reading, has your view of the importance of church membership changed at all? Please explain.

3.) Has God used this 8-week journey through *Grounded* to challenge, encourage, shape, or form you? If so, how?

Centering our whole lives on Jesus
as we make disciples wherever we are.

