

# **PARTNERS IN MISSION**

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# Purpose

This course is designed for you to explore the claims of Christianity in a safe environment, with lots of room for questions and discussion. For some, this will be completely new information; for others, it will be a good refresher. Wherever you are at in your faith journey, this course will help you get a firm grasp of the basics of Christian belief and life. We encourage you to take the time to explore faith in Jesus and what it means to follow him.

While becoming a follower of Jesus Christ often is a moment's decision, the life of faith is an ongoing learning process. Much of what it means to be a follower of Jesus is learned through being one: as you come to understand God's ways you learn to walk in them more fully. No introductory course on the Christian Life can adequately prepare you for the adventures that lie ahead of you - you'll just have to jump in and go for it!

On the other hand, we want to do our best to walk with you in the journey of following Christ. While we can't prepare you completely, having a solid foundation will assist you in getting off on the right foot and put you on a trajectory towards Christian maturity, where you will be ready "for every good work." This course aims at giving you that solid foundation. We too often assume in the church that if you attend church you will figure out this foundation on your own, but that's simply not true! In fact, the church has an awful track record of letting its members fill the pews while a burned-out church staff does all the work of local ministry. You can picture it like a triangle: a few "professional clergy" at the top of the triangle doing all the work to tend to the congregation at the bottom. We'd like to flip the triangle upside down: the leadership of the church at the bottom supporting and equipping the congregation at the top doing the work of ministry. The Bible says it like this:

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4.11-16)*

For this reason, we take mission partnership very seriously. The church is not a social club but a community of people sent to be Jesus' people in the world. Part of the hope of this course is that you will make the Vintage Faith Community your church - a community of faith that becomes your family, caring for one another and working together to demonstrate and proclaim the good news about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to Spokane, the Northwest, and the world!

# Introduction: Gospel Christianity

**SUMMARY:** The heart of Christianity is the Gospel. Gospel means “good news” and was a word used by Jesus and the early church to describe the core content of Christianity.

## THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS

According to Dr. Timothy Keller, “gospel” (from the Greek word *ev-angelion* = good news) was a term applied to any historical event of such significance that it actually changed the course of history for those to whom it was proclaimed. For example, the birth of Caesar Augustus was “gospel” because his birth promised a new era of prosperity and the blessing of the gods for the whole Roman world.

Perhaps the best example of the use of the word gospel comes from Martyn Lloyd-Jones. He says that when a king went to war and lost, he would immediately send generals throughout the cities and villages to prepare the common people for war. Because the battle had been lost, the enemy would advance to take the people captive, and if anyone wanted to live they were going to need to fight for their lives. Their livelihood, their hope, and their future was, essentially, in their own hands. On the other hand, Lloyd-Jones says, when the king *won* a great victory on the front lines, he would send “good-news messengers” or “gospel-proclaimers” (literally, evangelists) to proclaim the victory throughout the cities and villages of the Empire. These men were not generals telling the people to prepare for battle; rather, they were messengers carrying a “gospel” message that the livelihood, hope, and future of the people had been secured on their behalf by the king, though they themselves had not lifted a finger!

Lloyd-Jones says that every religion sends generals; in other words, every religion is a system of belief and practice that promises eternal blessing, nirvana, or enlightenment to the degree that you are willing to believe, obey, and perform. In religion, you are given a set of instructions, a list of practices, or a methodology of reform, and it is up to you to make it happen. Gospel Christianity, on the other hand, sends messengers - evangelists - who proclaim that the victory has already been won by the king on behalf of his people. Though the people themselves have not gone to battle, they reap the rewards of the king’s risk, courage, and skill. Gospel Christianity is not advice, information, or a set of practices or doctrines that you need to adhere to in order to earn eternal life. Gospel Christianity is the announcement of a victory won on your behalf by King Jesus, which you have only to receive, believe, and celebrate!

## **THE GOSPEL IS WHAT JESUS HAS DONE**

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

First, *Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God.* In every way, he was perfectly pleasing to God, absolutely faithful, and entirely obedient. When I put faith in him, I'm asking God to deal with me not according to my performance in life but according to Jesus' performance on my behalf. We are fundamentally shifting our sense of worth and identity from ourselves to him. When that happens, God no longer considers me a rebel against Him but treats me as a "dearly beloved son." Our experience of this incredible truth leads to a deep, humble gratitude and a zealous desire to flee from sin because it is incompatible with who we are in Christ.

Second, *Jesus died as a perfect substitute, taking the just penalty against my sin.* Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath against me and my sin to the very last drop; there is none left for me when I place my faith in Him. God the Father turned his back on his own Son so that he could turn his face toward rebels like me. I recognize that my sin put Jesus on the cross, and that humbles me; but I also recognize that he freely chose to go to the cross for me, and that reality energizes me to live faithfully before him! This is why Paul in Romans 8.1 says, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!" We are no longer guilty before God; we have been "justified" or made right with him and we have peace with him. Our moral failure does not hinder our relationship with God.

Third, *Jesus rose from the dead and defeated sin, death, and hell.* Jesus is alive today and promises to take control of my heart and life, actually living in me by his Spirit! When Jesus ascended to the right hand of the Father, he sent the Holy Spirit to live in us, empowering us for growth in character, gifting us for ministry in the world, and leading us into all truth. By faith in him I can walk in consistent victory over my sin, the patterns of sin in the world, and Satan's work. Additionally, because Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father, I can be certain that God's love towards me will never change, and one day Jesus will return to re-make the world as he intended it to be in the beginning, set all things right, and bring me to be with him for eternity.

## **THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS FOR US**

Christians, then, are not primarily a group of people who all believe the same things and perform certain rituals and religious observances. The radical claim of the New Testament - and of Jesus himself - is that Christians are new people, a new humanity, created in and through the work of Jesus Christ. Our sin has been forgiven because of Jesus, God treats us as beloved children because of Jesus, and the Spirit of God comes to take up residence in our hearts. We are not who we used to be; rather, we are "in Christ": all that belongs to Jesus is ours, our past is gone, and our identity today is in Him!

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

- In Religion, we obey in order to be accepted by God, fearing what he might do if we're disobedient. The Gospel motivates us to obedient Christian living by telling us that because of Jesus we are already accepted, that the judgment against our sin has fallen on Jesus, and that there is no guilt or condemnation left for me.
- In Religion, I obey in order to get things from God, often making promises about what I will do or how I will change. The Gospel tells me what God has done for me, and his grace teaches me to obey out of joyful gratitude for all that he has already given me.
- In Religion, my identity and self-worth are based on what I can accomplish, on how hard I work, or on how moral I am. Therefore, I look down on others who aren't as moral or obedient as me. But in the Gospel, my identity and self-worth are based on God's love for me in Jesus, even while I was his enemy, unable to accomplish or earn his love by my actions. Therefore, I can't look down on someone different than me because I am no better than they are – and probably worse.

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

As Christians, we want to rest daily in, rejoice in, and live out of what God has done for us in Jesus. This means an ongoing, simultaneous awareness of our sinfulness that leads to deeper humility and also a growing awareness of how amazing grace really is.

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

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

**What was most insightful for you in this section?**

**In your own words, what is the difference between Gospel Christianity and Religion?**

**How would you explain the 3 main points of Christianity to someone else?**

**What does it mean to be “in Christ?”**

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

# SESSION ONE – The Story of God

The primary place we learn about the Gospel is the Bible. For 2000 years, Christians have endeavored to be “people of the book,” a phrase emphasizing the *authority* of the Bible in the life of the Church. We face significant challenges in this endeavor in our day: a general disregard for authority, the fear that authority is always overpowering and controlling, and the commonly held misconception that an ancient text is mostly irrelevant to modern man. These challenges come from within the Church as often as from outside it, and often it is the way in which Christians themselves have used the Bible that has encouraged many to reject it without ever investigating it.

## I. What Is The Bible About?

The most important key to the Bible is to recognize that it is not about *you*. We tend to read the Bible as if we were the main character and often place ourselves “into the story” to learn what we should be doing. While the Bible talks tons about what we should be doing, the most important key is to read the Bible through the lens of the Gospel. In other words, read to find out what the Bible tells you about what God is up to in the world and, particularly, how a passage points forward or backward to Jesus:

*Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24.44-47)*

Jesus is telling his disciples that the Bible – from beginning to end – is all about *Him!* In each and every passage, the Bible is telling us something about our need for Jesus to come to save us and heal the world. As you read the Bible, always try to pay attention to what each passage is telling us about Jesus.

If you read the Bible as if it is primarily about Jesus and his saving work in our place, then the Bible becomes the source of humility, encouragement, joy, and strength it was meant to be. Don’t read it like a series of talks on how to be more moral or more religious so that God will bless you. Rather, read the Bible to learn about what God has done in general in history, and particularly in Jesus, what that means for we who believe in Him, and how that ought to shape our lives today.

## SESSION ONE – The Story of God

Unfortunately, the Bible has often been used as a rulebook or “morality manual” to keep people in line and to silence thoughtful reflection and discussion. That is *not* how we should understand it. We must come to see that the Bible is God’s self-revelation, the record of how he acted in history with real humans to reveal himself and his purposes for his creation.

### **The Flow of the Bible**

While it can be easy to get lost in the details (just try reading Leviticus from beginning to end!), the Bible does have a basic structure that is helpful not only in understanding how God has worked in history but also how he intends to continue that work in the present and into the future. You can think of the Bible as a drama in 5 Acts:

**Act One – Creation:** In the beginning, God makes the heavens and the earth, and he makes it all perfect. He reigns over his creation as the all-loving King, and Adam and Eve are his agents, made “in his image” and charged with taking what he had made and cultivating it, creating a culture which not only honored God but reflected his goodness and good purpose for it. Unfortunately, this state of affairs only lasts for the first two chapters of Genesis.

**Act Two – Fall:** God’s people choose to dishonor God, to find their own sense of purpose and meaning in the world apart from God and his good purposes for them. As they turn from God, all of creation turns with them, and humanity has been in rebellion against a good and loving God ever since. While they remain image-bearers, that image is significantly and seemingly irrevocably damaged – they can no longer be the people God intended them to be. This part of the play begins in Chapter 3 of Genesis, but is an ongoing theme, even through our day.

**Act Three – Israel:** Rather than wipe the slate clean and start over, God begins to enact a plan to redeem his creation from within the brokenness of humanity. Rather than cast humanity aside, he calls a man named Abraham and promises that through Abraham he will eventually remake the world as he intended it to be. The majority of the Old Testament, beginning in Genesis 12, is the outworking of Act Three and traces the way in which God acts through this people – called Israel – to begin to redeem his creation.

**Act Four – Jesus:** The Old Testament ends without the Drama coming to a conclusion. In fact, it ends without any real resolution at all. But the New Testament begins with Jesus, who, it turns out, is the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham about remaking the world. Jesus is the one through whom God sets the world right, and he does so not by destroying the world, but by taking the brokenness of the world on himself, dying, and rising to life again 3 days later. In his resurrection, the early Christians come to see that death has been destroyed and that God has done

what he promised to do! Act Four comprises the first four books of the New Testament which are called “The Gospels.”

**Act Five – A 3-Part Finale:** The *first scene* of Act Five is the early Church, those who have come to believe that Jesus is God’s way of redeeming the world. God sends his Spirit to fill this early church in order that they might go out shining the light of the Story of God into all the world. The majority of the New Testament, beginning with the book of Acts and going straight through to Jude, is this first scene. This is primarily composed of letters written by early church leaders to churches and individuals, instructing them on how to go on living and telling this Story. The *second scene* is the one in which you and I find ourselves living – continuing the work that God gave to his early church, telling and living the Story of God in our day. The *third and final scene* is described in the book of Revelation, a somewhat cryptic book which describes God’s view of how this redemption work is going. It ends with a glorious finale, where God remakes the heavens and the earth, sets all things to rights, and comes to live amongst his people forever!

## II. General Bible Information

The Bible contains 66 books written by 40 different authors. It is divided into Old and New Testaments, and the individual books cover a breadth of genres: history, poetry, general and personal letters, sermons, and even a love song. There are geographical surveys, building plans, travel diaries, population statistics, family trees, inventories, and numerous legal documents. It covers hundreds of controversial subjects with amazing unity. It is the best-selling book of all time, and is now available in nearly 3000 languages.

### What does Scripture say about itself?

*Some statements from Scripture about Scripture:*

Given by inspiration of God – II Timothy 3.16, II Peter 1.19-21

The very words of God - I Thessalonians 2.13

A perfect guide for life - Proverbs 6.23

Effective - Isaiah 55.11

Powerful - Hebrews 4.12

For everyone - Romans 16.26

To be lived - James 1.22

*Some poetic images from Scripture about Scripture:*

Sweet like honey - Psalm 119.103

A lamp to guide our life - Psalm 119.105

A fire that purifies and hammer that breaks us - Jeremiah 23.29

A sword - Ephesians 6.17, Hebrews 4.12

A seed for faith salvation planted in us - James 1.21

Milk that nourishes us - I Peter 2.2

### **The Marks of Scripture**

Here is a brief summary of what we believe about the Bible:

- a. **Authoritative:** The Bible is not just about God, but God's words; he is speaking to us in his word. As such, the Bible is our final authority on the heart and will of God.
- b. **Inerrant:** Because the Bible is God's Word, it always tells the truth in everything it talks about. The Bible is fully truthful.
- c. **Clear:** The Bible is understandable and straightforward. You don't need a Theology degree to comprehend its message. However, only the heart and mind enlightened by the Holy Spirit will be capable of grasping its depths.
- d. **Necessary:** The life of faith cannot be lived without the Scripture. God nourishes and feeds us spiritually through the Bible.
- e. **Sufficient:** The Bible doesn't tell us everything, but it does tell us all we need for life and faith. While books about the Bible can help us grasp its message, we believe in the primacy of the Scriptures.

### **III. How Did We Get the Bible?**

"Canon" is the term that refers to the list of books of the Old and New Testaments which comprise the Bible. These books share common traits that distinguished them from other extra-Biblical writings, including some books that claim to be written by Biblical characters (these are called "pseudophygia" - written in an apostle's name by someone other than the apostle). The OT canon was solidified around 400 BC when the last book of the prophets, Malachi, was written. Malachi ends with the promise that God's next redemptive act would be sending John the Baptist. Some Bible versions include the Apocrypha, a series of books written between the close of the OT and the start of the NT. While these books can be historically helpful, they have never been considered authoritative because they contain errors and are often at odds with the clear teaching of the rest of Scripture. Additionally, there is no sign that these books functioned with any authority in the early church until 1546, when the Catholic Church voted to make them authoritative in order to justify certain unbiblical doctrines (such as purgatory).

The New Testament canon was officially decided upon as early as AD 367, although almost complete copies date as early as 180 AD. Most of the NT books functioned with authority in the early church before they were even finished being written (2 Peter 3.15-16).

**The English Version**

How the Bible came to be translated in English is a long and fascinating story. The Old Testament is mostly written in Hebrew, while the New Testament is mostly written in Greek. In order for us - or anyone who doesn't know Greek and Hebrew - to read the Bible, it has to be translated. Many people wonder if the Bible can still be accurate after being translated to another language. The answer is yes! Essentially, the process goes something like this:

<b>GOD</b>				<b>YOU</b>
<b>Revelation</b>	<b>Transcription</b>	<b>Translation</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Application</b>

Step 1 - **Revelation** is when God gives to his prophets and apostles his word. This happened through audible words, through visions and dreams, and through (as in the case of the 10 commandments) God actually writing it down. There are 40 different authors throughout the Scripture, and God works through the personality and style of these individual writers to pen his Truth to us. In each case, the texts functioned authoritatively within the Judeo-Christian tradition soon after they were written.

Step 2 - **Transcription** occurs when, in order to preserve the revelation and to make it available to more than one person, scribes diligently make copies. Since there was no printing press, scribes were trained to be extremely careful and accurate in their copying. While there are 150,000 variances in the manuscripts of the Bible, 99.9% of these errors are inconsequential - differences of spelling, punctuation, word order, and the like. In fact, only about 50 of these have any significance whatsoever, and none of them calls into question any doctrine or moral command.

Step 3 - **Translation** becomes necessary when a group of people do not know the original languages in which the manuscripts were written (Hebrew, Greek, and a little Aramaic). Scholars trained in linguistics do the painstaking work of putting the original manuscripts into a common language.

Step 4 - While transcribing and translating are hard work, **interpreting** the text can be even more difficult. It is easy to come to a text of Scripture and assume we understand what is being said, or even worse, to bring our own personal opinion about it to the text. The goal of interpretation is to understand the original intent of what was written. This step requires slow reading, careful study, dialogue in community, and consulting others who have studied it.

Step 5 - The final step of Bible translation occurs when you try to **apply** it to your own life and situation. While there is only one correct interpretation (the author had a single purpose in writing it), there are a multitude of applications. For example, when we understand that Jesus wants us to love our enemies, and that loving our enemies means we “lay down our lives” for them, we have a



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correct interpretation. But the application has to be specific to your situation: Lend a power tool? Share a pint of your favorite beverage? Help with a remodel? In other words, how can you “lay down your life” for your neighbor today?

Obviously, the further we move from the original, the greater the chances of error. Fortunately, God has given us the Holy Spirit and the promise that He will lead us into all truth. The amazing fact is that the basic beliefs of the majority of Christians over the last 2000 years have remained unpolluted and unchanged.

Modern English translations fall along a continuum of 3 basic categories, from more literal (each individual word translated) to less literal (thoughts and ideas translated):

<b>Word for Word (literal)</b>	<b>Thought for Thought</b>	<b>Paraphrase</b>
King James	NIV	The Message
NASB	NRSV	New Living
ESV		

### **Choosing a Bible**

When you are looking for a Bible, you can easily be overwhelmed by the myriad options. On one hand, you want a version that is easy to read; on the other hand, Greek doesn't always readily translate into easy English. You want a Bible version that finds a balance between ease of reading and accuracy of translation. At Vintage, we recommend, preach, and teach from the English Standard Version (ESV). It is easily readable and accurately translated. Another good option is the New International Version (NIV). If you want something that is even easier to read, though it is not the best for Bible study, you might want to try the New Living Translation (NLT).

We recommend that you find a reliable translation and buy it in a version that will last. Generally, the more you spend on it the more durable it will be, especially if it says something like “Genuine Moroccan Calfskin”. Be a Bible person: read it, study it deeply, memorize it, chew on it, sleep with it, and take it to heart. Allow God to transform your mind and your heart as you daily feast on the Word of God.

### **Summary**

To say that the Bible is authoritative is to say that it tells the True Story of the World, that is, that in Jesus Christ God has reclaimed what was rightfully his, has destroyed the power of evil and death, and is gathering the world to himself again. As “people of the book,” we want to learn to live and speak this True Story in creative and relevant ways in our day, allowing the authority of the Bible to



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set the trajectory for the way in which we accomplish that task. We are in Act Five today, and we are each significant players. As such, we must become well-versed in the rhythms of the Story, and that only happens by immersing ourselves in regular and disciplined ways in Scripture itself.

The Bible is accurate, consistent, and trustworthy. The Bible is “living and active,” and as you read it you will find it reveals your own heart and leads you in the path of life. Ultimately, all Scripture points to Jesus and to man’s deep need for redemption through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. The Bible is our guide to the meaning of life, the life of the Church, and God’s purposes for all of creation. Whenever we gather as a church, we gather around Christ and his Word in order that we might become more like him as we learn of him and from him what he wants for us.

### **IV. Living the Bible**

The Vintage Faith Community believes the Bible with joyful seriousness. It is God’s Word to humanity, and the only right response when God speaks is to listen well, reflect deeply, and learn to live in light of the Story.

We are strongly committed to studying the Bible in community. The Bible was written to communities of people to instruct, teach, correct, and train. We do not study in order to undermine or wiggle our way out of Scripture’s commands; rather, we study together in order to listen, learn, and respond in obedience.

When we gather as a church, we prioritize the preaching and teaching of God’s Word. We believe God gifts his Church with preachers and teachers who are charged to preach the whole counsel of God.

We believe each and every Christian is called to learn, study, memorize, and live Scripture as much as he or she is able. We want to be men & women who study and learn so that we can grow together into Christian maturity. Often this means you will be called on to teach others what you are learning just as others will be called on to teach you.

We believe that reading Scripture needs to be accompanied by prayerful reflection. We not only want to understand what the Bible says and what it means, but also how it applies in our individual lives and our community. When we read, God himself is speaking to us, so we want to train ourselves to listen well to how the Holy Spirit is speaking today.

While we understand that Scripture was written in a particular time and place, and that this must be respected when we read and study it, we do not believe in using that context as a way to undermine

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the clear teaching of Scripture. We recognize that God does not change his will or his ways based on the time and place. Additionally, we must be careful to not pull verses and passages out of the context they are in. The Bible is not a series of one-liners we can use willy-nilly to prove our point and win theological arguments.

While we value discussion about how the commands of Scripture are to be lived out, we aren't interested in hearing everyone's opinion about "what a passage means to me." God intended specific things in his Word, and so we endeavor to understand what He intends to communicate and conform our lives to it.

We are convinced that a strong commitment to personally reading, studying, praying, and obeying the Bible is a sign of Christian maturity. The goal is not simply to have as many "quiet times" as we can each year; rather, as we read and study and pray the Scriptures, we're learning to live in the rhythms of grace, to more deeply believe the gospel, and to be equipped for every good work.

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

**What was most helpful or insightful from this section?**

**What about the Bible do you not understand? What questions would you like to discuss in class?**

**Do you read the Bible regularly? Why or why not?**

**What from this section would you be able to teach to someone else?**

# SESSION TWO – We Are Family

**“As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.”**

**Psalm 103.13**

In order to understand what the Scriptures teach about being a Christian, we must first come to an accurate understanding of who God is, who we are, and what God has done for us. To find out, we need to read the Bible “across the grain,” looking for themes and patterns. When we read the Bible this way, we learn that:

1. God is Holy and the only one worthy of our worship.
2. Humanity chooses to worship anything but God.
3. God punished our sin in Jesus on the cross.
4. The proper response to the cross of Jesus is faith.

## **I. God is Holy**

Ultimately, God is incomprehensible – we simply don’t have the capacity to understand him fully. He is known only through self-disclosure or “revelation.” While the Scripture is clear that God has revealed Himself, it is also true that God hides Himself (Isaiah 45.15). This means that we may know God truly while not yet knowing Him fully because He is absolutely infinite and there is no end of Him and therefore He can never be known in totality by finite and limited human beings.

God reveals himself to us in two ways. First, God reveals Himself by what he has created. This is known as General Revelation. Second, He also reveals himself by his works and words in our world as recorded in the Scriptures. This is known as Special Revelation. Special Revelation, represented exclusively in the Bible, is particularly important, as discussed last week, because God speaks to us about Himself, our relationship with Him and others, and the precious nature of being image-bearers reflecting His very character.

In order to give you a brief sketch of how God has revealed himself in Scripture, it is necessary to summarize. All the books in the world would not be enough room to record God’s divine attributes. Ultimately, we are trying to understand the infinite God through finite means – human language. We must understand, then, that while we can know much about God because he has revealed himself, we can never *fully* understand him. The following list of attributes serves only as a basic

summary of how he has revealed himself. While the following list is accurate, it is in no way complete, nor is it meant for us to think we have him “nailed down.”

**Self-Existing:** God does not need us or the rest of his creation. In Exodus, God reveals himself to Moses and eventually to all of Israel as “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3.14). God’s existence and his character are determined by him alone and are not dependent on anyone or anything else. While everything in all of creation has an origin and everything that exists is dependent upon God for its existence, God alone has no origin, no beginning, and no end.

**Unchanging:** God is unchanging in who he is, in his being, purposes, promises, and attributes. All that God is He has always been, and all that He has been and is He will ever be. His unchangeableness (often called immutability) does NOT mean that he does not feel emotions. It simply means that he is who he is and he will always be consistently that.

**Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent:** God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and everywhere present (See Psalm 33.13; Psalm 90.2; Isaiah 66.1; Jeremiah 32.27). God knows every thought and intent of mankind, and nothing is a surprise to him. He has the authority and the power to act in whatever way he chooses. Although he is separate from his creation, he is present in it everywhere, and there is no place where we can escape him. He has all power and reigns supremely over everything.

**Just and Righteous:** God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right. He is the impartial judge who always gives the right and just judgment. God’s righteousness is his devotion to his holiness in the context of relationship to his creation (Deuteronomy 32.4).

**Love:** The Scriptures teach us that God is Love, and that he alone defines what love is. Jesus said that the greatest love we can have is to lay down our life for our brothers, and he showed us perfect love when he died for us while we were still sinners (Psalm 145.8,9; 1 John 4.8). Though the Scriptures declare that “God is love,” often times we reverse that to mean “Love is god,” thereby reducing the love of God to our shallow, sappy, and weak notions of love. The Love of God is perfectly balanced with the holiness of God, and the Scriptures declare that his love is a jealous love that will not tolerate sin and will ultimately destroy sin and sinners. Ultimately, the wrath of God is the byproduct of his love; that is, God loves his creatures so deeply that he hates their sin and rebellion. In *Hope Has Its Reasons*, Becky Pippert writes, “God’s wrath is not a cranky explosion, but is his settled opposition to the cancer of sin which is eating out the insides of the human race he loves with his whole being.” God’s love flows out to his creatures in mercy and grace. Mercy is the kindness of God in not giving us what we deserve; grace is his free choice to give us what we don’t deserve.

**Holy:** God is utterly other, unlike anything he has made. He is separated from sin and wholly devoted to magnifying his own glory and majesty in the world. There is no one like God (Psalm 99.5; Isaiah 6.3). God is untouched and unstained by the evil in the world and he does not in any way participate in it, though he is capable of using even evil for his good and holy purposes. He is the object of highest value in the universe!

**Triune:** To say that God exists as a Trinity or Tri-unity is to say that there is one God with a unified essence who exists in three equal persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By “persons” it is meant that God thinks, feels, acts and speaks. It is sometimes helpful to say that within the triune God there are three “who’s” and one “what.” There is no other worldview or religion that claims that the center of reality is this absolutely holy God-in-Community. The Scriptures reveal that God created out of overflow, not out of need: God is love and he pours his love on us from the overflow of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit relationships within the Godhead. Early church Fathers described the Trinity using the term perichoresis (peri – circle, choresis – dance): the Trinity was an eternal dance of Father, Son, and Spirit sharing mutual love, honor, happiness, joy and respect. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God invites us into this eternal dance with him!

### **Summary: the Beauty of God**

God’s Beauty is the summation of his character, the way in which each and every aspect of God is perfectly harmonized, never in conflict, and infinitely praiseworthy. He is overwhelmingly powerful yet personally compassionate and kind. He is mighty in every way, yet draws near to his people. His sovereign power and matchless authority are in perfect harmony with his infinite tenderness and patience. We are created to be captivated by the beauty and radiance of God, to have the whole of our being deeply, joyfully satisfied in relationship to him, to be thoroughly and completely taken by the greatness and goodness of God. There is nothing greater than God, and to put anything or anyone before God is to break the First Commandment, become idol worshipers, and make ourselves into slaves. Only when God is first in our hearts will we ever truly be free:

*The thing that God is most committed to is his own glory. But here's what you need to understand. His commitment to his own glory is your only hope. Because he's committed to his own glory, he's committed to draw to himself a multitude of people who forsake their own glory and do the one thing that they were created to do: live for his. So his commitment to his own glory causes him to listen and respond, listen and respond, until all of his children no longer look to the shadow glories of creation for their satisfaction, but rather look to him. Because he's committed to his own glory, I can go to him in prayer knowing that he'll hear and he'll answer. (Paul Tripp)*

## II. Humanity

God is holy, totally set apart, majestic and perfect. As we consider his character, we become deeply aware of just how *unlike him* we are. In the beginning, when God first made us, he made us “in his image,” people who were to relate to him in unbroken, intimate friendship. He said we were “very good.” We were created to be God’s earthly family, with him as our loving Father, living in his world as his beloved children. But the Bible tells us – and our experience confirms it – that there is something deeply wrong with our humanity. The world we live in is broken and imperfect, and at the center of that brokenness is the evil of our own hearts.

Shortly after God created Adam and Eve, they chose to rebel against his loving rule over them. They chose sin, and we are living with the consequences of their choice today. According to the Bible, we are sinful, rebellious, and enemies of God. The bible says that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God,” meaning that we’ve not lived up to God’s righteous standards. We’ve not been the people God intended us to be and have chosen not to honor and trust our Father.

One way the Bible describes this “falling short of the glory of God” is in terms of idolatry. As Christians, we must understand that God made a good and whole creation that we have perverted, broken, and abused. As rebels against God, we often take created things and make them more important than the Creator:

*[God's] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Romans 1)*

While we might not actually be making images of birds and animals, it is part of our fallen nature to take the good things God has made and elevate them to positions of supreme importance. We try to find our happiness, identity, and worth in them, rather than in God. So we take things like work, relationships, sex, or money and we make them all-important to us. We become slaves of those things of which we think, “If I don’t have it, then I can’t be happy.” It is no wonder that our lives are joyless: when we base our happiness on having things that are created, we’ll quickly be disappointed, frustrated, and angry when we can’t have them, when they forsake us, or when they are taken from us. But, rather than recognize that these things will never bring us the joy and meaning we long for, we usually simply switch our focus from one created thing to another. When

we don't find happiness in our career or success, we'll look for it in relationships or sex. When we don't find it there, we'll try to find it in spending money on things we like or trying to be as comfortable as possible. When we can't find lasting joy in any of these things, we'll often try religion. But even religion is nothing more than a slave master, promising you joy only if you can live up to some set of standards, laws, or morals.

There are two basic types of religion: hard and soft. Though not a new phenomenon, soft religion is very popular in our pluralistic culture. Soft religion is a smattering of self-chosen beliefs patched together from various new-age teachings, books, and Oprah guests. Soft religion promises a life of ease and prosperity through trying to be a good and moral person who doesn't get too worked up over anything. Hard religion, on the other hand, has a very clearly defined list of morals and values. Hard religion tends to be very judgmental and condemning of those who cannot measure up to the list of prescribed moral practices. While hard and soft religions are on opposite ends of the spectrum, they operate on the same basic premise: I am accepted, loved, and important based on my performance. They may have different lists, but the key is living up to the list.

The Bible teaches us that our problem is deeper than choosing the right list and living up to it. Both hard and soft versions of religion are nothing more than humanity's attempt to make God in our image. Soft religion won't change you because you've simply made God to be a good-natured grandpa who doesn't really care what you do or what you think about him/her/it. Hard religion might change your external behavior (you stop sleeping around, getting drunk, dancing, or whatever happens to be on the list), but you end up exchanging one list of bad things for another (now you are judgmental, critical, and unloving). In both its hard and soft forms, religion is impotent: soft religion leaves you without the power to change, while hard religion leaves you without the joy of true change.

Thankfully, religion is not the answer the Bible gives for our sin problem.

### **III. Redemption**

Paul the apostle declares that God has gone to great lengths to welcome us back into relationship with him, welcome us back into his Family:

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It*

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*was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Romans 3.23-26)*

While we have all fallen short of God's perfect and righteous standard, God has made us righteous (justified us) by putting forth his own son in our place to bear the full weight of God's judgment against our sin. In this way God can perfectly solve the problem: he upholds his own justice and holiness by punishing sin *and* he offers grace to us by punishing our sin on his own Son in our place! In other words, God welcomes us back into the original relationship intended for Adam and Eve – His human Family – by allowing his own Son to take the punishment we deserved. In the cross of Jesus Christ, God's mercy toward sinners and His justice toward sin meet, and God remains holy and just while sin-sick people like you and I get welcomed back into His family. This is God's great love for us:

*But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5.8)*

*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5.21)*

*For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (1 Peter 3.18)*

All this is accomplished by the **substitutionary atonement** of Jesus:

*The righteous, loving Father humbled himself to become in and through his only Son's flesh, sin and a curse for us, in order to redeem us without compromising his own character. The biblical gospel of atonement is of God satisfying himself by substituting himself for us [...]. The concept of substitution may be said, then, to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. (John Stott)*

The Gospel not only saves us from the righteous anger of God against our sin and rebellion, but also invites us back into God's Family as his beloved children! We have become Family again! God offers his only Son for our sin in order that he might have us back in His Family again. This is the good news at the heart of Christianity.

## IV. By Faith in Jesus

In contrast to what we've been talking about in this session, Christianity has often been misrepresented as a long list of things you are supposed to do, similar to all other religions. Indeed, many people have left the church because that was what they experienced.

But the good news of the Gospel is that, because of Jesus, there is nothing left to do to please God. God did not send his son to die for you so that you could take on a new set of laws you can't live up to. God is not waiting for you to fulfill a new list of rules and regulations. The major difference between Christianity and every other religion is the Gospel of Grace, the simple but profound reality that God welcomes us into relationship with himself based not on my performance but on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus:

*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Ephesians 2.8-9)*

In other words, God has saved you by his own free gift and not according to your “works,” good things you might have done to earn God's approval. There is no “cosmic scale,” weighing out your good and bad, and getting you to heaven in the end if the good outweighs the bad. Christianity plainly states that our “bad” so far outweighs our “good” that the scale would forever be tipped against us. To place our faith in Jesus is to recognize that on the cross my record of wrong was wiped away and the perfect life of Jesus was credited to my account. God the Father now sees me and treats me as if I have the perfect record of Jesus! Amazing grace!

We become Christians when God reveals himself to our hearts, opening our spiritual eyes to see his glory in Jesus Christ. The Gospel moves in to the center of your life and transforms you from the inside out. The Bible uses the word “heart” to describe the center of our lives. To have something in your heart (in the Biblical sense) is to allow your hope, joy, consolation, comfort, and delight to come from that thing. To be a Christian requires that we first “repent” or turn from the other things that are currently our core motivations; we must make a conscious decision to no longer find our identity in those things. As you do that, you'll also be making a conscious decision to find your identity in Jesus. This second step is called faith. Faith in Jesus is to rest your entire life on him and to become a child of God through him.

The change that happens in your life when you repent and believe is so profound, such a fundamental shift, that the Bible describes it as being “born again.” You actually become a new person in Jesus! The beauty of God in the Gospel becomes your core motivation for living, and you begin to learn to live out of a new center!

## V. The Spirit of Sonship

Upon the initial response to Jesus, God gives a special gift to every believer – Himself! God the Holy Spirit comes to permanently indwell the believer to unite you in living relationship to God. When you place your faith in Jesus, you get swept up into the “dance of the Trinity” and brought into friendship with God.

*You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. (Romans 8.15-17)*

Part of the process of repentance and faith is the giving over of the control of your life to the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 5, Paul instructs the believers: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.” We should continually ask the Holy Spirit to direct, lead, and control our lives. God’s promise to us is that as we abide in him – that is, rest our hearts and find our joy in him – he will produce his character in our lives. This happens by the Holy Spirit’s work in you. He is the one who produces in you the “fruit of the Spirit” listed in Galatians 5.22: “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” He is making you like Jesus!

*Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2.38)*

*You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (Romans 8.9-11)*

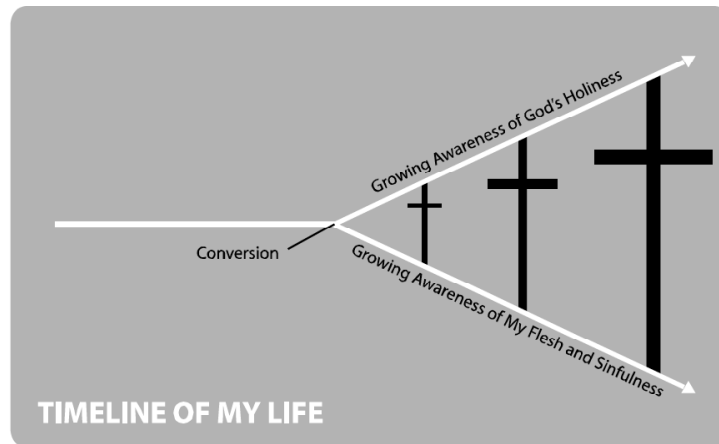
*For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12.13)*

Before we move on, take some time to consider whether or not you have responded to Jesus’ work in this way. It is often the case that we *think* we are Christians just because we go to church or are basically good people. Hopefully you’ve seen in this section that none of those things makes you a Christian. You only become a Christian when you are “born again,” repent of the ways in which you

find your identity, joy, and purpose apart from Jesus, and begin to consciously place your faith in him. While this is primarily a change of heart, it very quickly becomes a change in actual behavior. The change that happens in the “root” of your life becomes change in the “fruit” of your life, too!

**Respond:** In what concrete ways are you learning to find your joy & satisfaction in Jesus?

## VI. Relying Entirely on the Gospel



(Diagram taken from Coram Deo's *Gospel Centered Life* material)

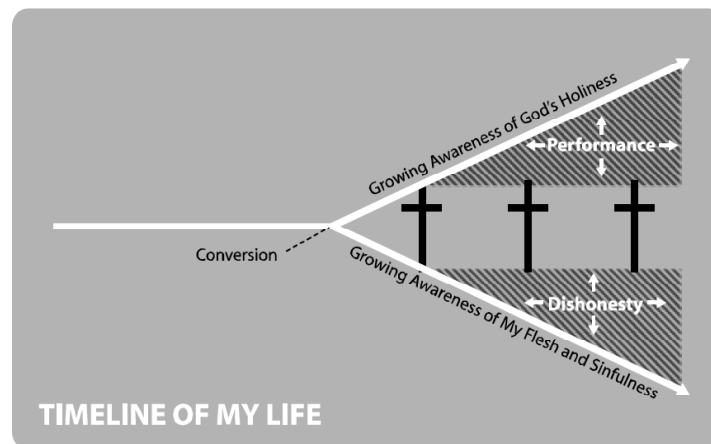
The above diagram is a picture of the ideal path of growth as a Christian. When you first become a Christian, you do so because you realize God is so holy and you are so sinful and rebellious. In the moment of conversion, what you recognize is that only the cross – representing both the perfect life of Jesus and his death in your place – could ever bridge the gap between you and God. You have an awareness of God's holiness (the upper slope) and an awareness of your sinfulness (the lower slope).

As you mature in grace, you experience both a growing awareness of God's holiness (the upper slope) and a growing realization of your own rebellion and sinfulness (the downward slope). As you read the Bible, experience the conviction of God's Spirit, and live in community, the distance between who God is and who you are becomes increasingly clear. It is not that you are getting more sinful or that God is getting more holy; rather, you are simply becoming more aware of both realities. This is good and right and a significant part of becoming who God wants you to be.

As this happens, don't despair. You are right where God wants you to be! Ideally, as you grow in grace, your need for the cross actually increases. God already knows how deep your sin goes, so your increasing discovery of it doesn't surprise him or compromise his commitment to you. He gave his Son to you in the full awareness of just how deep your sin goes. In turn, as you learn more about how wonderful God is, you'll be increasingly grateful for how he has saved you. We want to live Gospel-centered lives, where the cross is always growing in its significance in our lives.

### Two Ways We “Shrink” the Cross

If you look carefully at this second diagram below, you'll see what happens when we try to grow as Christians by our own efforts. Sadly, by relying on performance and dishonesty, we actually shrink the cross, miss out on both the joy and power of the Gospel, and rob God of his Glory as our Savior!



(Diagram taken from Coram Deo's *Gospel Centered Life* material)

**Performance:** On one hand, we often revert to trying to earn God's approval and favor through our good works. It is very natural to continue to believe that God's love for us is based on how obedient we are, rather than believing that his love for us is based on *how obedient Jesus was*. When we forget that, we lose the joy of the Gospel, and Christianity becomes a constant chore at best and life-stealing religious performance at worst. This emphasis on performance is also known as legalism or religion: ignoring or minimizing God's holiness by thinking we can “measure up” through hard work. Religion stresses **TRUTH**, but minimizes **grace**: It says, “Here are God's righteous demands – his love for you is based on your degree of obedience.”

**Dishonesty:** On the other hand, we are often tempted to minimize our sin, make excuses for it, or simply pretend like it isn't a problem. We don't like to admit that our sinfulness goes deep – deeper than we ever imagined – so we settle for “cheap grace” and quick fixes: “Oops I did it again – so glad I'm forgiven!” When we downplay our sin or are unwilling to confess how deep it goes, we are disconnecting ourselves from the energizing power of the Gospel and the miracle of grace! If you're

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“not that bad,” then Jesus is nothing more than a little help when you need it; if you are totally depraved and wickedly self-centered, then the magnitude of God’s gift of forgiveness is life transforming! This tendency toward dishonesty is also known as license or relativism: ignoring or minimizing human sinfulness by not being honest about our deep depravity. Relativism stresses **GRACE**, but minimizes **truth**: It says, “No one can measure up to God’s laws – but he loves us no matter what we do.”

### **Preaching the Gospel to Yourself**

Christians never outgrow the Gospel. As we realize our tendencies toward performance, dishonesty, and self-righteousness, we must repent of our sin and believe anew in the promises of the Gospel.

Gospel-centered living, the kind of Christian life that results in increasing freedom from sin, abundant joy in obedience, and brings glory to God, requires the ongoing work of **repentance** and **belief**. Seeing our sin is not scary or embarrassing; rather, as we see it, we recognize that God fully knows it, that Jesus died to pay the penalty for it, and that our relationship with God is now based on Jesus’ perfect obedience in that area. That gives us the freedom to confess and renounce our sin, leaving it behind, and to begin to live obediently out of joyful gratitude.

Take a few moments to slowly read this life-changing quote:

*There is unspeakable comfort, the sort of comfort that energizes, in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me for my good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that his love to me is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me so that no discovery now can disillusion him about me - in the way I am so often disillusioned with myself - and quench his determination to bless me. There is certainly great cause for humility in the thought that he sees all the twisted things about me that my fellow men do not see, and that he sees more twisted corruption in me than I see in myself. There is however equally great incentive to worship and love God in the thought that for some unfathomable reason he wants me as his friend and desires to be my friend and has given his Son to die for me in order to realize this purpose. (J.I. Packer)*

If you believe this, taking these radical truths deep into the core of who you are, you will begin to be transformed! This is the core of Christianity.

**Respond: How might you live differently if you really believed the above quote?**

## VII. How We Change

Consider the following example. God’s Word instructs us not to lie, yet all of us lie (or as we’d rather call it, “stretch the truth”) on a fairly regular basis. If you are functioning in a **Performance/Religion mode**, you will try your very best not to lie, living in fear that God will reject you if you lie and hoping that God will love you more if you stop. As a result, you’ll have no joy because you live under the (false) burden to perform and please God, something the Bible tells us we cannot do. Furthermore, if you are having a measure of success at honesty you’ll be arrogant, while if you are repeatedly failing you’ll be despondent. That’s miserable!

If you are functioning in a **Dishonesty/Relativism mode**, you’ll either dismiss God’s command altogether, excuse your sin (“it’s just a little lie...”), or compare yourself to others (“I’m not as bad as *that* guy!”). We call that “cheap grace,” and you’ll have no energizing power over sin because you don’t confess it, and you live in the ongoing experience of shame and guilt. Again, that is a miserable existence.

The reality is that many, many Christians have experienced (and continue to experience) this kind of Christianity. They’ve been told to perform, to work harder, to look good on the outside, and to put on a good show. They’ve felt pressure to look all put together, to not be messy, and to hide any sin in their lives. *Many people have left Christianity altogether because they experienced this distorted version of Christianity.*

But the **Gospel** leads us into something different altogether. When you believe the Gospel, you readily accept the command not to lie. You understand that it is clear and binding because it reflects not only the will of God but also the heart of God. He is a good Father and his commands are not burdensome. But you also understand that you’re a sinner and that no matter how hard you try, you can’t obey the command perfectly. You’re stuck! But you don’t therefore despair (“Oh, how I hate myself!”), give into the sin (“I just can’t stop!”), try to move too quickly to forgiveness (“At least I’m forgiven!”), or begin to make promises to reform (“I’ll do better next time!”). Rather, you must engage in some deep heart searching.

Why do you choose to lie? Think about it for a moment. On one level, the answer is simple: we’re sinners, so we sin. But on a deeper level, each of us is motivated toward sin for different reasons. We must learn to investigate our own hearts so that we see WHY we choose to sin. *Whenever we choose sin, whether consciously or unconsciously, we do so because we are after something that only God can truly give:*

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*[T]he most basic question which God poses to each human heart is, “has something or someone besides Jesus the Christ taken title to your heart’s functional trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight? (Idols of the Heart and “Vanity Fair,” David Powlinson)*

When something or someone “takes title” to our heart, we call it idolatry. Almost anything can become an idol in our lives, and often these idols are good things in and of themselves. They become idols when we elevate them to the place of God in our lives. In other words, when our happiness, identity, and security are connected to having one of these good things, we are worshipping idols, no matter how much we may say we love and trust in God.

Consider the following list of possible idols. I feel content, important, joyful, or significant:

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

We call the list above “near idols” because they are usually very apparent and easy to recognize. **Take a moment and circle which ones are your idols.** Remember, most of these things are good in and of themselves; the problem comes when our joy, satisfaction, and identity are connected to having them. Almost anything can become an idol, and each of us should be able to circle a number of the above idolatries.

**Respond: List your top 3 (or so) idols here and how they show up in your life.**

**Respond: What do your idols have in common? What is underneath them?**

**Respond: How do your idols often lead you to sin?**

**The four most basic idols** – what we call “far idols” because they are underneath other idols and therefore more difficult to see – are listed below. Under each idol is the fear that often accompanies these idols. Often it is easier to work backward from what you most fear to the idol that you most deeply crave. (Taken from Darrin Patrick’s talk on “Idols of the Heart” @ Missional X)

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

What you seek: privacy, lack of stress, freedom

Greatest Nightmare: stress, demands, responsibility

Others often Feel: hurt (you’re not contributing fully), disappointed (lack of follow through)

Problem Emotion: boredom (never risk, always hold back, safe)

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

What you seek: affirmation, love, relationship

Greatest Nightmare: rejection, criticism

Others often Feel: smothered (by your neediness), put-off (by your insincerity)

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

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

What you seek: discipline, certainty, standards

Greatest Nightmare: uncertainty, what you can’t control

Others often Feel: condemned, judged, unable to measure up to your standards

Problem Emotion: worry, anxiety

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

What you seek: success, winning, influence

Greatest Nightmare: humiliation, lack of respect, incompetence

Others often Feel: used, a means to your end, relationally unimportant

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

**Respond: Which of the above idols most describes you? How do you see it in your life?**

**Respond: How does it make you feel to realize you are motivated by this idol?**

When any of these “idols of the heart” is more important than Jesus, we give in to sin. The reality is if we fully believed the Gospel, we would stop sinning. Dr. Timothy Keller says that *the sin underneath all other sins is a lack of joy in Christ*. When **Jesus is our sole source of joy and sweetness in life**, when we are fully satisfied in him, then we no longer go looking elsewhere for what only he can provide. In other words, when I believe the truth that I already have God’s favor, love, delight, and joy, my idol loses all power over me and my internal need to sin is undermined. I can learn to obey God joyfully!

The problem with our idols is three-fold:

They are weak: they cannot deliver what they promise, but only enslave us to work harder.

They are harmful: we hurt ourselves and others when we are slaves to these things.

They are grievous: idol worship breaks the heart of the God who died to give us joy in him.

True life-transformation happens by identifying the things that take our hearts captive – our idols – and learning to replace them with God himself. You must come to see that the sin you see in your life is the fruit of idol worship in your heart. Like a tree producing bad fruit, you must get to the root issues before real change will happen. Therefore, true change cannot happen simply by trying hard to not sin. To really put an end to sin, you must get to the root of it by identifying the motivations of your sin and replacing them with gospel motivations.

Once you have identified the idol at the root of sin, you can actually begin to repent and turn from it. You can begin to name it, see the weakness of it, the pain and hurt that it causes in your life, and ultimately to recognize that you are choosing to serve it rather than Jesus who died for you.

At the same time, you aren’t simply turning away from your idol; you also need to be turning to something else – namely, Jesus and the gospel of grace! You must see how the gospel first challenges your assumed “needs:” you don’t *need* comfort, approval, control, or power. You don’t *have to* have those things. And, at the same time, the gospel reminds you that you have God as your

Father, that he loves you and accepts you, that he is sovereignly in control, and that he has your best interest in mind:

God is good – so we don't have to look elsewhere (vs. the idol of Comfort)

God is glorious – so we don't have to fear others (vs. the idol of Approval)

God is great – so we don't have to be in control (vs. the idol of Control)

God is gracious – so we don't have to prove ourselves (vs. the idol of Power)

It is the cross which once-for-all proves that God is all this for us. As we meditate on the cross, our hearts are softened and warmed to God, our idols are undermined, and our life becomes an act of worship. We are living the life God intended us to live, as his beloved children, in his adopted Family.

## VIII. Gospel Identity: We Are Family

We put all this together in one simple statement: We Are Family.

The Bible teaches that God is a Father. When he created humanity, he was making a “family” over which he would rule and reign in love. We were made to be in relationship with God but are separated from him because of our sin. Apart from Him we search for significant and meaningful relationship and are always disappointed when others let us down. The good news is that, because of Jesus, God has brought us back into his family, fulfilling that deep longing for community and promising to never let us down.

To say “we are Family” is to make a statement of Identity. Family is not something we do, but something we are. God has done this in Jesus, and we receive this Family as a gift of grace. It is amazing to realize that God has adopted us and made us into His Family. None of us deserves this, none of us has earned this, but each of us has been welcomed. Therefore, we are *learning* to love and care for one another as Family. We are *learning* to be God's people together, to embody who we are as his Children, and to fulfill the “one another” commands of Scripture. For this reason, because we are all adopted into God's Family together, we prioritize being in authentic, vulnerable, and life-giving community in three specific ways:

*First*, we encourage every Family member to have a few close Christian companions with whom you can pray, confess sin, offer forgiveness, and encourage one another in following Jesus. Because we don't have numerous church programs, it is vitally important that we take responsibility to disciple and care for one another on a regular basis. It is simply too hard to try to live the Christian life without the support of others on the same journey.

*Second*, we believe that mission and service ought not to happen in isolation. Our **Missional Communities** are the primary way that we serve our city together. These groups share a common sense of mission and act as a Family in caring for one another. The Missional Community is the church, and if you aren't connected at this basic level then your experience of church will be disappointing, the care you receive will be limited, and your sense of belonging will be minimized.

*Third*, we want our **Sunday Gatherings** to be a place of welcome and introduction to Christian community. As you come on Sundays, we challenge you to come not just to receive but also to practice hospitality – the welcoming of strangers as Family. As a Mission Partner, you commit to helping make our Gathering a tangible expression of the welcome that the Gospel offers by finding a way to regularly serve.

Here is our Family Identity Statement:

**We are Family:** *We are God's Children who are fully accepted and adopted, and who love one another as His family.* Because God has restored us to himself, forgiven our sin, and removed his wrath from us by placing it on his own Son, we have become children of God, holy and dearly loved by our Father! Therefore, we are God's children and his people in the world, a community that does for each other what God has done for us in Jesus, that the world might taste and see the goodness of our Father.

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:**

**What was most insightful/helpful in this section?**

**What do you still have questions about that can be discussed in class?**

**How does the gospel of Jesus free you from slavery to your idols?**

**What sort of commitment to community do you need to make? What steps will you take?**



# SESSIONTHREE – We Are Missionaries

**“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you.  
As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’”**

**John 20.21**

In Session Two we discussed the first way to understand the Gospel, the “across the grain” reading of the Bible. In that way of reading the Bible, the Gospel flow is doctrinal, dealing with the basic topics of Gospel Christianity: God, Sin, the Cross, and Faith. This shows us the *power* of the Gospel, how God rescues us from our sin, adopts us as his children, and changes us into new people.

In this session, we’ll look at the Bible “along the grain,” following the story-line of the Scriptures. As we do this, we’ll see the *purpose* of God in the Gospel. When we do that, we see that:

1. God made all things good and gave humanity the role of creating a culture of Shalom.
2. Humanity turned from God, ruined the Shalom of Creation, and created a culture of death.
3. In the death and resurrection of Jesus God is remaking the world and restoring Shalom.
4. In Jesus we are a part of the new creation and commissioned to help restore Shalom.

## I. Creation

**Genesis 1.1** tells us very simply how the universe came into being: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Any Biblical understanding of the nature of the world and the cosmos must begin with that simple statement. The rest of Genesis 1 is a poetic and rhythmic description of how God spoke creation into being. Each day, God created by speaking – when God says something is, it simply comes into being. In addition, at the conclusion of each day of creation, God states that all that he has made is “good.”

*You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you. (Nehemiah 9.6)*

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. (Psalm 19.1)*

*For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. (Psalm 96.5)*

**Hebrews 11.3** emphasizes that understanding how God did this is an issue of faith: “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of the God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.” God made everything out of nothing, and everything that God made was good. In order to rightly understand our world, we must come to see – first and foremost

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- that what God has made is good. Nothing in creation is inherently evil or wrong; at its root, in its fundamental essence, all of creation is good.

In addition, Scripture teaches that God is not only the Creator but also the Sustainer of all that is:

*[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1.15-17)*

The Bible teaches that God is the Creator in a similar way to an artist. God created all that is and he remains present in it but also separate from it. Though you can see his handiwork in all that he has made, and he remains active in and through it all, he is separate from it. Creation itself is not God. He created it and he upholds it and he is constantly interacting with it. God created out of the overflow of who he is as the triune God of love.

**Genesis 1.26-31** tells the story of God's creation of Humanity on the sixth day:

*Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

*So God created man in his own image,  
in the image of God he created him;  
male and female he created them.*

*And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

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Because we are created in God's image, we carry a great deal of dignity. Humanity is the pinnacle of creation, and humans are made to image-forth God, to show to the entire universe what God is like. To be made in his image means that we humans share many of the same characteristics of God, including personality, reason, and creativity. But more importantly, it means that we are to be in relationship to him and so to understand ourselves – our Identity – in relation to him. Part of the sad story of humanity is that we spend our entire lives comparing ourselves to one another in order to secure a sense of identity and worth when only relationship to God offers what we long for.

Genesis 1 is the big picture version of creation, painting the creation picture in the broadest of brush strokes. In Genesis 2, the lens zooms in to give us a step-by-step account of God first creating Adam, planting him a garden, and setting him in the middle of that garden. His instructions to Adam are to care for the garden and tend it, working with God to bring forth all its beauty. The only prohibition God gives Adam is that he must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when he does he will surely die.

However, God is not done and knows that Adam needs help if he is to accomplish God's grand plan. But rather than just make Eve on the spot, God takes Adam on a zoological expedition in which he names all the animals and comes to realize deeply his need for a helper. Only after this does God put Adam to sleep, take a rib, and make Eve. For Adam, it is simple: she is beautiful, naked, and perfectly suited to be his helper; therefore, he sings her a love song and takes her to bed. "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed." It is a beautiful picture of harmony and peace: God with humanity, man with woman, humanity in creation.

But God also gave Adam and Eve a vocation. They were to go out into the world that God had created and cause it to continue to flourish as they tended and cared for it. Perhaps the best way to understand God's intent in the beginning is in terms of a kingdom or culture. God created a perfect world, but it was a world that was undeveloped and not yet to its full potential. Adam and Eve were given the task of cultivating the riches of creation, and in the process they would form a culture that honored God and reflected his character in every way. They were to build a kingdom over which God would reign in love and in which they would function as his ambassadors and agents. The biblical word for this culture is *Shalom*, which can be defined as universal flourishing and harmony, the fabric of Creation expertly woven by God, and God's people doing his work in partnership with him.

**Summary:** Adam and Eve were created for relationship with God and for the fulfilling of his purposes in the world. They were created as Image-bearers, meaning they were to both find their identity in him *and* to find their significance or purpose in His purposes for them. They had no need

to go out and prove themselves or do great things; rather, as they looked to him by faith, they were to do his work – his Shalom-cultivating, kingdom work – in the world.

## II. The Fall

Genesis 3 tells the story of man’s fall from perfection. Though they were intended to walk in perfect relationship with each other, with God, and with creation, it was short lived. Satan – the personal embodiment of evil and rebellion against God – shows up in the garden in the form of a serpent and deceives Eve. Adam was given the command about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and he was expected to protect and teach his wife. Unfortunately, Genesis 3.6 tells us that Eve was deceived into believing the fruit was a good thing, and Adam stood by silently and then joined her in rebellion.

Throughout the Scriptures, it is Adam, not Eve, who is held responsible for the tragic event. When God first comes looking for them, it is Adam to whom he calls out. Adam and Eve have sown fig leaf clothing for themselves – humanity’s first attempt at a religion to cover up our guilt and shame – and are “hiding” from God – a game we continue to play to this day. God’s question to Adam is one we all must answer: “Adam, where are you?” is not a question of *location* but of *relationship*. Adam and Eve have thrown away God’s good gift and turned their back on their Maker.

As our first parents, Adam and Eve have plunged us into ruin, too. We sin because our very nature has been corrupted to the core, and the consequences are physical and spiritual death, eternal separation from our Heavenly Father, and his wrath and judgment:

*Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned. (Romans 5.12)*

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Romans 3.23)*

*For the wages of sin is death [...]. (Romans 6.23) But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59.2)*

We are still people made in God’s image, but that image has been deeply disturbed by the Fall. While we have not been ruined *absolutely* by the Fall – all people still reflect a great deal of God’s character – we have been ruined *completely*: every aspect of our nature has been contaminated. Therefore, we are people of both dignity and depravity in the sight of God.

The result of our inner corruption is a world full of corruption, the unraveling of the Shalom of Creation. God intended that Adam and Eve would build his kingdom of Shalom; instead they created their own culture of death, discord, and disharmony. For every bright spot in the Bible Story – and in

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our world today – there is a culture of death all around it. If you simply read the book of Genesis, you can watch the culture of death form as humanity continues to choose sin and to rebel against their maker. Rather than turn to him in repentance and faith, humanity consistently chooses to turn away from God, and the result is the brokenness of our world today.

**Summary:** Though God has made all things good and created them to be enjoyed by us, we have taken the good things of creation and twisted, abused, and mishandled them. God’s beautiful gifts have become corrupt in our hands, and everything from food production to wealth distribution to sexual intimacy is twisted and broken. Whereas we were intended to form and build a culture of Shalom, a culture that lived under the benevolent reign of God, a kingdom of heaven on earth, in our sin we’ve instead created a culture of shame, ruled by our own desires and passions, and created a kingdom of hell on earth.

**Respond:** How do you see both the goodness and perversion of creation today?

**Respond:** Do you see both the goodness and perversion of creation primarily in the world or in yourself? Why?

### III. Redemption

At the same time that Adam and Eve – and all of humanity after them – are running *from* God, the Bible tells the story of the God who continues to pursue his Creation. In Genesis 3, even as God is cursing his people and his creation for their sin, he makes a promise to Adam and Eve: one day he will send the serpent-crusher, the one who will destroy the works of darkness and sin, and restore all of Creation to God. Though God was rightly angry and caused Adam and Eve to experience the consequences of their rebellion, he was also full of grace, and put into action his plan to redeem and restore all that was lost through their rebellion.

#### The Old Testament Story

The Old Testament tells the story of God calling a new people to himself, beginning with Abraham, and working a plan to bring his blessing back to his creation through this family:

*Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. “I will bless those who bless*

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*you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12.1-3)*

God promises Abraham that through his family – the people who would come to be known as the nation of Israel, or the Jews – he would bring his creation back under his reign of blessing and restore the Shalom. Throughout the Old Testament, God is saving, calling, and forming this people to be the people through whom his redemption will come.

Unfortunately, Israel never becomes the people who restore God’s blessing to the earth. Though the story is long and often difficult to follow, it becomes increasingly clear that no human will be able to restore and redeem God’s creation. In fact, the Old Testament ends with the prophets pointing forward to One who will come to establish God’s kingdom, redeem humanity, and restore the Creation to God.

### **The Arrival Of The King**

It is John the Baptist – the freaky cousin of Jesus who lives in the desert and eats bugs – who opens the New Testament with the announcement that the Redeemer, the King, is coming to set the world to rights. John points to Jesus and declares him the One sent by God to usher in the kingdom of God and restore the Shalom of Creation.

Jesus proclaims the good news of the Kingdom of God, calls people to repent and enter into the Kingdom, and demonstrates the reality of the Kingdom in his miracles. He then gathers a community of men around him to be a living example of the Kingdom and teaches these men how to continue his kingdom work after he is gone.

In the miracles of Jesus we catch a glimpse of what earth will be like when the Kingdom of God comes in fullness, when God finally and completely heals and restores the Shalom of Creation. In the Kingdom of God, no one goes hungry, no one is sick or lame, no one is excluded because of race, class, or culture, and no one is oppressed by evil. The healing that Jesus demonstrates is holistic: mind and body, individuals and systems, nations and cultures are reunited to God and made whole again.

When Jesus goes to the cross, he absorbs the evil and brokenness of the world, takes on himself our sin and the culture of death we’ve made and absorbs it. Jesus takes the kingdom of death in order to give us the Kingdom of God.

When he rises from the dead three days later, he rises on the “first day of the week” – a Sunday – as a sign that he has ushered in a new creation. Though it is not fully here yet, it is “breaking in” all



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around our globe whenever the reign of God is honored and the church does the work of demonstrating and proclaiming the kingdom. The fabric of Creation, the Shalom, is being re-woven.

God has always intended to call a people and form a God-saturated culture or Kingdom. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God has established his Shalom Kingdom and welcomed us in. We enter that Kingdom through repentance and faith, and then are sent into the world as kingdom messengers and workers. We are to demonstrate the reality of the Kingdom of God and proclaim that God is making it a reality through Jesus:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5.17-20)*

As Christians, we're entrusted with both the message of reconciliation and the ministry of reconciliation. Like Jesus, we've been called to proclaim what God has done in Jesus and to demonstrate it tangibly in Shalom-restoring activities. We call this two-fold purpose "mission," and those who live this new life in Jesus are "missionaries."

Essentially, being a missionary in our context has two implications. The first is everyday interactions with neighbors, coworkers, and others who don't yet know Jesus. This is often called "evangelism," though the word needs to be defined. The second has to do with the areas of brokenness and need in our city and the ways in which we are sent to be restorers of Shalom. This is often called "social justice," but again the term needs to be understood in Biblical terms.

### **IV. Evangelism and Our Culture**

The first area of mission in our lives has to do with the networks of people God has placed us in. God has intentionally given us relationships in our neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, and the places we play, which he wants to use in order to advance his kingdom. In order to live as a missionary, we must begin by recognizing that all of life is a part of our work as ambassadors of Jesus.

In his book *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, George Hunter re-appropriates the ancient Celtic means of evangelizing in contrast to the Roman mode of evangelism that has largely dominated American

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Christianity. Roman evangelism has been popularized by faithful men such as Billy Graham, and codified by programs such as Campus Crusade’s “Four Spiritual Laws.” In the local church it can be seen in the large events (i.e. concerts, community fairs, felt-needs lectures, tent revivals, etc.) that are intended to draw large crowds to hear a gospel presentation and call to decision by a recognized spiritual authority.

While this mode has proven faithful in the past and remains fruitful in many cultural contexts, people in our culture live lives filled with entertainment, sales pitches, marketing, self-help seminars, and large, emotionally moving events of various sorts and are therefore unimpressed by a large church event and unlikely to give up a precious evening or weekend to attend a church event. So, the Celtic model of getting the church people out to them is more likely to be both faithful and fruitful.

In the Celtic model, people are called to “come and see” before they are called to “repent and believe” (John 1.35-51). The gospel is presented first as a genuine friendship with someone who is a Christian who does not hide his or her faith or push it rudely. The non-Christian is actively ushered into the web of relationships among the church and welcomed to be involved in the activities of the church that interest them (i.e., helping run the concerts, helping guide a rock climbing expedition, playing on a softball team, managing the web site, joining a Bible study) and the missionary partners of the church continue in prayer for the person and seek to demonstrate the love of God in practical ways (i.e., bringing meals to moms who have just had a child, helping a young band record their album, giving a band a place in the church to practice, housing people needing help, giving Bibles and books of interest, etc.). In this way the non-Christian is connecting with the church not in terms of events and large programs, but in ongoing face-to-face contact with people who love them and speak truthfully to them.

The non-Christians see the very natural and practical outworking of the gospel in people’s lives and begin to identify themselves with the church before they identify themselves as Christians by speaking of “our church” and “my church”—which we do not believe indicates faith but is a good step along the journey to speak of “our Jesus” and “my Jesus.” As trust builds with their friends and the church, they have become accustomed to hearing about Jesus Christ often and at some point God gives them faith and they pass from death to life. This precise moment is often unknown to us, and we are less concerned about the exact moment of salvation than their understanding of the gospel and their love for Jesus Christ, which changes them as they become new creations in Christ.

In this model, non-Christians are not pressured to confess Christ but are well aware that Christian friends are praying for them and desire for them to be saved. So, when they do become Christians, they confess Christ to their friends who are overjoyed and spread the good news throughout their

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social network in the church, which results in great joy and celebration. The new Christian then usually asks to be baptized so he or she can make a public profession of faith. We encourage them to invite their friends and family to their baptism so that they can begin their work as a missionary who is to remain in those relationships for the purpose of bringing the gospel as it was brought to them.

**Respond: What relationships has God given you in order to be a witness for Jesus?**

**Respond: In what ways do you need to be more intentional with these relationships?**

### V. Social Justice and Our Culture

Relationships are only one half of the work God has called us to as missionaries. On the other side of personal relationships is the ongoing work of demonstrating the kingdom of God by bringing wholeness and restoration. As we look at our neighborhoods and our city with the eyes and heart of a missionary – one sent for the ministry of reconciliation – we’ll quickly see the places, systems, and people who are experiencing the brokenness of the Shalom.

Jesus taught that the two greatest commands were to love God with all that you are and to love your neighbor as yourself. Do you recall the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10? Jesus told that story in response to a question from someone who was trying to avoid loving his neighbor. When a man was robbed and left for dead along the road, two religious leaders intentionally passed him by. Only a Samaritan – a person considered to be a moral and religious outcast – stopped to care for the man. Jesus concludes his story by asking,

*“Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.” (Luke 10.36-37)*

You. Go. Do likewise. Jesus doesn’t mince his words: showing mercy to your neighbor is not optional for those who would claim to follow Jesus. However, by using the term “neighbor,” we do not necessarily mean the people who live next door. Missiologist Darrel Guder, using Jesus’ parable, defines neighbor as “anyone you cannot avoid.” Your neighbor is anyone who has needs that you have the resources to meet.

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Your neighbor may be those who live next door, those you work with, those you play with, or those with whom you share some sort of affinity, including your immediate and extended family. Paradoxically, your neighbor may also be someone you have little in common with but whom God has placed squarely in your path or specifically called or commanded you to care for.

As we think about the role each of us is called to as missionaries in our city, it is imperative that *you* can define and articulate who *your* neighbors are. It is insufficient to say, for example, “I’m called to Spokane.” Spokane is (believe it or not!) diverse, full of people with different needs and different stories, each immersed in a particular context. Which of them are you called to? Whose needs are you meeting, and to whom are you “showing mercy”?

We particularly choose to be involved in work that brings healing, restoration, and redemption to the most broken areas of our city. We believe that because God is making all things new in Jesus, we are to live as witnesses to that reality by helping our city to catch a glimpse of what God is doing. We are participating with God as he restores the Shalom of our city.

Seeing that God has called and sent the Vintage Faith Community into this city, what kind of mission work might you want to engage in? Where do you see need in our city that the church should be meeting? And how might you join in what God is already up to?

**Respond: Who are your neighbors and how are you showing them mercy?**

**Respond: What most hinders you in living as a missionary in our city?**

**Respond: Which is more challenging for you, evangelism or social justice? Why?**

We envision missional initiatives in three basic categories:

Relief Initiatives (Isaiah 61/Luke 4): where can we meet brokenness and need?

Building Initiatives (Jeremiah 29): where can we contribute to strengths in our city’s culture?

Confrontation Initiatives (Ephesians 6): where is the darkness and evil in our city, and how can we meet it head-on?

Spend some time this week praying about how God might have you be involved in his kingdom work in our city. As you go about your week, ask God to open your eyes to see your city as a missionary,

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rather than as a local. Ask him what he is doing and how you can join him. And talk to your neighbors, coworkers, grocery checker, teller, or anyone else who might see needs that you don't.

**Respond: How are you involved in restoring Shalom in our city?**

**Respond: What areas of our city desperately need to be infected by Jesus Kingdom people?**

## VI. We Are Missionaries

A Missionary is someone who knows and believes that his or her primary role in the world is not simply to fulfill the American Dream. Missionaries live with an overarching purpose to all that they do, believing that God has sent them to the places they live, work, and play to bring the light of the Gospel to the people there. A missionary is one who lives in the reality of what God is doing to restore Shalom and is *actively* involved in that work.

As missionaries, we want to live beautiful lives, full of humble joy and genuine other-centered love as testimony to the truth of the Gospel. We want to serve, bless, and practice hospitality with all people because Jesus has done that for us.

As missionaries, we also think creatively about our involvement in this city, asking God to open our eyes to the needs of people around us so that we can begin to meet them in humble service. As we work together to be this city within a city, we joyfully give of our financial resources, not only to the needs of our church, but also to the poor and needy in our midst.

Our Missionary Identity Statement:

**We are Missionaries:** *We are sent by God to join him in restoring all things to Himself.* Because God has come to restore and redeem all of creation through Jesus, his healing work extends to people, systems, cultures, and all of creation! Therefore, we are God's ambassadors or representatives, sent into our culture by the Holy Spirit, commissioned to proclaim and demonstrate that God is restoring the world to Himself through Jesus.

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### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

**To what degree does being a missionary shape your life?**

**What missionary activities are you engaged in on a regular basis?**

**What do you need in order to be a more effective missionary?**

**Is it possible to be a missionary on your own? Or do you need a team? Why or why not?**

# SESSIONFOUR – We Are Servants

**“Live as people who are free,  
not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil,  
but living as servants of God.”  
(1 Peter 2.16)**

Over the last few weeks we’ve looked at the Bible across the grain (Family) and along the grain (Missionaries). This week, as we look at our third Gospel Identity, Servants, we need to dig into the Story of God a bit and see the pattern of life that characterized God’s people. How did God intend for Adam and Eve to live? What happened instead? And how has Jesus restored what God intended? In this section we’ll learn that:

1. God intended Adam and Eve to be His Servants as they stewarded Creation.
2. Humanity chose to serve Creation instead, ultimately becoming slaves.
3. Jesus came as a Servant to buy humanity out of slavery and free us to serve God again.
4. As Servants of Jesus, we do whatever He asks, whenever he asks, wherever it takes us.

## I. Stewardship

God created Adam and Eve on the last day of Creation, day 6. All that God had made was for them, and as his ambassadors in the world they were charged with the care and cultivation of Creation. Though they did not own or rule over creation, they were given creation as a gift. They were stewards or caretakers of God’s world.

Stewardship implies servanthood. Adam and Eve were not free to make of creation whatever they wanted; rather, as they submitted themselves to God’s loving reign over them, God’s character shaped and influenced all that they did. They were free to “fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over it” only under the loving wisdom of God. In this way they would be protected from misusing, abusing, and destroying God’s creation.

Adam and Eve were created as Servants of God who were to oversee the day-to-day operations of the planet. All that happened on the earth was to be under their care and management. As they fulfilled this role on the earth, they were serving God, the Creator and Sustainer of all things. This was the pattern of Shalom: humanity served God and used Creation as a way to honor and glorify Him.

## II. Slavery

Unfortunately, that intended pattern of Shalom did not last long. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve choose to listen to the Serpent, serve themselves rather than God, and use the creation to meet their own

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selfish ends. In fact, they turn the whole pattern on its head: they worship and serve themselves rather than God, and they use God’s resources to do it! Not only are we turning our backs on our Maker, we are using his resources to spit in his face.

And so this new, inverted pattern begins to dominate the human story. Men and women exert their own power and pursue their own glory, using the resources of God’s creation and trampling on one another to make their own names great. We all now follow this pattern, pursuing our own happiness by whatever means necessary and desecrating God’s creation to get it.

The irony of it all is that Adam and Eve chose to eat the fruit out of a desire for freedom. They believed the lie of the serpent that freedom would only come when they could define themselves apart from God and be free from his rule over them. We all so easily believe that lie! But God created them to flourish under his rule, and once they had thrown it off, they found that there was nothing but slavery apart from God. Whereas God blessed them and loved them and gave himself to them without conditions, they now found themselves pursuing joy in things that were nothing but slave-masters. Like a goldfish “freed” by a toddler from its fishbowl, this new freedom was slavery and death – a freedom we’ve been swimming in ever since.

**Respond: How does serving God create genuine freedom for Adam and Eve?**

**Respond: What happens to a goldfish when you “free it” from its water cage?**

### III. Suffering Servant

Beginning with Abraham, God promised that one day he would restore his benevolent rule on the earth and extend his blessing to all people. Unfortunately, because this inverted pattern was so deeply ingrained in humanity, God’s people tended to interpret this promise as their opportunity to be over and above the world. His people persisted in the lie that freedom would come when they were on top of the world. Throughout the Story of God, whenever they prayed for a deliverer, they asked for one who would lead them out of slavery and establish them in the world. They hoped for a deliverer who would conquer their enemies and give them great victory in the world.

But God’s plan was different. His promise to Abraham – that all nations would be blessed through him – was a call to Servanthood, not to domination. God intended that Israel would be a servant to the world, taking on the sin of the world through the temple sacrifices, as a sign of one who would

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later come to be the final sacrifice. God's plan was to send a servant-king, one who would be conquered rather than conquer, and in doing so he would conquer the hearts of his people and restore them to relationship with himself.

Jesus came as a suffering servant, sent into the world to bear the sin and evil of the world and thereby heal the world. Jesus gave up everything - his Father, his home, his glory - in order to make himself a servant, even to the point of death. He showed us greatness through becoming lowest, least, and last.

In Mark 9-10, Jesus is walking with his disciples to Jerusalem to die on the cross. For the first 8 chapters, Jesus has been on the move, displaying great power in miracles, wisdom in teaching, and influence amongst the people. The 12 disciples are glad to be with him and have become convinced that he is the promised deliverer who will establish Israel above the nations. But beginning in chapter 9, to the dismay of his disciples, Jesus begins to predict his death. On 3 separate occasions Jesus plainly tells his disciples that he has come to suffer and die at the hands of the religious and political leaders. Each time Jesus makes this prediction, Mark depicts the disciples in direct contradiction to Jesus. The first time it is Peter who insists that Jesus not talk like that anymore. The second time the disciples themselves begin to argue about which of them is the greatest. The third time it is two of the disciples, James and John, who come to Jesus and ask for the seats of prominence and power when Jesus establishes his kingdom.

But Jesus has not come to establish his greatness, at least not in the way the disciples are imagining. Jesus has come as the suffering servant king, not the conquering king. In his rebuke against James and John's request, Jesus again teaches them that, in his kingdom, greatness means servanthood and making ones' self the last, least, and lowest.

Jesus sums up his point like this:

*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. (Mark 10.45)*

Ransom is the price paid to free a slave. Jesus has come to pay the price to free us from our slavery to ourselves. He's come to restore us to relationship with God through his own death and resurrection. He dies that we might live, and live no longer for ourselves, but for God, as His Servants once again!

## IV. A Servant Community

What happens when a group of people come into this alternative kingdom, are freed from self-promotion and self-protection, and begin to do life together in community? Immediately after the apostle Peter's first sermon, thousands of Jews become believers in Jesus as the Messiah and begin to experience this kind of fellowship:

*And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2.42-47)*

*Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4.32-35)*

The result of the disciples being filled with the Holy Spirit, being sent by the Holy Spirit as missionaries, and proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel was a new kind of community. It was the kind of community that pointed to the truth of the gospel message. It was, as Jesus had said years earlier, “a city on a hill” that would show the world what it was like to live under the reign of God again.

**Respond: Have you ever experienced this kind of community?**

**Respond: What selfish behavior has to come to an end for you live in community like this?**

## V. We Are Servants

In Jesus' life and death he frees us from slavery to ourselves. We no longer have to be our own masters. We can drop the heavy burden of self-protection and self-promotion and come under the benevolent rule of King Jesus, the suffering King. He suffered for us, serving us to the fullest extent, and thereby undermining our need to protect or promote ourselves. When we place our faith in Jesus, we are transferred into his kingdom and given a new family and a new mission. We are adopted as children of God and sent into our world to bring healing and redemption. But Jesus has shown us that the pathway or dynamic by which that healing will come is not the normal course of human life. Redemption will not happen in our city if we come to "conquer the city for Jesus." Jesus came to win the world through service and sacrifice, and only as we give up our lives for the good of others, absorbing the pain, evil, and brokenness of the world, will the redemption that Jesus has purchased go out into the world.

We share in Jesus' Identity as Servant. To say that we are Servants is to acknowledge that Jesus has first served us. We have been served by the Son of God, the great Servant King. Jesus served us by not holding on to his rights as the Son of God and freely choosing to lay his life down in our place. He served us by becoming the ransom paid to free us from slavery to ourselves. He served us by becoming the way out of our self-sabotaging freedom. The reason we fail to serve is that we don't know and rest in what God has done for us in Jesus. When we fail to serve freely and joyfully, we are demonstrating that we still love ourselves and have not surrendered our lives to the one who purchased our freedom. We are revealing that we believe our wants and needs are more important than God's love to us in Jesus.

As Servants, we live in such a way that we surrender ourselves moment by moment to the will of our Father. We want to be ready and willing to do whatever is needed, whenever it is needed, wherever it leads us. We are no longer calling the shots in our lives, putting limits on how much we will serve or when we will serve or whom we will serve. We have been bought with a price and we are no longer our own. We now must learn to hear his voice and respond in obedience as servants. We must cultivate a moment-by-moment dependence on His Spirit so that we remember who we are and discern how, where, and when - not if - to serve.

*And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? For what can a man give in return for his soul?" (Mark 9.34-37)*

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The Celtic model of evangelism (see p.33 above) is very much service-oriented. Rather than standing on the street corner to proclaim a message altogether foreign to the ears of 21<sup>st</sup> Century people, we believe in coming alongside our neighbors in order to first *be* the Gospel to them. This requires that we know our neighbors well enough to know what would be Good News to them. As you learn their needs, desires, and hopes, you can begin to show how the Gospel meets those longings. You take a posture of humble service toward your unbelieving neighbors because Jesus has taken that posture towards you. This is how disciples are made in our city

You are a missionary servant if you know the names and stories of your neighbors. We believe strongly that the best place to begin serving is right in your own neighborhood because this makes relationship natural, and service more easily becomes a way of life. Imagine how you might serve if you were to move to another country as a missionary. Before assuming that you know what people need, you'd want to spend a lot of time listening and asking questions, learning from your neighbors. This kind of listening and learning is a servant activity

Being a Servant of Jesus requires sacrifice, inconvenience, and the death of selfish desires. As we embrace this Gospel work in our city, we rearrange our lives to be able to serve each other and our neighbors. At the same time, being a Servant of Jesus is never a real “sacrifice.” You are always being called to give up one thing in order to have something greater, the abundant life found only in giving up your life for Jesus and the gospel:

*Peter began to say to him, “See, we have left everything and followed you.” Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.” (Mark 10.28-31)*

One of the best ways to evaluate whether or not you are living as a servant missionary is to look around your dinner table. With whom are you sharing meals? Jesus repeatedly ate with the outsiders and outcasts of his religious society, and in sharing meals with others we invite them to experience the abundance and blessing of God. As Servants of Jesus, we are the descendents of Abraham, and we are, like him, “blessed to be a blessing.” We actively look for opportunities to bless each other and those God has put in our lives.

There are so many opportunities to serve in our city that the kingdom work that needs to be done can be overwhelming and immobilizing. Making it even worse is our own resistance to living this kingdom way. The only way to move beyond your hesitations is to make radical, sacrificial, and

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intentional adjustments to your lifestyle, trusting deeply in the Gospel's power to re-order the desires of your heart. All this must be done in the context of the Christian community, the church.

Jesus taught and modeled that real, abundant, joyful life only comes as we learn to give up our lives for the good of others. As long as we hold on to our lives in self-protection and self-promotion, we are forfeiting real, lasting, meaningful life. We have been freed from the tyranny of our own selfish desires in order that we might be conduits of grace to those around us. Living under his loving reign, we are freed to joyfully serve those he puts around us.

Our Servant Identity Statement:

**We Are Servants:** *We are servants of God who serve Him as we serve others around us.* Because God has sent his Son as a sacrificial servant, taking our place on the cross and thereby healing and forgiving us in his substitutionary death, we then are freed from our self-love and self-reliance and empowered by him to serve those around us. Therefore, we model our lives after the Servant-King, increasingly being freed by Him from slavery to self and so empowered to serve others.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

**How does the kingdom of God create the kind of community described in Acts?**

**How can we work with the Holy Spirit to create that kind of community?**

**In what ways do you avoid being last, least, and lowest?**

**How does the good news make being a servant attractive and desirable?**

**How have you served your neighbors lately? Do they know you as a Servant of Jesus?**



# SESSION FIVE – We Are Learners

**“...but grow in the grace and knowledge of our lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”**

**II Peter 3.18**

When we say the word “church,” what immediately comes to mind? Perhaps you think of an old brick building, or maybe a Sunday morning event? Do you recall a prominent preacher or teacher, or a perhaps a boring lecture with bad music?

In our culture, the word “church” carries many different meanings and connotations, most of which aren’t good. But what does Scripture mean when it speaks of the Church? And what does that mean for the Vintage Faith Community, our church?

In this section we’ll look at our fourth and final Gospel Identity, Learners. As we do, we’ll learn that:

1. The church is the community of disciples of Jesus, those being formed into his image.
2. As disciples of Jesus, we are given everything we need to learn and grow.
3. Disciples of Jesus take responsibility for the mission and maturity of the whole church.

## **I. The Great Commission**

In the beginning, Adam and Eve were called to God as a Family and sent by God as Missionaries. Though Adam and Eve were made in God’s Image, they did not yet know everything, did not completely understand how to Image God in everything, and needed to be intimately connected to God in order to grow and mature in their calling. Though they were without sin, they weren’t without room for maturing, learning, and growing.

Throughout the Old Testament, God’s people were called to be a Learning Community. God gave them his Law and told them to teach each other, remind each other, and encourage each other in faithful obedience.

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6.4-9)*

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In the New Testament, we see that Jesus came as both fully human and fully God, and Luke reports that Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and favor with men and God (Luke 2.52). Though he was fully God, he learned as he grew and came to understand his call as he walked in obedience to his Father. Though he was perfectly without sin, he was also fully human and his wisdom and understanding grew as he matured.

As Jesus lived out his mission on earth, he called people to himself so that he could teach, train, and equip them to replicate his ministry after his death and resurrection. Throughout the gospels we see Jesus doing ministry - preaching, teaching, and demonstrating the good news - and taking his disciples with him. They watched him, asked questions of him, and eventually did ministry alongside him. Jesus told them, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6.40). Jesus invited his disciples into a process of learning how to live in his ways and to do his works. They learned to be like him in character (Family), in purpose (Missionaries), and in posture (Servants).

At the end of his time on earth, Jesus gathered his disciples together one final time and commissioned them to continue this disciple-making process: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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. And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28.18-20). A few days later, as the disciples were praying together in Jerusalem, Jesus sent them the Holy Spirit to empower and embolden them to go out and fulfill this disciple-making commission.

This community of disciples going out to make disciples of Him was later called the *ekklesia*, a Greek word which means “those called out.” God called this community of disciples out of the world and then sent this community of disciples into the world to fulfill the Great Commission, “to make disciples of all nations.” They were disciples who were sent to make disciples, to reproduce the life of Jesus in one another and in those around them. The Greek word *ekklesia* is commonly translated in our Bibles as “the church.” This is still what Jesus intends the church to be.

The church in America is currently proving that this does not happen simply by focusing on building a good Sunday service. 85% of churches in America are dying. Only 3% of churches in America are growing by conversions; the remaining 12% are growing by transfers and church shoppers. America is well on its way to becoming the least Christian nation in the world, and many other nations are sending their missionaries to us! The church in America has forgotten that she is the community of disciples sent to make disciples.

## II. The Body of Christ

The New Testament writers used the metaphor of a head and a body to describe Jesus' relationship to this community of disciples. In Ephesians 4, Paul gives a picture of a fully functioning church:

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4.11-16)*

Jesus is the head of the church, the senior pastor, the one who is responsible for the growth and maturity of his body. He holds the church together in unity of heart and purpose. At the same time, Jesus gives gifts to his church - to people like you and me - in order that his church would continue to mature in likeness to him and fulfill his mission to make disciples of all people.

As a part of Jesus' body, we are each given gifts, abilities, and experiences that we must use to equip the rest of the body so that we all mature together. In order for the church to reach full maturity, each part has to be working to its fullest extent. Each part needs to be developed. So while we recognize that we have been called to make disciples, we must also first recognize our need to be formed into disciples. We have much to learn about how to live as a Family, how to be on Jesus' Mission, and how to embrace our Identity as Servants. As we step into these Identities, our need for learning and equipping goes way up. We don't know what we are doing! So we need to take responsibility to get the teaching, training, and equipping that we need - from Jesus, gifted leaders, and the gifts of the body.

As you are learning from and being equipped by these gifted people, you must remember that the purpose of such equipping is so that you can turn and do the "work of ministry;" that is, so that you can be a disciple-maker. You are a disciple, and you need to grow as a disciple, in order that you can better make disciples!

According to Ephesians 4, the goal of spiritual growth is not simply that *you* are growing more like Jesus; rather, the goal is that *we* are growing more like Jesus. In other words, you have a responsibility to practice spiritual disciplines and to find and develop your spiritual gifts so that

you can help us all become mature disciples of Jesus. In the church everyone is both a teacher and a learner, and we need one another in order to become who God wants us to be.

As we learn to rely on Jesus completely, deal with our idols, and preach the Gospel to ourselves, we also make a commitment to do the same for one another. We call this “Gospeling” one another. We Gospel one another by helping to identify each others’ idols and work on seeing how the Gospel of Grace can free us from their power.

It is the expectation of the New Testament that those who call themselves followers of Jesus are connected to a local expression of the church, an actual portion of the body of Christ. These individual Christians gather regularly to hear the Gospel preached, encourage one another in following Jesus, and to take Communion. They then go out into their world to join God in His missionary work, expanding His Kingdom throughout the world. The Bible is clear that every Christian is a part of the larger church body and is expected to participate in the life of a local church with the gift(s) God has given him or her (I Corinthians 12.1-31).

*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10.25)*

Many American Christians are in the habit (fad?) of a “just me and Jesus” view of life. While we recognize the personal nature of faith in Jesus, we also see the necessity for faithful Christians to connect themselves to a local body of believers. When you choose to distance yourself from a church family, you not only miss out on the challenge of genuine Christian community and the opportunity to learn how to love people you may not like, you are also robbing other Christians the opportunity to be blessed, encouraged, challenged, and built-up by who God has made you to be. Connection to a thriving, faithful community of Jesus’ people is an essential Christian responsibility.

### **III. The Holy Spirit and Mission**

Before Jesus sent his disciples to fulfill the mission of making disciples together, he instructed them to await the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Not many days later, as they were praying and waiting in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit descended upon them, empowering them for mission and giving birth to the church community.

The Holy Spirit is the One who forms, gifts, and equips the church to fulfill the Great Commission. This happens in two fundamental ways. The first has to do with the way the Holy Spirit forms and matures our character into the image of Jesus. We call this “Spiritual Graces.” The second has to do

with the way the Holy Spirit empowers the church for fulfilling the ministry of Jesus. We call this “Spiritual Gifts.”

## IV. Spiritual Graces

The Holy Spirit’s first responsibility is to help you become more like Jesus in character. The Spirit is at work in each of us to produce character traits like love, joy, courage, and hopefulness. It is completely the Spirit’s work to produce these things in us; however, we are each invited to participate with His work.

Disciplines are simple exercises we can do in partnership with the Holy Spirit in order to create space in our lives for the Spirit to transform our character. The process is often described by the metaphor of sailing. In sailing, the boat is only moved by the wind, but the sails must be up in order for the wind to move the boat. Disciplines are the hoisting of sails so that the wind of God’s Spirit can move us, change us, and teach us!

Remember, these are not things you must do in order to please God or earn his favor – you already have his favor by faith in Jesus! These are simply activities to work into your life so that you are open to his leading and guiding in your life. These are ways to cultivate your friendship with God, to put yourself in a place where you are regularly inviting the Holy Spirit to search your heart, reveal sin and distractions, and help change you into the character of Jesus.

Below is a basic list of Disciplines common to the church. It is usually best to choose one or two to practice for a period of time, rather than try to do them all every day!

### ***Disciplines of Abstinence***

*Solitude:* The practice of spending time without any others or any distractions.

*Silence:* No noise or conversation. Just you and God.

*Fasting:* Abstain from food, media, entertainment, or anything else that occupies your time.

*Frugality:* Use your money for purposes outside your own needs for a time.

*Secrecy:* Do not allow anyone to know of the deeds you do or the money you give in order to avoid doing them for the wrong motivations.

*Sacrifice:* Stretch your sense of what you can do without for the sake of those who have less.

### ***Disciplines of Engagement***

*Study:* Memorize Scripture or read through the entire Bible.

*Worship:* Engage in corporate worship and include worship in your own prayer time.

*Celebration:* Practice being grateful and thankful both in your own relationship with Christ and with other believers. Express encouragement and thankfulness to others.

*Service:* Give your time to the church and/or to others. Ponder tithing your time.

*Prayer:* Take deliberate steps to pray regularly and with purpose. Praying through the Psalms is a good way to increase your “prayer vocabulary.”

*Confession:* Practice confessing your sins to trusted people who will pray with and support you.

A regular diet of Spiritual Disciplines is not necessary in the Christian life. This is not a new list of rules to follow. Rather, these are “means of grace,” and in truth almost any intentional practice can become a spiritual discipline if it is helping you to focus on God, what he has done for you in Jesus, and helping you to live out this abundant life more fully! The important thing is that the disciplines help you realize your need for grace and put you in a place to hunger and thirst for more of God in your life!

## V. Spiritual Gifts

In order for the Church to be equipped to do the work God has called us to do, the mission of making disciples, God has given us his Holy Spirit. The second key role of the Holy Spirit is to empower and equip the Church for the work of ministry by giving gifts of grace to individuals in the body. These are special gifts which are given by the Spirit as He deems best. We don’t earn them or acquire them by merit, so there is no need to boast in what you’ve been given or despair in what you’ve not been given! There are 3 primary places in scripture where spiritual gifts are discussed.

Take a few moments and read through these passages:

*For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12.3-8)*

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is*

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*given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. (1 Corinthians 12.4-11)*

*As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 4.10-11)*

Just as each of us has natural abilities that we received from birth, we also have supernatural abilities that we receive when we are “born again” through faith in Jesus. Peter simplifies the whole thing for us by dividing those gifts into serving and speaking gifts. As you look over the lists above, keep Peter’s simple division in mind, and try to identify a gift that God has given you.

When it comes to the supernatural gifts of the Spirit, we can err on two sides. On the one hand, we can become overly obsessed with the gifts and begin to measure our faith – and the faith of others – based on what gifts they have and how they use them. On the other hand, because they are not easily understood and often abused, it is easy to dismiss the whole idea and reduce the gifts to nothing more than personality traits or natural ability. Wanting to avoid both extremes, we aim for the truly Biblical balance, as Paul taught the church at Corinth:

*Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts. (1 Corinthians 14.1)*

The healthy Biblical balance prioritizes the fruit of the Spirit – the character of Jesus in our lives – over the gifts of the Spirit, but *not to the neglect* of the gifts. In other words, prioritize love. Make your goal to love God and love others in the full maturity of Jesus. And, at the same time, eagerly desire that God would equip you to do his work through spiritual gifts. Ask him for gifts, especially for those gifts that build up the body of Christ.

The best way to identify your gifts is to be in community, to take risks in speaking, serving, and loving others, and look for the places in which something beyond your own ability takes place. For example, just because you are naturally a good communicator does not mean you have the spiritual gift of teaching or prophesy. The question you have to ask is this: when I teach, when I speak God’s word, does something beyond my own ability to communicate take place? Are the people to whom I

speak edified and challenged by my words? If they are, then it is more than likely a spiritual gift because the results are not something you can make happen in your own efforts.

Many Christians today believe that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit (miracles, healings, prophecy, tongues, etc.) are no longer in operation. But the plain reading of the Scriptures gives no indication of such a time of ceasing until Christ returns to gather his Church. And since that hasn't yet happened, we are still in need of the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in all the full range of gifts.

We believe that God is a God of order and not of confusion, and so we believe strongly in Paul's final admonition to the church at Corinth regarding the use of spiritual gifts:

What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up [...]. For God is not a God of confusion but of peace. (1 Corinthians 14.26, 30)

When the church gathers, particularly in our Missional Communities, there is freedom for the use of spiritual gifts. Anytime spiritual gifts become some sort of show and the focus becomes the gifts and not the Giver, then there is confusion and not peace.

**\*For more information on Spiritual Gifts and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, see Appendix Five: On Spiritual Gifts in the back of this manual.**

## **VI. The Vintage Faith Community**

Before we leave this section on being the body of Jesus, I want to take a few moments to share about the idea of "vintage faith." Many people have wondered where this name came from and why we use it. As we look back at what Jesus intended for his church to be, what we call "vintage Christianity," we'll also take a few moments to look forward to what that might mean for our city.

Jesus, in his greatest sermon (Matthew 5), summed up what his Church was supposed to be with two metaphors. The first, about salt, had to do with the character, values, and "flavor" of the church:

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, it is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men."

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Salt, says Jesus, has to be salty. If we are going to be Jesus' people, we have to be very much like Jesus. And not just as some sort of show that we put on when we are together or when people are watching. Rather, we have to become like Jesus from the inside out.

The second metaphor was about light:

“You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden, neither does someone light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Rather, they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the room. In the same way, let your light shine before men that they might see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

As we become like Jesus from the inside out, we put ourselves to work bringing goodness and beauty, truth and justice, compassion and care – “light,” as Jesus says – into the world.

If you have much church experience, this may sound a little simplistic. But too often the church has failed this vision in two primary ways. On one hand, it has retreated from culture, viewing the world as evil and bad, and hunkering down to try to just hold on until Jesus comes back. On the other hand, it has capitulated completely to culture, being swayed by the most recent popular opinion, and thereby losing its ability to stand prophetically beside the culture and call it toward Kingdom Redemption. The Vintage Faith Community wants to engage culture in order that it may be redeemed, to bring all of life back into relationship with its Creator.

We hope to become a “city within the city,” a community of Kingdom people who live, work, serve, and play in our city in such a way that others are drawn to the kind of community Jesus has made us to be. Jesus promises that “a city on a hill cannot be hidden,” and we want the love we have for Jesus, for each other, and for our city to be so attractive that others want to know Jesus.

Our ultimate goal is God's ultimate goal: the name of Jesus worshipped and adored in every tongue, tribe, and nation – beginning in our own backyards. We desire to be a community of Kingdom people doing Kingdom work. We recognize that the church does not exist simply to house the saints; rather, we exist to fulfill Jesus' mission to “make disciples of all peoples,” following Jesus as he seeks and saves the lost. We are a community of missionaries, called by God to bring – in word and deed – the good news about Jesus and the Kingdom to the people we engage with each day.

We believe that this vision is Vintage Faith. It is what Jesus intended for his people to become. The current state of the church is depressingly far from this original vision, and with all our energies we want to recover and experience again God's power working through his broken but redeemed people to be good news to the world, beginning in Spokane.

So what might happen to our city if we, by God's grace and Spirit, move more fully into what he has called us to be?

**The Vision: What We See**

We believe that the Gospel - God's mission to make all things new in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus - brings true and lasting renewal *into all spheres of life*. As we dream and pray and do God's work in our city, we see the gospel bringing renewal in the Family, in the Culture, and in the Church.

Our stance toward our city can be seen in God's command to Israel when they were captives in Babylon. While Israel wanted to stay outside of the pagan city of Babylon, God told them to go into the city and participate in the life of the city for the good of the city. He promised that their welfare was connected to the welfare of the city:

*But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29.7)*

Not surprisingly, the word translated "welfare" is the Hebrew word, Shalom. Sound familiar? God wanted his people to be about his Kingdom mission, establishing his Shalom, in the pagan and godless city of Babylon. In fact, God was so intent on seeing it happen that he says *He sent them there*. Given the fact that they were taken there as captives, this is a profound statement. God is intent on getting his people in-line with his mission!

We believe that God has sent us to our city, Spokane. We believe that God loves our city and the people in it, and that he wants us here so that His Blessing can come through us to all who live here. We believe the Church is called to be in the city for the joy of the city and the glory of God.

One passage that has continued to help shape this vision is found in Acts 8. The church was birthed in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost, a Jewish Festival that drew thousands of people from around the Mediterranean into the city. When Peter first preached the gospel after the coming of the Holy Spirit, thousands of Jews heard the gospel and were converted to Jesus and Jesus' mission. Because they were all in Jerusalem for the Festival, they decided to stick around and enjoy the fellowship, learn from the apostles, and share life together.

All was well until the Jews, led by a man named Saul, began to persecute the new church and drive all the converted visitors back to their cities and towns. Out of this persecution - perhaps sent by God to get his people on mission - a man named Philip heads down to the city of Samaria:



*And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles... But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison. Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city. (Acts 8.1-8)*

As a result of persecution, Philip went to Samaria both to preach the gospel and to demonstrate the gospel. He told them about Jesus, but he also demonstrated the reality of the kingdom by healing, performing signs, and driving out evil spirits. Philip was being a disciple sent to make disciples amongst a particular people group in a particular city. He met the needs of that city so profoundly, in both word and deed, that Luke (the author of the book of Acts) records that “there was great joy in that city.”

This is our vision for Vintage Faith. We want to see the church body – all of us – so fully formed by our Identity in Christ that we live out the activity of Acts 8 in a consistent and regular way. As we do that, relying on the Holy Spirit, doing the work of the Kingdom, and proclaiming the good news of Jesus, we hope to see true Gospel joy spread through our city.

Imagine what our city might be like if we lived this vision together in reliance upon the Spirit:

### **Social & Family Renewal**

- Men are stepping into the responsibility to lead with strength and grace.
- Single life is valued & celebrated; Strong marriages are built; Divorce is declining.
- Hurting marriages and broken families are being healed.
- Strong schools with capable and compassionate teachers are provided for children of the city.
- Child abuse, neglect, and abandonment has diminished, and many children are being adopted.
- Sex is increasingly viewed as sacred and worthy of protection.
- Classes and races are attempting and experiencing reconciliation.
- Neighborhoods are being rebuilt and rehabilitated; neighbors are learning to respect and honor one another.

### **Cultural Renewal**

- Corruption and greed are declining in both private and public sectors.

- Integrity, honesty and trust between landlords and tenants, management and labor, professionals and clients, merchants and customers is increasing.
- Creative and corporate professionals are forming cooperative ventures to do cultural productions and establish new civic and business enterprises that will reflect the glory of God and improve the quality of life.

### **Church Renewal**

- Clear and powerful proclamation of the Gospel of grace is spreading through the city replacing legalism, liberalism and authoritarian cults.
- Testimonies of changed lives are the talk of the town.
- Unity within and between churches replaces splintering and conflicts and causes unbelievers to marvel.
- Balanced outreach of word and deed is meeting the needs of the city.
- Healthy new churches are being planted.

## **VII. We Are Learners**

Jesus called twelve men to be his disciples, learning from him how to live the life he created them to live. After his death and resurrection, Jesus instructed these disciples to go into the world and multiply themselves, making disciples in every nation, teaching them to obey everything that Jesus commanded. Each of us has been called to be a disciple or student of Jesus, and each of us is called to help others become disciples of Jesus. We take responsibility to grow and develop as disciples ourselves, even as we do the same in the church and in the world. We are disciples who make disciples.

No matter what you are doing or how you are doing it, you are teaching others how to be a disciple of Jesus. Because it is your Identity and not simply an activity, all that you do teaches about Jesus and life in Him. Therefore, we need first to repent of the ways in which we've not believed this reality and not lived out of this Identity. When you don't think that your contribution to the body is important or needed, you are failing to believe the truth about who you are. The joy of knowing that you are gifted and needed in this disciple-making adventure ought to lead to a deep desire to be developed and equipped as a disciple so that you can become a better disciple maker.

The modern idea of being a "church-attender" is totally foreign to the New Testament. We are the church, so we can't "attend" ourselves. The church is the body of Christ living as His people and carrying out his mission, each of us equipped and equipping others, so that the body keeps on growing.

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To say that we are Learners is to acknowledge that “grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph 4.7). Each one of us has received from Jesus grace in the form of gifts, abilities, resources, and experiences. As we are called into his Family and sent as his Missionaries, each one of us is in need of being developed as a disciple and at the same time needed as a developer of disciples.

The body of Christ is being built up in love, both in maturity in Christ and in the mission of Christ to make disciples. In order for this to happen, each part of the body - you and I and all of us - must be “working properly.” As we mature and develop ourselves, we take responsibility to mature and develop others.

Our Learner Identity Statement:

We Are **Learners**: *we are disciples of Jesus who together are responsible for the maturity and mission of the church.* Because God has begun this work in us and by His Spirit promises to bring it to completion one day, we recognize the need to continuously be learning together from him and being changed by him. Therefore, we are students and followers of Jesus, learning from him how to live life the way God intended, and helping one another to do the same.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

**What was most insightful or helpful for you from this chapter?**

**What questions do you still have that you’d like to discuss in class?**

**What is your experience of church, and how does this chapter’s description compare?**

**How can you actively take responsibility for your maturity and the maturity of our church?**



# SESSIONSIX – Missional Community

**“I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.**

**Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.**

**As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”**

**John 17.15-18**

**“Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you.**

**As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”**

**John 20.21**

Let's start this section with an obvious but important truth: The church body does not exist for the sake of helping a Sunday service run smoothly. If you have been involved in church much, the Sunday service is usually the “main event,” and all of your church involvement is basically connected to serving, giving and sacrificing in order to pull off the event.

## **I. An Event or a People?**

In Ephesians 4, Paul says that God gives the church leaders – apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers – for the purpose of “equipping the saints for works of service.” Too often the leaders have done little beyond equipping the people of God to “work at the service,” as if the Sunday event were the primary place that the work of the kingdom was to take place.

As we have been learning, Jesus has called and gifted the church with leaders in order that these leaders would turn and equip God's people to be the missionary force in the world that He intended them to be when he said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” The church is to go into the world and make disciples, a process that requires the leaders to spend their time and energy on calling, teaching, equipping, and sending the church into the world and into that task.

In this section we'll be talking about how we see our Gospel Identities being lived out on the ground level of our lives. We want to shift your focus off of seeing the church as a Sunday event and onto seeing the church as a Family of Missionary Servants who are becoming and begetting disciples. What if we saw the church as a network of relationships – people – called together for a mission or purpose in a particular neighborhood or amongst a particular people group? What if they actually believed that they were the Family of God? What if you believed you were the church? How might that change the way in which we think of church and the way in which we live our lives together? This is what we are talking about when we say that the center of our church is the Missional Community.

What we envision with our Missional Communities is the church of Jesus being taken into the mission field here in Spokane.

We envision the church being so committed to bringing redemption and wholeness to our city that our city begins to ask questions, giving us the opportunity to proclaim Jesus.

We envision people walking in humble obedience to the radical call of Jesus to love our neighbors as ourselves.

We envision Christians pooling their resources and energies for the good of the city, actually making the city a better place to live for everyone, as a testimony to the way God will one day make all things right.

We want to see Jesus' Church doing what it was put here to do rather than just trying to stay afloat, remaining aloof from the culture, or burning people out through church programs that only serve to keep the institution alive.

Most of all, we want to see our neighbors come to know and experience the powerful love of God in Jesus, find hope and joy in Him, and join us in this great mission to our city!

If you are a Christian, my guess is that there is something about this that both resonates with you and yet frightens you. Take heart - both are appropriate responses.

## II. Defining Missional Community

Here is how we define a Missional Community:

**A Missional Community is a partnership of Christians, for the mission of Jesus to our neighbors, who demonstrate the gospel tangibly and declare the gospel creatively to each other and to the world.**

The reason we call these Families "Missional Communities" is to keep us clear on the priorities God has called us to. A little further below we'll compare and contrast Missional Community with other church programs and groups. For now, let's look at that definition again and spend some time unpacking it.

## SESSIONSIX – Missional Community

**A Partnership of Christians:** First and foremost, a M/C is a group of Christ's followers who are linking arms, sharing resources, and caring for each other as they go into the world. Together, we are living out our Identities of Family, Missionary, Servant, and Learner. As we go about living out our faith in real and tangible ways, we need a group of people to support and encourage us along the way, people with whom we can share life and do mission together.

**For the Mission of Jesus:** The Great Commission given to the early church was the command to make disciples. A disciple is someone who responds in faith to what Jesus has done for them, resolves to actively live in his ways, and calls others to do the same. As disciples, then, we are partnering together in order to help one another and others actually live in obedience to the way of Jesus. We seek to be disciples of Jesus and to help others become disciples of Jesus. Being on mission is nothing more – or less – than being obedient to Jesus: “Go and make disciples!”

**To Our Neighbors:** Just as the Father sent the Son to a specific time, place, and people, so the Spirit does with the church, sending each of us to specific groups of neighbors. As the above definition of “neighbor” clarifies (see Session Three under the heading “Social Justice”), we *must* be able to articulate the specific people we are sent to in order to actually be intentional in serving them and making disciples among them. Sometimes these people will be defined by their geography – a certain neighborhood or region of the city. Other times they will be defined by their affinity – a shared need (like at-risk youth or orphans), occupation (like teachers or business executives), or recreational activity (like rock climbing or soccer).

**Demonstrate the Gospel Tangibly:** Just as Jesus came demonstrating the kingdom through selfless acts of service, so we actively look for opportunities to meet the felt and real needs of our neighbors so that we become a blessing to them. God has extended blessing and grace to us though we don't deserve it, so we are empowered to be a blessing to others. A Missional Community regularly plans projects and parties, opportunities to serve, and practical social justice actions that tangibly bless the neighbors they know and love.

**Declare the Gospel Creatively:** A M/C must listen to and understand the stories of their neighbors in order to be able to tell the Gospel Story in ways that are Good News. The good news message is full of meanings, implications, and themes that our neighbors need to see and hear. In order to share the Gospel well, we need the humility to listen well to their stories and the courage to tell the Gospel of Jesus clearly, applicably, and winsomely. Only as we intentionally serve and bless our neighbors will we find opportunities to tell them about God's grace in Jesus.

**To Each Other and To the World:** God's grace in Jesus is good news for those in the church and those outside the church: no one ever outgrows the gospel! Therefore, we speak the gospel and

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demonstrate the gospel to one another as a church family and to our neighbors. The Missional Community takes responsibility to make meals for families with new babies, to care for financial and physical needs, to counsel and encourage one another, to help each other move, and any number of other things that the church should do. At the same time, the Missional Community purposefully extends beyond themselves to do these kinds of things for their neighbors.

Let's compare and contrast a Missional Community with other small group concepts or church programs.

**A Missional Community is not a Small Group.** Small group ministries generally exist because the Sunday event can't "do" everything. In other words, the big group gathering on Sunday isn't a good place for relationships, Bible study, prayer, etc., so the small group is another place to go to "receive" what is missing. The small group functions like a smaller version of Sunday's event, helping people get the "missing pieces" of their Christian experience. A Missional Community, on the other hand, is a community that embodies the Identities of Family, Missionaries, Servants, and Learners together, day in and day out, as the body of Christ. The Missional Community is not one of many other programs at the church; rather, the Missional Community *is* the church.

**A Missional Community is not a Bible Study.** While a Missional Community will often study the Bible together, the goal is not simply more Bible knowledge or information; rather, the Missional Community studies the Bible to learn about what God is up to in the world and so that they can be better equipped to actively join Him. As we learn the Story of God together, we'll learn to better demonstrate and declare the Good News.

**A Missional Community is not a Support Group.** Our Missional Communities do not exist solely to care for and counsel one another. This is not just a time to hold each other accountable to personal holiness or to support each other in difficult times. All these things are important, but in a Missional Community they happen as we go about tangibly bringing the kingdom to bear on our city. If at times we pull back from that in order to get more healthy in our personal lives, we always do so in anticipation of taking the healing that God is bringing in our lives to the city. In other words, the Missional Community is not just about what God is doing among us, but about how God's work among us might extend to our neighbors.

**A Missional Community is not a Social Activist Group.** While each M/C will often work together on a variety of projects, it is not simply focused on a social cause but about Jesus and his mission in our city. You will certainly have something of a shared burden for the needs of our city, but the Missional Community doesn't seek to simply advocate a cause but to demonstrate and announce the kingdom of God.

**A Missional Community is not another Weekly Meeting.** A Missional Community is a family – brothers and sisters in Christ – on a shared mission. A Missional Community shares all of life together through meals, celebrations, sorrows, and trials. The gathering of the Missional Community is not simply a committee meeting, and the Missional Community doesn't begin and end with the weekly gathering. We aren't simply meeting to plan and organize projects but to share life together as we go about mission in our city.

Let me sum it up: rather than seeing the Sunday gathering as the front-end of mission and the center of the church, we need to be able to envision the Missional Community as the primary vehicle of mission and the center of the church, with the Sunday gathering as the time for celebrating God's grace, hearing stories of mission, and being equipped to go back into the mission field.

**Respond: What would it look like to live our Gospel Identities if we never had a Sunday service?**

**Respond: Is the Sunday service important? If so, in what ways?**

**Respond: To what degree is your life centered on making disciples in community?**

**Respond: How might you need to change in order to prioritize community and mission?**

### **III. Being The Church**

This is simple to write, but goes against almost everything we normally do in the American Church. So what does all this mean for you?

Many churches define a “faithful Christian” in terms of nickels, noses, and needs: how much you give, how often you show up, and what church programs you use. Obviously, we disagree. Spectator Christianity is not the Christianity of Jesus. You cannot sit on the bench and let others play the game. You must get into the game.

We also recognize that this understanding of the church takes some time to really “get.” The best thing to do is to get connected with a Missional Community. You will see this in action amongst them, see how they are still trying to figure it out together, and you’ll start to see how it can come to be reality in your own life.

Another implication of organizing the church around the Mission of Jesus is that you must learn to pray. Because we don’t have a ton of internal ministries going on, you have to actually go to Jesus in prayer and ask him to lead you and tell you what to do. You have to be actively connected to one another and to Jesus in order for mission to become a reality in your life. Only through prayer will you have your eyes opened to the needs around you and begin to be able to get involved in God’s Kingdom work in our city. You can’t rely on the pastors and ministry leaders to tell you what to be doing or to create a program for you to be involved in. You must listen to Jesus and follow his lead.

One of the weightiest implications of all this is the assumption that you will be leaving to help plant a new church in our city. As our Missional Communities multiply, they will form the core groups for new gatherings of the church around our city. In this sense, then, everyone involved in our church is leaving.

We are committed to planting churches through the multiplication of Missional Communities. By God’s grace, the Vintage Faith Community will become a movement of churches across our city - the Vintage Faith *Communities*. We’ll have multiple Missional Communities that are deeply embedded in neighborhoods and among various groups of people being the church in tangible acts of loving service and simple gospel proclamation. As these Missional Communities grow, they will become a movement of churches, all connected and interrelated, sharing resources, people, and knowledge for the glory of God and the good of our city.

#### **IV. A Rhythm of Life**

The real challenge of being the church is the realization that church is no longer an event you attend but a whole new way of life to which you are increasingly conformed. This is the way the Scriptures describe the church - a community of disciples who are sent to make disciples together (see, for example, Acts 14.21-28). You can’t live this vision of life and continue to move in other directions. This is the Christian life: in community, for Jesus’ mission, motivated by the love of Christ to you, and sent by his Spirit.

As this new identity begins to take root, we’re faced with a new question: How do we actually live in Christ, as people who’ve been given a new identity? What does it look like to be God’s Family? How

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do we live as a Missionary people? What activities do we engage in as Servants? What do we need to know and do as Learners? Because these are identities (who we are) and not activities (what we do) we often need help getting from “who I am” to “what I do.”

To meet that need, we’ve developed a set of practices that can be helpful to anchor our lives in these new identities. These practices - what we call Gospel Rhythms - give us a regular pattern to follow as we grow in our Identities.

I am not a gardener, but I have a bit of a garden at my house. I am trying to grow some string beans in my garden, which requires a trellis of some sort for the beans to grow up on. The trellis I am currently using - some string loosely tied between two sticks - isn’t really working. The beans are growing like crazy because the soil is good, they get lots of sun, and plenty of water; the problem is that they are growing every which way but up! By giving them a better trellis - something more sturdy - the beans will grow up, flourish, and produce better fruit.

Rhythms are like the sturdy trellis. The seed of the gospel has gone in to our hearts and is beginning to grow. God has faithfully planted the seed, watering it with truth and grace, and is bringing forth growth as we respond in repentance and faith. But the fruitfulness of our lives will increase as we get the trellis in place, giving us a sturdy frame on which to grow.

Just as the trellis in my garden doesn’t cause the beans to grow, rhythms don’t make us fruitful or faithful Christians. The fact that I have a trellis only gives contour to the growth that is already happening. Often times we try to get the trellis in place before we really have gospel growth happening, assuming that if we engage in a certain set of practices - like morning devotions, prayer, or evangelism - we’re being changed. It would be like me taking some beans I bought at the grocery and stapling them to my trellis - and then boasting about my garden! Unless the gospel is really going in and taking root in our hearts, the practices that we do will be nothing but empty religious ritual. But, by naming some common practices, we are creating a framework for growing in grace together.

Thinking in terms of rhythms helps us to learn to live in grace together, rather than simply think or talk about it. Rhythms move us out of theory and into the real world.

In a sense, as we learn to live in these rhythms, we are learning how to live all over again. We are learning how to rely on God in ordinary life, how to daily go to God to receive grace so that we can live each day in his ways. To live these rhythms requires an ongoing awareness of God’s presence in each conversation, with each person, and in every situation.

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Christianity is not spasmodic, a once-a-week shape-shifting experience, to which you quickly return to a more normal mode. Christianity is the good news of a new kingdom in which a community of people is graciously invited to a new way of being human together.

When we can begin to think about being the church in terms of rhythms and patterns of grace, we more easily move beyond the Sunday service. The rhythms we are talking about don't primarily take place when the church gathers. Our rhythms are lived on Monday morning and Wednesday afternoon, in the home and at the office, with our family and with our neighbors. We want to function as the church throughout the week, and not just when we meet together on Sunday.

This idea is not new. Saints throughout the centuries have banded together and adopted certain sets of practices that help them to be faithful to whom God has created them to be through the gospel. Rhythms like these have showed up in monasteries and in orders, among teams of missionaries in remote places, and in inner-city churches trying to create space for God's grace among very busy lives.

The basic idea is that we believe the gospel changes everything. It doesn't just make us Christian, it makes us human, as God intended us to be. As we learn to live as new creations together, rhythms keep us grounded in God's infinite grace in the daily activities of life. We are learning how to do the ordinary stuff of life with extraordinary love and power.

Have you ever worked for a company or been a part of an organization that had a set of values? For example, Whole Foods Outlets' values include "Selling the Highest Quality Natural and Organic Products Available" and "Satisfying and Delighting Our Customers." Levi's company values include, "Empathy, Originality, Integrity and Courage." A company has values in order to help clarify what they are really about.

Rhythms are similar in that they give us a handle on what we as God's people want to be about. The key difference, though, is that (did you notice this?) company values are things you value when you are at work. When they don't have their uniform on, I highly doubt that very many Whole Foods employees value "Satisfying and Delighting" customers. While a Levi's employee may value "Empathy" Monday through Friday, there may be nothing about their weekend that is especially "empathetic."

Rhythms are what we give ourselves to all the time because they are directly related to who we are in Christ – an all-the-time reality. We have an identity that never changes, regardless of the time of day, the relationship, or the location, so our activities should have a similar consistency. When we talk about our Rhythms, we aren't talking about what we do when we are together on Sunday

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mornings. We're describing a way of life that permeates every interaction, relationship, and situation.

We've chosen five key Rhythms that shape our life in Christ. These five practices are deeply rooted in the Biblical Story and help to shape how we live in that Story today. The five practices are: Bless, Listen, Eat, Speak, and Sabbath.

**Bless:** We honor and intentionally bless others through words, gifts, or actions. We want to live as people who are “blessed to be a blessing,” and so we make it our aim to find tangible ways to demonstrate God’s grace to others each week. We want to give freely and fully to others, both those who know Christ and those who don’t yet know him.

**Listen:** We listen to God, rediscovering the gospel in Scripture and being led by God’s Spirit. And we listen well to people around us to hear gospel graces and needs. Our daily practices include being in the Scriptures, listening for how God is speaking to us today. We believe the Scriptures primarily tell us about God’s saving and rescuing love, and we come to the Bible to listen to that Story again and again. We also listen to one another, listening for belief and unbelief, and finding ways to tell one another of God’s saving love.

**Eat:** We share meals with people outside our immediate family, offering welcome, friendship, and community. Eating is a basic routine for everyone, but whom we eat with tells us much about what we value and believe. We eat as missionaries, sharing meals with those who don’t know Jesus, and as family, breaking bread together regularly.

**Speak:** We speak to God through prayer, recognizing our dependence on him in all things. And we speak to people the story of Jesus and our story of Jesus, making the gospel a normal part of our conversations. We can’t live this Gospel life on our own, so we humbly confess our need for God on a regular basis. We also look for opportunities to speak the Good News to one another and to those who don’t yet know Jesus. We want the Gospel to permeate our conversations.

**Sabbath:** We work and rest with diligence and joy, through praise, play, celebration, and creating beauty together. God gave work, and God gave rest, and we acknowledge his Sovereign Goodness by taking time to rest and play together. We want to let God carry the weight of the world while we celebrate his faithful love, and we want to demonstrate the kingdom to our neighbors by resting well in his care.

These rhythms are designed to be helpful in realigning our lives around what God has done in Jesus. They aren't rules, or commands, or even guidelines. Rather, they are some "best practices" for those who are trying to live in the freedom of the Kingdom of God.

As we live in these daily rhythms, we are reminded of our need for a Savior and of our Savior's desire to transform our lives and change our city. We want to live in Gospel freedom, demonstrating and proclaiming God's gracious acceptance of sinners to our city.

## V. Frequently Asked Questions

This vision of church is rather messy. There are no real maps for it, only signposts that give a general direction. Reading this will only give you a glimpse of what might be in store for you. Here are some of the most frequently asked questions.

### **What about community?**

Sometimes people hear this and think that we are throwing relationships out the window. It is simply not true. We are not trying to break up your small group or tear you away from the people you have come to love. Our Missional Communities are built on our four Gospel Identities mentioned above: Family, Missionaries, Servants, Learners. A strong Missional Community is embodying all four Identities, meaning you are caring for one another as a Family, bringing the good news to our city as Missionaries, sacrificially blessing one another and your neighbors as Servants, and discipling one another as Learners. You'll often assess how you are doing as a Missional Community by looking at how well you are living out all four Identities.

### **What does it look like on a weekly basis?**

This is a difficult question because there is no predetermined plan for a Missional Community. In fact, part of the problem with the church in America is that we are too dependent on programs and events and pastors who tell us what to think and do. Instead, we need to be going to Jesus, the Senior Pastor and Head of the Church, and asking him what we should be about together.

Having said that, let me give you a few ideas of what it *might* look like week to week. If you decided that your mission was to bring the kingdom to your physical neighborhood – and through prayer, study, and listening to your neighbors, you learned that "good news" to your neighbors would be to encourage the families to slow down and play together – you might do that by hosting a monthly Saturday morning pancakes, crafts, and family games time. As you did that, you'd need to have your Missional Community pray, plan, and lead it with you, so you might spend your time together each week doing just that.

## SESSIONSIX - Missional Community

If your “neighbors” are kids from broken homes in West Central, you might serve together at Youth For Christ by mentoring kids and being involved in the Club night outreaches. Your missional Community might meet before or after Club to eat dinner together, care for each other, and pray for the ministry of YFC.

When and how often you gather will be determined by your neighbors’ and your own needs and resources. We often take one Sunday a month off from the gathering and use that time to connect with your neighbors through shared meals, outdoor recreation, or work projects. Just be sure to come back the next week and let everyone know how it went.

### **What about normal folks like me? This sounds like it is something for pastors or missionaries or other “Super Christians.”**

All of us are on a mission of some sort - the only question is, “Whose mission are you on?” As a Christian - the normal kind - you’ve been given the Holy Spirit, God’s sending agent in the world. If you are walking in the Spirit of God, actively pursuing obedience, you will (in some ways) naturally be on mission already. God uses normal people to do his work in the world. In fact, this whole way of understanding the church takes the focus off of the few “super pastors” and puts the focus on the “normal” Christians. Single people, working parents, busy stay-at-home parents, and students are central to God’s kingdom work in our city!

### **What if I just want to *go to church*?**

First, we recognize that many newcomers to Vintage have been wounded by crazy church politics and burned out by religious activity. Sometimes you need to take a season and just “go to church,” be with God’s people, sit under the teaching of the Word, and let God refresh your soul. If that is where you are at, please know that our deepest desire for you is that you’ll experience personal renewal and a new-found joy in the gospel. So come, be here, worship with us. Let’s talk about Jesus together. We want you to feel the freedom to do that without feeling the need to do or be or accomplish. We just want to invite you into this journey with us and we want to respect your need to consider all of these things thoroughly. You can do this best by just being a part of a Missional Community, sharing meals together, and watching the way they live this out.

Second, what we are talking about in this session is deeply rooted in what we believe about Jesus. We don’t believe that you can do any of this effectively or for the long-term without a deep, life-transforming experience of God’s grace. Grace is the center of Christianity and mission flows from living relationship to Jesus. If you are moved into mission for any reason other than the love of Jesus to you, stop! Mission is what happens when our lives are saturated with the love of God, and that happens as we grasp the reality that He loved us so much he gave his own Son for us. As that



truth melts your heart it also rearranges your priorities, and frees you to give your life to be blessing to others.

Finally, you should be aware that the idea of “going to church” is not a New Testament idea. Jesus did not start a movement that was only intended to put on a good Sunday show for the saints. Jesus gathered a group of people to himself, trained them, and sent them into the world to make disciples of him. He didn’t commission them to build a building or put on an event each Sunday morning. He sent them into the world to be salt and light: a grace-proclaiming, servant people for the fame of Jesus.

**This doesn’t seem like a normal church. Are you guys a cult or something?**

Most people who first come to our Sunday gathering have a “go to church” mentality. If that is you, know that you are a normal North American Christian. At the same time, you should know that North American Christianity is not normal. If you were to visit the underground church in China, the fastest growing church in the world, rather than million dollar buildings, slick services, and an overemphasis on Bible information, you would discover people being the church in radically world-changing ways without formal training, buildings, or even complete Bibles. But God is at work, people are dependent on him, and they are dedicated to the Great Commission. They are much closer to the “historical norm” for Christianity.

If you want to use some old-school terminology, we are Christian, Evangelical, and Reformed. We are Bible-believing, Jesus-loving, mission-centered Christians trying to faithfully proclaim and live the Gospel in our city. We love guys like John Piper, C.J. Mahaney, Tim Keller, and J. I. Packer. We are learning a ton from Gospel-centered counselors like Ted Tripp, Timothy Lane, and David Powlison. We’ve learned from dead guys like C. S. Lewis, C. H. Spurgeon, and Jonathan Edwards. We love the Puritans, like Richard Baxter and John Owen.

In addition, we are connected to the Acts 29 Network ([acts29network.org](http://acts29network.org)), to New Community Church ([new-community.com](http://new-community.com)), and to a number of other local churches.

**Why should I want to be involved in a Missional Community?**

For us, the church *is* the Missional Community. If you only come on Sundays, you’ll be disappointed in your experience and likely frustrated by the lack of care you receive, not to mention that you’ll miss out on the adventure of *being* the church. Many Christians are burned out on programs that do little more than maintain the institution. By getting involved in a Missional Community, you are fulfilling the Great Commission (“Go and make disciples!”) and doing it in a Great Commandment (“Love God, Love others!”) kind of way. This is Vintage Christianity.



**How can I lead a Missional Community?**

We are always in need of more men and women to lead our Missional Communities. There is a ton of kingdom work to do in our city and we need you to help us and let us help you. To lead a Missional Community, you need to first take our Partners in Mission course and actually be involved in a Missional Community. Express your desire to your Missional Community leaders. As they think you are ready, they'll hand off more responsibility to you, encouraging you to own your personal mission and call people to join you in it. Eventually you will be able to launch out from that Missional Community to start a new one. Before you do so, you'll also want to take our Servant Leadership Training course to prepare you for the responsibility of leadership in the church and mission.

**\*For more information on Partnership in Mission, please see Appendix Two at the end of this resource.**



# Appendix: Supplemental Resources

**Appendix One: Studying the Bible**

**Appendix Two: Mission Partnership**

**Appendix Three: Doctrine & Sacraments**

**Appendix Four: Giving & Tithing**

**Appendix Five: Spiritual Gifts**





# Appendix One: Learning the Bible

Do you feel like you read your Bible but never understand it? Do you get bored or frustrated reading because you can't seem to get anything out of it? Is Bible reading more of a chore than a delight? Do you listen to sermons and wonder, "Where the heck did the preacher get that?!"

You're not alone. Even for people who have spent years in the Church, Bible study can sound more like a dreaded duty than an adventurous delight. Why read the Bible if it only seems to make you more angry, discouraged, and frustrated? Let me assure you: the problem is not the Bible.

I want to teach you how to study your Bible. I want you to come away from your time in the Word encouraged because you understand it and are applying it in your own life. But let me warn you: it is not magic. It takes time, energy, and hard work. It takes a bit of concentration, a ton of prayer, some hard thinking, a little imagination, and often some further research. But you can do it. In John 14.26, Jesus says, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." A few chapters later, he says, "When the Spirit of truth comes he will guide you into all truth..." (John 16.13). If you have come to believe the Story of what God is doing in Jesus, you have the Holy Spirit residing within you, and he will teach you what the Bible is saying. If you are willing to put in the time and energy, and come to the Scriptures humbly and in prayer, you will find that the Holy Spirit will teach you more than you could ever have guessed was in there.

Consider this illustration: If you wanted to study frogs, you could do it two ways. First, you could go to the library, check out every book on frogs, read about them, and you would know a ton about frogs. Or, second, you could go to a pond and catch a frog. You could observe it in its natural habitat, see how it interacts with other frogs, see where it lives, how it breeds, how it eats. You could then take it home and dissect it in order to see how everything works on the inside. After dissecting it, you could fry up the legs and taste it. Yum. Inductive Bible study, the method of study you will be learning, is the second method. Rather than look at what others have said about the passage, you go directly to the passage and dissect it. The more time you spend asking questions about the text, studying it in its context, making connections, defining terms, and picking out key phrases, the better you will understand the passage. The better you understand it, the better you will be at applying it to your life.

Before we look at how to study your Bible, I want to remind you of the key thing to understanding it: the Bible is not about *you*. It is about *Jesus*, about the grace that God has shown us in Jesus, and what that means for those who turn from sin to worship the living God. Don't ever forget that! Ever!

# Appendix One: Learning the Bible

Inductive Bible Study has, essentially, four steps.

## *Step 1: Pray and Read*

To begin to really study, you must make some decisions. First and foremost, you have to make the decision to believe that the Bible is authoritative and that you are humbly placing yourself under it, not trying to impose your preconceived notions onto the text. Let the text speak for itself. So before you jump in to reading, pray that God would teach you, that your heart would be ready and willing to learn, and that you would leave your assumptions about the text behind. Once you've done that, you are ready to read. Start by picking an individual book in the New Testament, something short like 1 John, Philippians, or (even shorter) Jude. Or, begin with a single Psalm. Generally, when you are first starting a book or Psalm, you want to read it from beginning to end a few times to get the general feel for it. After you've done that, you can begin to look at sections, then paragraphs, then verses, and finally, the individual words.

As you do this initial reading, jot down any repeated words or phrases, make a note of key verses, and try to identify a main theme of the book or Psalm.

## *Step 2: Observe*

This second step is the most time consuming and important part of your Bible study. If you do a good job observing the text, then you will have no trouble interpreting it and applying it to your life. In this step you want to bombard the text with questions. Most important in this step is figuring out the context. Just as in real estate the most important thing is "Location, location, location," in Bible study the most important thing is "Context, context, context." Ask why the passage is where it is, how it fits in the flow and argument of the whole book, and how it connects to the historical context in which it was written. Answer the basic questions of "who, what, when, where, why, and how." But don't stop there. Define key words using other places it shows up in the Bible (called "cross-referencing") or a Bible dictionary. Just keep going on this step - you can hardly do too much observing. Remember, the more time and energy you put into this part, the better you will be at interpreting it.

Before you leave observation, write-out the main theme of the passage in one clear, concise, and accurate sentence.

## *Step 3: Interpretation*

This is the step where you try to answer the question, "What did the author intend to convey?" Contrary to popular Bible study, there is only ONE correct interpretation: the original author had a

# Appendix One: Learning the Bible

singular purpose and meaning in mind when he wrote it. There will be myriad applications from the text, but you have to know what it means before you can accurately apply it.

At this point, you want to look especially for where Jesus is at in the text. How is this text about him? If it is in the Old Testament, how does this text point us to our need for a Savior, or how is this text fulfilled by the work of the Savior?

You want to summarize what you've learned in step two about the context, and you want to connect the passage to that context. You want to find other passages that relate to this passage in order to find similar principles elsewhere in the Scriptures. Finally, in one sentence, you want to sum up the main point of the passage: what did the author intend for his original audience to know, believe, or do as a result of what he is saying?

Before you move to application, take some time to check other resources (commentaries, sermons by respected pastors, books, etc.) to see if your interpretation agrees with them. If you are coming up with something that no one has ever seen before, you are probably wrong.

## *Step 4: Application*

In this final step you are connecting the Bible to your life. Most of us jump right to this step and we miss the point of the passage completely. You cannot apply the Scriptures to your life until you've done the hard work of observation and interpretation. But, if you have done your homework, God will already be speaking to you about how you need to respond to the text. Is there a command to obey, a sin to repent of, a promise to believe, an error to avoid, an example to follow? What are you to do?

But don't stop at that. Once you know what the passage is saying and how God is applying it to your life, you have to come up with a plan to respond. You can't think it will just happen. How and when will you begin to implement what you've learned? Who will you tell that can offer accountability? Write it down, pray, make a plan, and go for it.



# Appendix Two: Mission Partnership

## Missional Community Covenant

### Questions for Covenanting

The following Gospel Identities reflect who we are because of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith in the gospel renews and re-arranges every aspect of our lives, calling us to increasingly give up our lives so that we can find abundant life in Christ. These Gospel Identities reflect what it means to be Spirit-filled and Spirit-led disciples of Jesus who make disciples of Jesus.

**Missionaries:** We are sent by God to restore all things to himself. God sent his son, Jesus, to Earth to take on human form and live within the culture. He worked, ate and interacted among the people, living in such a way that those around him could see and experience what God was truly like. Jesus came so that all people, places and things could be restored to a right relationship with God.

- What will you need to give up in order to arrange your lives around the gospel and the making of disciples as a way of life? (Mark 8.34-35)
- What neighborhood or group of people is the Spirit sending you to? (John 20.21, Acts 1.8)
- How will you as a team pursue those in your mission field? (John 1.14)

**Family:** We are children of God who live and care for each other as a family. God has always desired a people-an earthly family-who would live in such a way that the world would know what he is like. Jesus said that those who live in his ways and obey his Father are truly his family. Through Jesus we believe we are children of God and brothers and sisters with each other.

- In what specific ways will you overlap and share your lives deeply and regularly? (John 13.34-35)
- What “one another” commands will you seek to practice regularly? (Gal 6.2)
- How will you encourage personal accountability and discipleship (Journey Groups)? (Eph 4.1-6)

**Servants:** We are servants of God who serve others as a way of life. Fully God-fully human, Jesus took on the posture of a servant. He gave his life, even unto death, so that others could experience salvation, peace and restoration. Jesus said, “I am among you as one who serves...” All those who follow Jesus are called to serve in the same humility, whoever, whenever, and wherever it takes us.

- What needs do you see in your mission field? (Matt 9.35-38)
- What resources do you have as a team that you can plow into your mission field? (Acts 4.32-37)
- In what ways will you serve your mission field together (parties, projects, people)? (Luke 4.38-41)

## Appendix Two: Mission Partnership

**Learners:** We are disciples of Jesus who take responsibility for our own development and the development of others. Jesus called others to follow his ways, to be his disciples and live in obedience to all that God commands. He then sent these followers out to make new disciples. We believe we are also called to be followers of Jesus who take responsibility for our own development and the development of others.

- How will you grow in understanding of, confidence in, and ability to speak the gospel? (Rom 1.16)
- What radical steps of obedience is God calling you to make together this year?
- What will you learn in your times together? (Acts 2.42)

## Missional Community Covenant

SAMPLE

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ...  
standing firm in one spirit, with one mind  
striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.  
(Philippians 1.27)

**The following Gospel Identities reflect who we are because of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Repentance and faith in the gospel renews and re-arranges every aspect of our lives, calling us to increasingly give up our lives so that we can find abundant life in Christ. These Gospel Identities reflect what it means to be Spirit-filled and Spirit-led disciples of Jesus who make disciples of Jesus.**

**Missionaries: We are sent by God to restore all things to himself.** God sent his son, Jesus, to Earth to take on human form and live within the culture. He worked, ate and interacted among the people, living in such a way that those around him could see and experience what God was truly like. Jesus came so that all people, places and things could be restored to a right relationship with God.

- Our primary mission field will be the people and neighborhood of Browne's Addition as the Spirit leads
- We also will support other areas where God has placed each of us as we learn to be missionaries
- We'll pray regularly for our neighbors, asking God for gospel opportunities, celebrating as He does
- As one simple step in this direction, we'll use one Thursday/month to invite neighbors for a meal

**Family: We are children of God who live and care for each other as a family.** God has always desired a people-an earthly family-who would live in such a way that the world would know what he is like. Jesus said that those who live in his ways and obey his Father are truly his family. Through Jesus we believe we are children of God and brothers and sisters with each other.

- Jesus has called us to be with Him together, learning to sacrificially love and care for each other
- We'll invite one another along for meals, events, and mundane life regularly - including kids
- Involvement weekly in worship on Sundays, Sunday open table, Thursday MC meeting
- Everyone in our MC will be in a Journey Group with 1 or 2 others for gospel accountability

**Servants: We are servants of God who serve others as a way of life.** Fully God-fully human, Jesus took on the posture of a servant. He gave his life, even unto death, so that others could experience salvation, peace and restoration. Jesus said, "I am among you as one who serves..." All those who follow Jesus are called to serve in the same humility, whoever, whenever, and wherever it takes us.

- We'll ask God to help us see the brokenness & sin here, and work to shoulder it together as he does

## Appendix Two: Mission Partnership

- Regular and sacrificial involvement in the needs and events of the neighborhood events
- Provide man-power for neighborhood events (Fall Clean-up, Concerts, Art Fest/Elk Fest, etc)

**Learners: We are disciples of Jesus who take responsibility for our own development and the development of others.** Jesus called others to follow his ways, to be his disciples and live in obedience to all that God commands. He then sent these followers out to make new disciples. We believe we are also called to be followers of Jesus who take responsibility for our own development and the development of others.

- We need God to give us joy in the gospel and a burden for those who don't yet know Him
- We need to grow in gospel confidence and learn how to share the good news verbally
- We need to learn one another's stories so we know one another's gospel needs and spiritual gifts



# Appendix Three: Doctrine & Sacraments

## I. What We Believe

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

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

### **One Living and True God**

God eternally exists in three distinct personae: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit – equal in power and glory. He has revealed Himself to be perfect in love, holiness and righteousness. He created all, upholds all and governs all.

### **The Written Word of God, the Bible**

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are given by divine inspiration and are the written Word of God, the final authority for the lives of believers in every culture and age, and the infallible rule for faith and practice. They are to be interpreted according to their context and purpose in reverent obedience to the living Lord who speaks through them in power by his Holy Spirit. The primary purpose of Scripture is to lead people to faith in Jesus.

### **God the Father**

God has revealed Himself as a Father who is an infinite, personal Spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of men; He hears and answers prayer; and He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ.

### **Jesus Christ**

Jesus Christ is God's only begotten Son, was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and is both true God and true man. He was born of a virgin; lived a sinless life; fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah; performed miracles as evidence of His Messianic identity; died a substitutionary, atoning

## Appendix Three: Doctrine & Sacraments

death for our sins; rose bodily from the dead; ascended into heaven; and offers continual intercession for His people.

### **The Holy Spirit**

The Holy Spirit came forth from the Father and Son to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, and to regenerate, sanctify and empower for ministry all who believe in Jesus Christ and is an abiding Helper, Teacher, Gift-giver, and Guide. The true believer receives the Holy Spirit and is baptized into the Body of Christ at conversion, but the Spirit's empowering for godly living, ministry and mission must be sought and activated by faith. Through the indwelling Holy Spirit we can experience repeated fillings and a progressive liberation from the bondage of sin, Satan, and the world.

### **God's Plan to Save Man**

Man was created in God's image, tempted by the devil and subsequently rebelled against God. Men and women are now fallen in nature and evidence this condition in sinful deeds. Thus, they are sinners under condemnation. God regenerates those who repent of their sins and confess Jesus Christ as Lord, declares them righteous, forgives them of their sins, adopts them as His children, baptizes them with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of their future resurrection and inheritance with Christ, incorporates them into His Body, and empowers them for His service.

### **The Believer's Authority**

The believer possesses great authority through Christ over the powers of spiritual darkness led by Satan, the ruler of this world. We actively exercise this authority as we pray, walk by faith, exercise spiritual gifts and progress toward spiritual maturity in Christ. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit brings a present, though partial, reality of the kingdom of God on earth, as He acts in and through our lives with sovereign, supernatural power.

### **The Church**

The Church is the living, spiritual Body of Christ of which Christ is the Head and all regenerated persons are members. The local church is the primary instrument of God for the extension of His kingdom today. The Lord Jesus Christ committed two ordinances to the church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. We respect the variations of practice of these ordinances and affirm the unity of Christ's Body.

### **The Visible, Bodily Return of Christ Jesus**

Jesus Christ will return to the earth physically to raise the dead, judge the world, consummate His glorious kingdom, and renew the heavens and the earth, where the church will dwell with him forever. This is the hope of the church.

## II. The Sacraments

### Baptism

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

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

*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28.19)*

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

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

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

### Communion

Jesus at the Last Supper instituted Communion as a means by which God's people could continually remember and celebrate His body (shown in the bread) and His blood (shown in the wine) shed for the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26.26-29). The final communion for God's people will be at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb with Jesus at the end of history in His Kingdom (Revelation 19.9). The

## Appendix Three: Doctrine & Sacraments

church is to celebrate communion with a sober confession of sin and recognition of why Jesus died and rose (I Corinthians 11.17-34) and partake together to show that they are unified by Jesus (I Corinthians 10.17).

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



# Appendix Four: Giving and Tithing

The following briefly outlines what we believe about giving financially to the church and God's work in the world. For more information, please speak with an elder.

## Why is Giving Important?

Jesus teaches that our hearts are connected to our wallets:

*Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6.19-20)*

In fact, about 15% of Jesus' recorded words were about money. He saw clearly that when we believe in something, when we are committed to it, we easily put "our money where our mouth is." It is natural. In that sense, then, our giving reflects our heart, reflects our concern for our church, its leaders, and its mission. Beyond our commitment, giving reveals the depth of our maturity and Christian commitment. Giving a significant amount of our income away reveals a level of trust in God and his ability to meet our needs.

To give money away is a privilege both because we get to be involved in God's work and because we get to see the ways in which God will meet - and often surpass - our needs. We cannot give to God as a way to get back, as if God is some sort of bank. But we will see that he is faithful to his promises when we are faithful to give according to our means. Most people report that giving sacrificially has taught them more about God's faithfulness than almost any other Christian practice.

Many churches have insisted that 10% is the only Biblically faithful way to give. While we respect those who teach this, we don't agree. Giving is a heart issue, and to command a certain amount or percentage is to remove the freedom of God's people to give as he leads. God may lead you to give MORE than 10% of your income away (and quite often does, if we have ears to hear it). For many, 10% is a beginning bench mark; others may need "training wheels" of - for example - 2%, 5%, 7%, 10%, or something along those lines. It is often helpful to increase the percentage on a regular basis.

*"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse - the whole nation of you - because you are robbing me.*

## Appendix Four: Giving and Tithing

*Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." (Malachi 3. 8-10)*

*One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. (Proverbs 11.24)*

### **Some Interesting Statistics**

"While many Christian churches teach the biblical principle of tithing - that is, giving 10% of one's income to the church - relatively few people follow the practice. One out of every six adults (17%) claims to tithe, but a comparison of the amount that people gave to churches and their household income revealed that just 6% actually donated one-tenth of their income (pre-tax or post-tax) to churches. The level of misreporting among born again Christians was just as prolific: 32% reported tithing, yet only 12% actually did so in 2000" (barna.org). "16% of born-again Christians gave no money to his/her church during 1999" (barna.org).

Church members give an average of 1.6 to 2.5 % of their income. The Average American loses \$100 per year in change and 23% of church members give less than that. Interestingly, the more money a person makes, the less likely he/she is to tithe (Barna).

### **Common Questions about Tithing**

1. My finances are completely out of order, what should I do?

First, you should repent to the Lord for any sins that may have caused your situation. Then, you should seek wisdom about how to remedy your situation. To do this you can schedule a meeting with Pastor Steve in the church office to help you organize your finances and get yourself back on track. You can also find some very helpful information at [www.Crown.org](http://www.Crown.org), a Christian ministry committed to helping people grow in financial wisdom.

2. What Should I Do if I Cannot Afford to Give?

You should do what you can and seek to grow in financial wisdom. If your financial situation is strained because of an unusual need (i.e. injury, elderly, single parent etc.) then the church may need to assist you.

*And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. (2 Corinthians 8.1-4)*

### 3. Should Non-Christians Give?

The Bible is clear that non-Christians are welcome in church and are not expected to give any money.

### 4. Should I Give Off My Gross or Net Income? Should I Give Off All My Income?

*Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops. (Proverbs 3.9)*

### 5. Can I Get A Tax Deduction For Giving?

Yes. If you give in a way that we can record (i.e. check, cash in a marked envelope) then our church bookkeeper will keep accurate totals of your giving. We will send you a receipt letter at the beginning of the year certifying the amount of your total contributions that are tax-deductible from the previous calendar year.

### 6. How Can I Give At Vintage?

By check or cash placed in the offering bucket, or mailed in to the office.

### 7. How Much Should I Give?

This matter is between you and Lord. We have no desire to look at your giving records or keep track of who gives what. Study the Scriptures, pray, and give.

*Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. (2 Corinthians 9.6-8)*

As the above verse teaches, you should give:

- *Generously* - the best answer to “how much?” is “generously.” It doesn’t answer the question with a percentage or dollar amount and allows you to decide on your own.
- *As you have decided in your heart* - what have you decided about tithing? Then give accordingly. Once you’ve come to a decision, follow through!
- *Not out of compulsion, not reluctantly, but with joy* - the attitude that the gift is given in is as important as the amount or percentage. The realization that God owns everything and that he has entrusted you with this money should lead you to prayerfully and joyfully decide where to give it. Don’t give because you feel obligated; give because you are convicted of the importance of it and know that it is a part of your maturity in the Lord and you are happy to be a part of God’s work in the world!

## Appendix Four: Giving and Tithing

### 8. Should I Only Give To The Church?

No! To give is Biblical, especially to give to the needs of the church as it fulfills its mission in the world. There are many people and agencies doing God's work in the world, and they rely on the generous contributions of Christians like you. Again, it comes down to a matter of conviction, study, and prayer. Support your church and its work in your city, but don't forget those involved in the same kind of work around the globe. If you are wondering where else you can give money, here is a list of worthy ministries:

**Church Planting in Spokane:** we are partnered with New Community Church to plant other churches in and around Spokane. We always have a few new church start-ups that could use your money.

**Church Planting Around the World:** We are connected with a church planting network called Acts 29. For more information, go to [www.acts29network.org](http://www.acts29network.org).

**Youth For Christ:** Working in our own West Central neighborhood, Youth For Christ connects youth to programs and mentorship for the sake of sharing Christ.

**IAP and Letta:** Bill and Colleen Roe head up this ministry working to give micro-loans to women in Ethiopia. You can find out more at [iassist.org](http://iassist.org).



## Appendix Five: Spiritual Gifts

You may be interested in our stance on the “baptism” or “filling” of the Holy Spirit. We try to take a Biblically balanced and spiritually humble approach.

In order to talk about the Holy Spirit, and his role in the life of faith, we have to start with Salvation. Coming to faith in Christ is ultimately a matter of authority, a question of who will be in charge of your life. When you place your faith in Jesus, you are making a new allegiance, submitting your life to him, confessing that you’ve made a mess of it and that you want his leadership in your life. As you say yes to Christ, you become a child of God, and God himself takes up residence in your life, giving you a new heart and making you a new creation. This indwelling of God in your life is work of the Holy Spirit.

*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12.12-13)*

*Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. (Romans 8.9b)*

When you declare your allegiance to King Jesus, the Spirit of God comes to dwell in you. You cannot belong to God and NOT have his Spirit dwelling in you. And when he is dwelling in you, he testifies or confirms to you that you are a child of God:

*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (Romans 8.14-16)*

*In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1.13-14)*

HOWEVER, we can’t divorce God’s saving work in you from His purposes in the world. God is not interested simply in giving you his Spirit so you feel special, chosen, loved, etc. He places his Spirit in his people in order to accomplish his mission for the world. As Jesus said to his disciples:

## Appendix Five: Spiritual Gifts

*“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses.”*  
(Acts 1.8)

God intends that his message of King Jesus would go forth; we are his method for gathering this people. He intends that we be his witnesses, and to this end he empowers us by his Spirit. This empowering to witness comes in 2 forms in Scripture.

First, the empowering of the Holy Spirit produces the Fruit of the Spirit:

*The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control [...].* (Galatians 5.22)

Jesus wants his church to be the SALT of the EARTH, which means we need to have the character of Jesus in us, something that can only be produced by His Spirit. We can't be God wants us to be without His power.

The second way the Holy Spirit empowers the church for witness is through the gifts of the Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12 & 14 tell us the variety of gifts are given by the one and same Spirit as he sees fit. You don't get to choose your gifts. That passage also tells us the point of the gifts: the common good - the building up of the body, both in breadth and depth.

There is a great need in the church today for empowered witnesses. Many people might be tempted to say, “That isn't for me.” You want everything God wants for you, so just humbly ask to be taught. Tell God you don't get it, and giving him control is scary, and follow the Biblical command:

*Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts!* (1 Corinthians 14.1)

Conversely, it is no good to say “I was filled with the Spirit on such and such a day” as if God does it once and then you are forever magically filled. Paul sees it differently:

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

The command to “be filled” is an ongoing command, better translated as “keep on being filled.” In other words, Paul says the question is not “have you been filled with the Spirit?” but rather, “are you

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filled with the Spirit right now?” It is not a question of how much you are filled but rather a question of how much control the Holy Spirit has over your life.

So we say “yes” to all that God has for us as his people, “yes” to his empowering, “yes” to his character produced by his Spirit, “yes” to spiritual gifts, and “yes” to continuously being filled with his Spirit.

We also recognize that this position allows for the greatest freedom for differences of experience and interpretation. We want to hold fast to the clear teaching of Scripture and stay far away from anyone’s attempts to make their own experience the gauge of Christian maturity or Spirit-filled living. So we will be charitable with one another’s differences and agree to not be contentious on this issue.

Come Holy Spirit!

*The following pages are taken from a resource manual that is not created by Vintage Faith but by Mars Hill Church in Seattle, WA. Therefore, there may be differences in the way in which we define and understand spiritual gifts. The following pages are offered as a resource as you seek and explore the ways in which God has empowered and gifted you. As you read through this resource, as you study the suggested Scriptures, and as you pray and seek God for his gifts in your life, we will strive to support, encourage, and correct you as needed.*