patterned
SHARING & IMITATING CHRIST TOGETHER
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HOW TO USE THESE VIDEOS
FOR EACH WEEK OF THE PATTERNED STUDY, THERE ARE TWO VIDEOS ALONG WITH DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.

The first video should be watched and discussed within your small group the week prior to completing the written workbook. The second video should be viewed during the small group time following completion of the book.

Discussion questions provided are taken from questions the contributors ask during their respective videos. Spend time talking about practical applications of the material. This will provide encouragement and accountability during your growth as a disciple-maker.
thank you
for selecting this resource. Patterned is designed for any follower of Jesus Christ to gain practical tools to engage in our Lord’s Great Commission mandate of becoming a disciple-maker.

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS
This resource is for North Carolina Baptists by North Carolina Baptists. The men and women who have written and recorded these materials include church members, church staff, former missionaries and seminary leaders. They are not only experienced in the information they share, but they are also passionate about what they share. They were asked to contribute because they are disciple-makers in their everyday lives.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE
THIS RESOURCE IS MADE UP OF WRITTEN LESSONS AND ACCOMPANYING VIDEOS.

For each week of lessons, there are two videos. The first video is designed to be watched before beginning the week’s lessons, and the second video is to be viewed after the conclusion of the week’s lessons. The written and visual portions complement each other as they focus on different elements of disciple-making.

The lessons are structured with a two-fold purpose. First, they will take each learner deeper into Scripture to gain God’s perspective on the topic. Second, they will provide the learner with practical application for daily life.

This resource is ideal for use in a small group or Sunday School setting. This allows for others to learn from one another as they share what God is teaching them in His Word and as they encourage one another in their growth as disciple-makers.
For the introduction week, spend some time getting to know one another in your small group. Beyond asking the normal questions such as name, family and occupation, share with one another your disciple-making experiences. As you get to know one another, you will be able to learn from and challenge each other.

What have your past discipleship experiences been like? (Either in being discipled or in discipling someone else)

What do you hope to gain from this material?

How do you define “lost” and “lostness?”

Jesus gave us a model for praying for the lost (the Lord’s Prayer). How does He teach us to pray better in Luke 11:1-4?

What are practical ways we can pray for the lost?

How can you use Scripture to pray for the lost?

How does God feel about lost things?
WEEK 1
PRAYING FOR THE LOST
HOW TO PRAY FOR THE LOST
Who are the lost, and why should we pray for them?

“Our prayer and God’s mercy are like two buckets in a well; while one ascends, the other descends.”  
Arthur Hopkins

In Mark 9, the disciples tried, but were unable to cast out an unclean spirit. Jesus said to the father of the boy, “All things are possible for one who believes,” and the father said, “I believe, help my unbelief!” We know we should pray for the lost, but many times, we don’t believe. Jesus healed the young man, and then the disciples asked Him, “Why could we not cast it out?” Jesus answered, “This kind can only be driven out by prayer.” Those who are spiritually lost are worse off than an unclean spirit because it is not a temporal condition, but an eternal one. Therefore, we must learn to pray for the lost. We also need to ask God to help us believe in the power of prayer.

How often do you pray for the lost?

As Christ followers, many of us don’t really think about the lost, even though the Bible makes it very clear that this condition is grave. Much of our spiritual energy is spent on the saved, which is also necessary, but Jesus said that He
PRAYING FOR THE LOST

came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). We need to have this same heart as we consider those who are spiritually lost.

Today when we say the word “lost,” we tend to think in other directions. When I say “lost,” maybe you think of how your puppy escaped from your yard or how your child walked away from you at the county fair. Probably, for the minutes or hours that followed, you were so worried about finding that lost one and getting them back that your stress level was very high. While those are indeed scary moments, that isn’t what we should focus on. Lostness, as we see it in the Bible, is the condition of being spiritually lost. The best way to understand lostness is to develop a biblical definition.

Ephesians 2 talks about how we were like zombies. Yes, it says that we were dead men, walking through this world. It goes on to tell us how we were saved by God’s grace through faith. Then in verse 12 of chapter two, Paul writes,

“REMEMBER THAT YOU WERE AT THAT TIME SEPARATED FROM CHRIST, ALIENATED FROM THE COMMONWEALTH OF ISRAEL AND STRANGERS TO THE COVENANTS OF PROMISE, HAVING NO HOPE AND WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD.” Ephesians 2:12 (ESV)

From this one verse, we can see that being lost is described in four ways.

Write those four descriptions in the following blanks.

- Separated __________  __________
- __________from God’s people
- __________to the things of God and
- Individuals with no __________

Another passage that can help us have a better biblical understanding of what it means to be lost is John 3:17-18. Read it now and write down what it says about those who haven’t believed in Jesus.
How are they described?

In today’s society, we don’t like to talk about hell or an eternal destination other than heaven. However, the Bible is very clear that those who believe in Jesus receive salvation and will spend eternity with God, but those who don’t are already condemned to an eternal destination of separation from God. This is why we must pray for them.

Stop right now and think of three people you know who are separated from God. Pray for them by name. Ask God to do something supernatural in their lives to draw them to Him and help them understand His gift of salvation.

+ Pray and ask God to show you more people who are separated from Him.
+ Ask the Lord to make you aware of those who might be alienated from the Church.
+ Seek the Lord’s guidance in recognizing those who are strangers to the things of God.
+ Pray for the eyes of Christ to help you see those individuals without hope.

The famous British pastor Charles Spurgeon said, “If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to hell over our bodies. If they will perish, let them perish with our arms about their knees. Let no one go there unwarned and unprayed for.”
Write down the names or other identifiers (ex: tall guy at the dry cleaners) of the lost people you want to pray for.

How will you pray differently now that you have identified these lost people?

How can you continue to identify and pray more for the lost?
HOW TO PRAY FOR THE LOST
“Your Kingdom come”

“PRAYER IS A SHIELD TO THE SOUL, A SACRIFICE TO GOD AND A SCOURGE FOR SATAN.”

John Bunyan

Yesterday, we saw how the Bible helps us understand the condition of lostness. The Scriptures clearly show us that a person who is spiritually lost is separated from God, alienated from God’s people, a stranger to godly things and someone with no hope. Once we realize the eternal implications for the lost, our prayers should increase and intensify. Today we will learn from the words of Jesus himself.

Read Matthew 6:9-13 and write down what it has to do with praying for the lost.

Specifically, what is Jesus asking for?
This prayer is known as the Lord’s Prayer, and it is a model for us today. Although it doesn’t directly say, “pray for the lost,” the message is definitely here. At the beginning of the prayer in verse nine, Jesus addresses His Father and gives honor to Him. Then in verse 10, He gets to the meat of the prayer. In fact, everything else encompasses these words: “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.” As we reflect on the words, “Your Kingdom come,” I am reminded of Jesus’ first words as He initiated His ministry on this earth. If we look back, we see that Jesus was baptized, led into the wilderness to be tempted and then He was ready to begin His ministry. He said in Mark 1:15, “The time is fulfilled and the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel.” The phrase “Kingdom of God” is at the very center of all Jesus taught. It is found more than 60 times in the four Gospels. It is vital to understand what the Kingdom of God means if we are to pray for the lost.

I appreciate how Sinclair Ferguson defined the Kingdom of God as “the rule and reign of God, the expression of His gracious sovereign will.” We can see from the Lord’s Prayer and the opening words of Jesus’ ministry that there is a direct correlation between repentance from sin and believing in Jesus and the Kingdom. It’s as if God gives us a clue to understand His Kingdom. It begins when a person who is lost moves from realizing their situation of separation and hopelessness to seeing that there is an answer. In order to understand a kingdom, you must know the king. Jesus is that King. By coming into a salvific relationship with Jesus, one enters the Kingdom. Therefore, if we are truly Christ followers, then we must pray for the lost. If we are praying for His Kingdom to come – as instructed in the Lord’s Prayer – then it makes sense that we should be praying for the lost to come into that Kingdom. A key element of the Church should always include prayer for those who are not yet citizens of the Kingdom.

Read Luke 8:1. What does this teach you about the Kingdom?
If the Kingdom of God is good news, then we need to tell people. But, we need to pray first so God can prepare their hearts to receive the message.

If we are going to follow the model prayer given by Jesus, let’s also take into account the last prayer Jesus said. When He was on the cross, He prayed for those who were crucifying Him and making a mockery of “the King of the Jews.” “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). As Jesus was giving His life, suffering on the cross, He was praying for the lost. Is this not the ultimate example for us today?

Throughout history, the Church has prayed for the lost. George Whitefield, one of the key figures in the Great Awakening of the 18th century said, “Lord, give me souls or take my soul.” That is some prayer. John Knox, leader of the Protestant Reformation, pleaded for God to change the heart of his native Scotland. He said, “Give me Scotland, or I die.” Have we ever fallen in love with a community or a people group that we prayed so earnestly?

The second part of Matthew 6:10 says, “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We know that God’s perfect will is going to be accomplished. The question we should ask ourselves is whether we want to be a part of it. God allows us to be collaborators with Him and His work through prayer.

Pray for the individuals you wrote down yesterday or others whom God has brought to your mind during these moments.
IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND A KINGDOM, YOU MUST KNOW THE KING.

JESUS IS THAT KING.
How to Pray for the Lost

Do you believe in prayer?

"Prayer, secret, fervent, believing prayer, lies at the root of all personal holiness."  William Carey

Now if I were to ask the question, “Do you believe in prayer?” to anyone in a Christian church today, the obvious answer would be a resounding, “Yes!” But do our lives, both practical and prayer, reveal this daily?

We were privileged to serve 27 years with the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. In that time, my wife and two sons saw many answers to prayer. In fact, had it not been for the prayers of some faithful ladies in the Women’s Missionary Union, we might not have made it through that first term. I believe in prayer; I saw firsthand the effects of intercession by God’s people. They prayed, and God moved. Barriers were overcome, problems were solved, ministry needs were met and health issues were resolved. Most importantly, people walked out of spiritual darkness into light.

Read Mark 9:20-29. What can you learn about prayer from this passage?
Many times during Jesus’ ministry, He healed people because of their faith. He showed that if we truly believe, He can do anything. He gave examples about moving mountains if you believe. In the text from Mark, we see a father asking Jesus to heal his son who had a spirit that caused him to have terrible convulsions. Jesus asks the father, “Do you believe?” The father, in a very honest answer, replies, “Yes, I believe, help my unbelief.” Many of us are in the same place as the boy’s father.

As you pray for the lost, do you believe that God can bring them out of their sin?

We must pray, trusting that nothing is impossible for God. If you believe, then that will change the tenor and the intensity of your prayers. I remember when we were in language school in San Jose, Costa Rica. Those first few months, my Spanish was very basic, and I was frustrated about not being able to share the gospel or even minister to people. After our first trimester of language school, we received training on prayer evangelism. I was truly impacted by how God used this very simple strategy.

We were taught to prayer walk down a couple of streets each day for a week. For a time, that is all we did. We walked up and down these streets and prayed every day. It was only the second time I had done any type of prayer walking. It was a wonderful experience because I could pray in English or in my broken Spanish, and God understood. I prayed for each house and each person who lived there. I prayed for their physical, emotional and financial needs, but most of all, I prayed that they might come to know God in a personal way.

Then after the first week, we did it again on the same street. But this time we stopped by each house and told people who we were and that we were out
praying for their neighborhood. We asked them if there was anything specific that we could pray for, for them or their families. It was amazing how many of the people who invited us to come inside shared personal issues that their families were facing. Even in my broken Spanish, I could understand and pray for them. Others who didn’t invite us in would share prayer requests with us, and we learned the names of their family members and began to pray for them and their physical and emotional needs, but we also began to pray specifically for their salvation. Many people accepted Christ through this ministry. It was amazing to me that even though I couldn’t speak very clearly or deeply, God allowed us to be a part of what He was doing through prayer. I began to see that I needed to pray more faithfully not only for people I knew, but also for people who lived around me whom I hadn’t even met.

Where and for whom might God be asking you to pray for right now?


Many years later, my kids had a Christian rock band, and they were asked to play in bars. As a disclaimer, there weren’t any concert halls or other venues in the area. Surely the obvious answer was to tell my sons they couldn’t play in bars, but as we prayed about it, we sensed that this was an amazing opportunity God was giving us. So I told my sons they could play at the bar, but we would go with them, and we would take a group of mature Christian young people to prayer walk before and during the concert. Each time they played over the next several years, someone accepted Christ, and we later began a church with these postmodern hippies who had decided to become Christ followers. Only God could do that, but prayer was foundational.
Read Mark 2:2-12. In verse 5, the passage says that Jesus saw their faith. Whose faith is Jesus referring to?

According to this Scripture, what does Jesus have the power to do?

Do you really believe in the power of prayer? Do you believe God can move mountains? Do you trust that God can save the lost? If so, then how will your life reflect this faith?
HOW TO PRAY FOR THE LOST
Praying Scripture

“Don’t pray just when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it. A man is powerful on his knees.” Corrie Ten Boom

Over the years, I have learned several ways to pray more specially for the lost. Let me share a few with you today.

FIRST, we need to take prayer seriously, not haphazardly. I have a colleague who served in South America for more than 25 years, and he would always say that prayer is serious business. Many of us only pray short, rehearsed prayers each day. We must remember that the lost are eternally condemned as we step into the breach for them. God deserves our best, especially when we pray for the lost.

SECOND, pray for the lost by name. We know that God honors our general prayers, but if we are going to intercede, let’s intercede for individuals. Call them by name. Intercede on their behalf.

THIRD, we should pray fervently.

Read James 5:15-18. What kind of man was Elijah?
How did he pray?

It is interesting that James tells us Elijah prayed fervently. This isn’t a word we use much today, but it has special meaning. The word fervent means “earnestly” or “intensely.” It also has the idea of being passionate, sincere and heartfelt. Therefore, our prayers need to be much more than repeated or practiced words; they need to come from our heart.

FINALLY, we should pray Scripture for the lost. This is so simple, but I have to admit, I never learned this in an academic setting. Rather, I began to hear mature Christians pray Scripture as they were interceding for others. Here are a few examples:

“One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.”  
Acts 16:14 (ESV)

Your prayer might look like this: “Father, I pray that you will open Bill’s heart as you did Lydia’s in the book of Acts so that he will receive and believe the gospel.”

“I WILL GIVE THEM ONE HEART, AND A NEW SPIRIT I WILL PUT WITHIN THEM. I WILL REMOVE THE HEART OF STONE FROM THEIR FLESH AND GIVE THEM A HEART OF FLESH.”  
Ezekiel 11:19 (ESV)

You might pray, “Father, give Susan a new heart and fill her with Your Spirit.” Or even, “Lord, will You soften the hearts of our new neighbors to the gospel message, just as You did in the book of Ezekiel?” As you pray Scripture, you are not only interceding for the person, but you are also agreeing with God on what needs to happen.
“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”  

2 Corinthians 4:3-6 (ESV)

Pray: “Father, I know that John’s mind is blinded to the truth, but in Jesus’ name, I ask that You will let the light of the gospel shine into his life today.”

There are so many great verses we can use. Here are just a few of the dozens of verses you might pray for the lost: Psalm 18:27; Proverbs 8:13; 29:23; Isaiah 64:6; Matthew 13:4-7; Mark 9:43-47; Romans 3:23, 6:23; Ephesians 2:1; 1 Timothy 1:13-16.

It is biblical to intercede for the lost. There are many examples of godly people praying for the lost, the misguided and those living in sin.

Read the following passages and answer how each person interceded.

Exodus 32:7-14: Who interceded for whom? Why? What was the result?
PRAYING FOR THE LOST

Acts 7:54-60: Who interceded for whom? Why? What was the result?

Romans 9:1-3, 10:1: Who interceded for whom? Why? What was the result?

1 Timothy 2:1-4: Who interceded for whom? Why? What was the result?

C.H. Spurgeon preached a sermon called “Mary Magdalene” in which he spoke about praying for the lost. He said, “Until the gate of hell is shut upon a man, we must not cease to pray for him. And if we see him hugging the very doorposts of damnation, we must go to the mercy seat and beseech the arm of grace to pluck him from his dangerous position. While there is life, there is hope, and although the soul is almost smothered with despair, we must not despair for it, but rather arouse ourselves to awaken the Almighty arm.”
How will you be more intentional to pray Scripture for the lost?

Will you stop right now and take a few minutes to pray one of these Scriptures for a lost person?
HOW TO PRAY FOR THE LOST

How can God use me to be a part of the answer to prayers for the lost?

In day three, we looked at a story from Mark 2. Four men carried a paralyzed man to Jesus, but they could not reach Him because of the crowd, so they removed the roof and lowered their friend. We might see what these four did as prayer in action. They brought the paralyzed man before Jesus, and this is what we do when we are involved in intercessory prayer. However, there also may come a time when we must ask ourselves, “How can God use me to be a part of the answer to the prayer?” As we intercede for the lost, we need to constantly ask, “Lord, what should my response to this need be?

Maybe the answer is to pray more. Maybe you could write a note, send a card, send a text, make a phone call or pay someone a visit. As you pray, be open to the leadership of the Holy Spirit to guide your response.

This might be why some people don’t like to pray. They are afraid that if they intercede for someone, God might call them to do something. And guess what? — He just might. We must never forget how precious the lost are to our God. There are many passages that speak about this, but probably the best example is Luke 15.

Read Luke 15:1-7. What is the central idea of this parable?
WEEK 1

Is there something you need to let go of or leave to pray more for the lost?

Read Luke 15:8-10. How does this parable motivate you to pray?

What else does it motivate you to do?

Read Luke 15:11-24. How does God receive those who were lost?
How should you pray differently after reading this parable?

It is easy to see that God desires to find that which is lost. In fact, Jesus came to “seek and save the lost.” As Christ followers, we must understand that not only is prayer foundational to all we do, but it is also one of our most effective strategies. Praying for the lost is the first step in obeying the Great Commission.

Romans 10 tells us about salvation and what it means.

“BECAUSE, IF YOU CONFESS WITH YOUR MOUTH THAT JESUS IS LORD AND BELIEVE IN YOUR HEART THAT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD, YOU WILL BE SAVED. FOR WITH THE HEART ONE BELIEVES AND IS JUSTIFIED, AND WITH THE MOUTH ONE CONFESSES AND IS SAVED.”

Romans 10:9-10 (ESV)

This is another prayer that we can pray for the lost. Chapter 10 goes on to ask: How can someone call on the name of the Lord if they haven’t believed, and how can they believe if they haven’t heard, and how can they hear unless someone goes to tell, and how can someone go unless they are sent out? Each of these steps needs to be undergirded with prayer. As we mentioned above, when we pray, we must continuously ask ourselves, “How can I be a part of what God is doing in bringing people out of darkness into light?”

From Romans 10, what can you identify as being necessary for salvation?
Ask God how you can be a more active participant in helping the lost find the truth in Christ. What do you need to do this week to take the first step?

The following is a personal story about how prayer is the first step to making an impact for God’s Kingdom.

We lived in southeastern Mexico during our last few years of missionary service. While there, I desired to know more about the largest unreached people group in the Americas. About seven hours from where we lived, there was a Mixtec group of more than 170,000 people who were under 1 percent evangelical. I wanted to do more front-line investigation but was discouraged by others because it was a dangerous area. For almost three years, I prayed every week about going to visit and doing more research. After time, I was told that I shouldn’t go.

Then in 2014, our focus included five strategic people groups we were praying for. Hundreds of people joined us to pray for the Mixtec group. Finally in the fall of 2014, I felt that God was leading me to go. Accordingly, I made plans with another missionary, and we headed off. We didn’t have any contacts or even a person of peace, but as we traveled, we felt confident that God was about to do something amazing. We met someone who told us to talk to a certain man, and then another, but they all kept saying, “You should find Job.” Job ran a shoe store in the town where we were staying. Job was a Mexican national who was a believer. He had been to this area many times and had much more information for us. By the way, Job was 84. As we gathered information and told him we would be traveling two more hours to the geographic center of this people group, he asked, “Could I go with you?” We said, “Of course, brother!”

The next morning, we headed out and drove through those curvy mountain roads to what seemed like the end of the world, and then we found our town. Job took us about five miles farther to a small village; there we met our first
believer of the Mixtec people. We talked for an hour, and he said, “Would you like to meet our church?” We said yes. Within an hour, he had gathered five men and one lady to meet with us. We shared our desire for more of the Mixtec people to know Christ, and the leader looked directly at me with tears coming down his cheeks and said, “We want to reach our people, but we just do not know how. Can you help us?” I answered, “yes.”

Over the next few months, I made three more trips to visit our brothers there, and a church from Florida adopted this group. They have been teaching the Mixtec people how to evangelize and disciple people in a way that is reproducible. Over the past year and a half, they have sent multiple teams and have reached numerous families and are starting several new churches. To God be the glory! It all started with prayer.

What are the implications of this story for you and your life?

What have you been challenged to do differently as you have studied how to pray for the lost?
MARTY CHILDERS
was born in Hickory, N.C., and graduated from Gardner Webb University and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He married Melissa Vaughan, and together with their two sons, they served for 27 years with the International Mission Board. They have lived in Costa Rica, Bolivia and Mexico. Marty's passion is for missions and training people to reach the nations. Marty currently lives in Durham, N.C.
Why do we pray?

Who are some of the people we should pray for in addition to the lost?

What does Paul remind believers to pray in Ephesians 6:18-20?

From your list on page eight, share some of the lost people around you whom you can pray for. How do we pray for the people we have listed?

What is disciple-making and how is it an ongoing process?

Jesus modeled disciple-making. How did He do this?

How can the Great Commission be a “natural thing?”
WEEK 2
DEFINING EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP
It is always important that we begin Bible study in prayer. Please take a moment to pray for an open heart and mind to solely hear from God. Pray for God to reveal His truths to you, and to grow in your heart His love for people, which will manifest a desire to be used by Him, compassionately, through personal evangelism and discipleship.

While the Bible is our true source of defining evangelism and discipleship (disciple-making), when one thinks of a definition, they typically look in the dictionary — so, out of curiosity, let’s do that.

“Evangelism: the spreading of the Christian gospel by public preaching or personal witness, zealous advocacy of a cause.” Oxford Dictionary

“Jesus is the key to everything else. He is the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Good Shepherd, the Vine, the Gate, the Way, Truth, and Life, and the model to follow. The ideal life is focused on Jesus. It is not just trusting him but also truly following him. To focus on him is to live a fulfilling life. It is about becoming more and more like him in the power of the Holy Spirit to the glory of God. To be conformed into Jesus’ likeness is the goal (Rom. 8:29). The word for this is discipleship.”

Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, DiscipleShift.
DEFINING EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP

As followers of Jesus Christ, our cause is the gospel, the good news of Jesus coming for us (John 3:16-17) — His birth, death and resurrection, along with the heart-life transformation (growing in His likeness) that is made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit (Colossians 2:6-15).

We are to follow Jesus in how He loved and how He personally shared this good news (evangelism). Consider the evangelistic nature of the book of John, where John wrote what he personally knew of the person of Jesus, his intimate friend and his loving Savior. Jesus was sincere, gentle, welcoming and accessible. He shared the truth of the good news out of great concern. Evangelism is sharing the hope of Jesus. It is not proving a point, not arguing to win and it is not defending God.

We are also to follow Jesus in how He lived out discipleship — intentionally yet organically teaching disciples with the Word of God through living life together in accountable relationships, empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to mature in faith and encourage replication (discipleship).

Sure, Jesus knew His time was short — so He was intentional in discipleship efforts, but His teaching also fed and grew the disciples naturally (organically), focusing on developing quality relationships. Discipleship isn’t programmatic and it isn’t staged — because life isn’t. Remember that we have a High Priest who came down from the glory of heaven to hang out in our messy neighborhoods and look us in the eye, seeing our great needs.

Shouldn’t we then treat people and share the hope of Jesus’ redemption with the same empathy toward the destruction of sin? After all, He chose to pursue sinners and spend intimate time with them. He came for the sick (Mark 2:13-17).

“Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet He did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” Hebrews 4:14-16 (NASB)
Being Jesus’ disciple gets to the gut of who we are and how we should be living and utilizing our time. Disciples are called to follow Jesus, which transcends to becoming more like Him and helping others follow Him.

From the start, let’s look at a term you may have seen lately:

| DISCIPLE-MAKING | For the purpose of this study, we’ll consider this word a combination of both evangelism and discipleship. |

When I look at it on paper, I relate the intentional hyphen to a bridge moving from evangelism to discipleship, where both are tremendously important.

One must first know who Jesus is before one can become like Him. And one should be moving toward maturation in following Christ before one joins the Holy Spirit in making disciples who make disciples. Simply put, would a baby raise a baby? We were all “baby Christians” at one time when we first came to know Jesus personally, and babies or children benefit from a present teacher to nurture and train them. Babies have enormous growth potential.

Through reference of Scripture and Jesus’ life, it is our hope that you will see how evangelism and discipleship are related, connected and merge into a continuing, ever-growing relationship. You were first introduced to the amazing person of Jesus Christ and, through the grace to believe, you accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord and then began following Him. And hopefully, you were encouraged in your growth and learning by godly, accountable relationships. If you were not, could you consider how helpful it would have been to have someone compassionately sharing biblical knowledge with you along life’s journey, encouraging you in hard times while also celebrating the good and praying for you?

Now let’s break that down further — EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHP.

Have you seen that evangelism is promoted throughout the entire Bible? Consider that the Old Testament prophesied and evangelized about Jesus, the coming Savior. Jesus arrived, in person, in the New Testament and lived a life of disciple-making. Don’t miss that the Old Testament also includes examples
of people helping others follow God. One example is found in Exodus 18:13-26 when Moses established God-ordained leadership, rooted in discipleship.

The 12 disciples had probably heard Old Testament prophecy of Jesus because the Old Testament writings were regularly read in home meetings and in synagogues. Jesus Himself then approached them personally. But it didn’t end there. For three years, Jesus invested in the lives of these 12 men — living by example, teaching, loving and leading. Jesus’ ministry of disciple-making is a ministry of presence. While God has given us His Word through the Bible, He also provided the example of Jesus Christ’s pattern for disciple-making.

“And He appointed twelve [disciples], so that they would be with Him [for instruction] and so that He could send them out to preach [the gospel as apostles — that is, as His special messengers, personally chosen representatives].” Mark 3:14 (NASB)

Our amazing Savior has also given us the divine purpose, great honor and loving gift of knowing Him, sharing Him with the world and making disciples of all nations. Let’s refer to Scripture so you may see this truth for yourself.

READ ROMANS 10:9-15, ACTS 22:15-16 AND MATTHEW 28:19-20, and then consider the questions following the Scripture.

“If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. As Scripture says, ‘Anyone who believes in Him will never be put to shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile — the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on Him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to
“Them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’”

Romans 10:9-15 (NIV)

“You will be His witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on His name.”

Acts 22:15-16 (NIV)

Once a person seeks forgiveness of sins and accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, what are they to do?

To whom can you witness personally? Note that the Scripture says: Witness to ALL people. This suggests that Jesus doesn’t discriminate culturally or personally.

“Then, Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them...”

patterned
- 35 -
Who is speaking, and why should we listen?

What are we told, or rather commanded to do, and to whom? Be specific.

Notice the word “go” in the Scripture above. It is an urgent command. We aren’t to wait for an invitation. He has already told us to go. “Go” means “as you are going about life.”

So, as you are going about life, prayerfully consider whom God has placed in your path for disciple-making and list them here:
Considering that this was one of the last things Jesus shared with His disciples before ascending to heaven, how important must this be to Jesus?

“Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.” 1 Thessalonians 2:7b-8 (NIV)

How does this verse display disciple-making as patterned by Jesus’ sharing His life with disciples?

Finally, how do you see disciple-making (evangelism and discipleship) in each of the verses listed above?
Take a moment to pray before you begin.

There are more Old Testament quotes in Matthew than in all the other gospels. Jesus is the Savior of the world and, for evangelistic purposes, the Old Testament quotes helped teach this truth.

Jesus’ genealogy in Matthew 1 shows that Jesus prophetically arrives as Savior of the world, and all people matter to Jesus. All get God's best. He began His ministry in Matthew 4:16-17 with the words, “Repent for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

This was soon followed by Matthew 4:19:

“And He said to them, ‘Follow Me [as My disciples, accepting Me as your Master and Teacher and walking the same path of life that I walk], AND I WILL MAKE YOU FISHERS OF MEN.’” Matthew 4:19 (AMP)

I like the Amplified version of Scripture because it elaborates on what Jesus is saying. Can you see Jesus promoting the message of disciple-making (evangelism and discipleship together) as He wants it to be? Jesus approaches the spiritually dead about accepting Him as Savior and Lord, or the word used here, Master. Jesus then also includes, “walking the same path of life that I walk, and I will make you fishers of men.” Have you considered that “making you fishers of men” is a blessing offered?

Jesus' life included helping His disciples grow. People were a priority.

It’s said first in Matthew 4:20 that Jesus’ disciples responded immediately and enthusiastically to join Him in the mission of disciple-making (evangelism and discipleship). Do we do the same?
Jesus then began to teach His disciples to live as He lived, teaching them about how their lives could serve as an example to others. He intentionally, but organically, invested in their lives as life happened. Disciple-making takes time.

**Jesus replied:** “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.* This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments.”  
**Matthew 22:37-40 (NIV)**

If we love God, we will desire to follow Him. If we love God and love others, we will want to invest in people’s lives through disciple-making relationships. Foremost, evangelism and discipleship are about love — God so loving the world (John 3:16-17), and love transforming us so we love others. Obviously, both evangelism and discipleship work best through love, concern and compassion.

Furthermore, Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11:1 from reinforce how Jesus lived: “*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*”

God knew that we need relationships more than information-transfer. Our loving God showed Himself in relationships through the person and character of Jesus with many wonderful attributes including mercy, compassion and understanding.

*“But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”*  
**1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)**

We are to imitate Christ in loving God, loving others and disciple-making. All three include authentic relationship. Why authentic? Jesus evangelized, taught and discipled out of genuine love. The Pharisees, for example, spoke out of negative religiosity — not a relationship with God, nor a love for people, and no concern for their eternal damnation. Jesus also dealt with each disciple personally and individually, as each had varying temperaments. Jesus took the time to get to know them as they got to know Him.
The Old Testament is our guide to what unfolds in the New Testament. After all, God’s Word is timeless, no matter if it is the Old or New Testament. Sin hasn’t changed, nor has the need of a Savior and following Him. Genesis gives us the foundation of God’s relationship with the world and shows us the first acts of man’s disobedience and God’s redemptive grace. God was so interested in our relationship with Him that He had a plan that made it possible for the veil to be torn through the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ. The world started in relationship – first with the Trinity (God, the Holy Spirit and Jesus in communion), second, the relationship between us and our Creator God, and third with our relationship to Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Genesis 1:1-2, 26a).

Having considered our creation story, it is no surprise that God designed our faith journey, our disciple-making life, to be one of relationship.

“God was, in essence, the pattern for the personhood of man. The image of God is personhood, and personhood can function only in the context of relationships. Man is a living being capable of embodying God’s communicable attributes.”

The MacArthur Bible Commentary, p.11

Jesus designed His Church to be a unified relational body, building each other up into the fullness of Christ and instructing each other about Jesus.

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:19-20; 1 CORINTHIANS 12:12-14; EPHESIANS 4:13; EPHESIANS 4:29; AND ROMANS 15:14, and then consider the questions following the Scripture.

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. 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 5:18-21 (NIV)
“Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body — whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free — and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 (NIV)

“How do these verses further explain disciple-making, the importance of relationship and the idea that the gospel didn’t come to us solely for us but to be shared?

“Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” Ephesians 4:13 (NIV)

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)

“I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to instruct one another.” Romans 15:14 (NIV)
Jesus is too big, too good, too life-changing for us not to be bursting to share.

Discipleship is having the right view of Jesus.
Please take a moment to pray before getting started in today’s study.

In short, thus far, we’ve seen that evangelism is sharing the good news through personal testimony, and discipleshio is following Jesus, which leads to helping others follow Jesus.

**EVANGELISM + DISCIPLESHP = DISCIPLE-MAKING**

Disciple-making is done out of love, concern and compassion, and it is best lived out through relationship. This is the gospel. We will treat our neighbors with mercy. We will grow in maturity and holiness. We will grieve sin and the eternal fate of our co-workers. We will be moved to compassionately act in disciple-making when we know God’s mercy, Christ’s love, and that, in spite of ourselves, we are His beloved.

“And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Ephesians 3:17b-19 (NIV)

What does disciple-making look like if Christ’s love is your strength, your motive, and what fills you up with all the fullness (or can I say goodness) of God?
Jesus is not only concerned with how people can be a part of His Church, the body of Christ, but He also wants people to live as He did. When we invest in people’s lives — loving them, serving them and sharing about Jesus — we are living like Christ as a disciple-maker. We are putting Scripture into practice, imitating Jesus through disciple-making.

When we meet Jesus, we meet a man who calls us to love God and love people (Matthew 22:34-40), come and die (Mark 8:34-35), and follow Him (Matthew 4:19, 11:29).

As noted earlier, Jesus spent three years not only explaining the gospel but also living it out among the 12 disciples. He intentionally poured into them so that they could pour into others. It is about gospel knowledge — heart-change — shared.

“YOU THEN, MY SON, BE STRONG IN THE GRACE THAT IS IN CHRIST JESUS. AND THE THINGS YOU HAVE HEARD ME SAY IN THE PRESENCE OF MANY WITNESSES ENTRUST TO RELIABLE PEOPLE WHO WILL ALSO BE QUALIFIED TO TEACH OTHERS.” 2 Timothy 2:1-2 (NIV)

Discipleship takes place when we are in the Word of God, when we are imitating Christ, being filled with the Spirit and being strengthened in the grace of the gospel, which encourages us for the calling. Discipleship takes place when the disciples of God work together in relationship. As noted in 2 Timothy 2:1-2, God intended for mature disciples to replicate.

What else do you learn about discipleship from the above verses?

Being with Jesus has its natural results. Andrew heard John talk about Jesus and believed. The first thing he did was find his brother to share with him. His brother was Peter, who would be used by God for the promotion of
His Church. We can’t keep Jesus to ourselves, and He doesn’t want us to do so. Like anything else, when we are excited, when we’ve learned something new or struggled to overcome, we want to share that moment and experience with others.

“Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas,’” (which, when translated, is Peter).

John 1:40-42a (NIV)

Matthew 16:15-18 shares more about how God intended to use Peter.

Each of us has a faith genealogy of some sort, if you will. My great-grandmother prayed for my salvation while I was still in the womb, and then, as early as possible, she began sharing the Word of God with me, all the while continuing to pray for me and show me the likeness of Jesus through her actions toward me and others. I came to her with doubts about God, with misinterpreted Scripture and with life struggles. And, through the Word of God, wisdom from the Holy Spirit and in great mercy, she used her life to be a disciple-maker. Others then came alongside me and nurtured what my great-grandmother began. I can easily look back and see that I grew less when there was no one “there.” Sure, we are never alone because the Holy Spirit is there, but a living, breathing person looking me in the eye was and is a great help to hold me accountable. This principle is also encouraged by Jesus Himself.

Jesus is too big, too good and too life-changing for us not to be bursting to share. Discipleship is having the right view of Jesus.

Jesus prayed for us, knowing the mission field He was calling us to go into is a battlefield where training soldiers is vital for His mission to continue until His return (John 17:1-26). Having served in the Army National Guard and now in the Church, I can personally attest to the importance of everyone being trained and focused on the mission — His mission. Everyone is important.
Discipleship is a serious commitment. There is much at stake. There is a great battle at hand (Ephesians 6:13-17). Discipleship is being salt and light.

“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven.” Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV)

Through disciple-making (evangelism and discipleship), how could you be salt, and how could your light shine? Think specifically about sharing your personal testimony of how God has guided or carried you through life or, in what current, specific situations would sharing the light of love and forgiveness allow others to see Christ?

Discipleship takes place when a person is changed by the inward work of the Holy Spirit and outwardly showing the compassion of Christ in fulfilling His calling of disciple-making. Jesus couldn’t compromise following the Word of God. Disciples of Christ enhance and change the world around us as we help others see Jesus and grow. Discipleship is showing Jesus to others. (For further study, see also Luke 11:33-36.)

What better example to look at than the Church in Acts to see a living community with barriers broken down and discipleship occurring. How did this happen? Discipleship occurs through the power of the Holy Spirit.
“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8 (NIV)

This week, some of you may have been thinking, “I do love God, and I want to be obedient in disciple-making, but how?”

How does this Scripture encourage you and possibly change your thinking?

What is the result of the Holy Spirit coming upon you?
Did you pray before you began today’s lesson?

We have looked at various Scriptures concerning what evangelism and discipleship are and are not.

Now let’s focus on the practical definition.

Read John 4:1-42. After reading each word, list what you find as practical examples of Jesus as a disciple-maker that we can follow.
I find that Jesus’ practical definition of what disciple-making looks like includes:

+ Meeting the Samaritan woman “where she was.”
+ Being approachable and approaching people.
+ Initiating relationship.
+ Speaking the truth with love.
+ Being indiscriminate.
+ Loving.
+ Engaging people with the gospel.
+ Showing great concern.
+ Being a safe person who offers guidance.
+ Pointing the woman to Himself.

Disciple-making is:

+ Dedication, investment, shepherding.
+ Authentic, transparent.
+ Soaked in grace.
+ Showing importance of relationship with Jesus — making much of Him.
+ Not a program.
+ Biblical and includes biblical assignments as to learn directly from God.
+ Prayer.
+ Accountability.
+ Sincere relationship.
+ A great place to discuss and to be.
+ Not casual.
+ Denying self.

The last point is about denying self. Let’s look at that through the person of Jesus and the Samaritan woman.

Take a moment to read John 4:1-42 again.
What conclusions do you find in this disciple-making example as related to the woman, Jesus, the disciples and others? How does this guide and encourage you toward what disciple-making looks like?

The woman was so happy and so excited that she forgot the errand and left her water jar to go tell others. Jesus forgot being tired, hungry, hot and thirsty — overlooking these for the concern He had for the woman’s salvation. When His disciples returned, Jesus explained His renewed vigor and joy saying, “I have food to eat that you know nothing about ... My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work.”

Here you can see discipleship as intentional, yet organic. It’s done as you go through life, so don’t place too much emphasis on the classroom — it’s not “just another Bible study.”

In these verses and the previous ones, you see that disciple-making is teaching and leading with reproducible intent.

They watched and learned. Jesus served with them. He then asked the disciples to serve and, ultimately, He commanded them to teach others.
Pray before you begin.

It’s the final day of this week, and the question for today is will you follow Jesus in disciple-making?

+ Jesus leads in disciple-making through the Holy Spirit. He redeems. We don’t.
+ Disciple-making is replication of Christ, not us. He is holy, we aren’t.
+ Disciple-making is sharing truth, sharing your life and reminding others of God’s grace.
+ Disciple-making is discipline and accountability.
+ Disciple-making encourages further life transformation.

READ THE FOLLOWING VERSES to see the truths above for yourself and then note any additional points you learn as you consider biblical disciple-making.

“For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1:13-14 (NIV)

“But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.” 1 Peter 1:15-16 (NIV)

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” 1 Peter 2:9-10 (NIV)
DEFINING EVANGELISM AND DISCIPLESHIP

“Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.” 2 Corinthians 7:1 (NIV)

What are you currently teaching others about Christ that He has taught you?

John 1:35-39 records that the disciples who first met Jesus went looking for Him to spend more time with Him. Because the initial experience was so wonderful, they wanted and needed more. It is awesome to sit at Jesus’ feet, but if we only sit and soak — never going out to mercifully and lovingly pursue sinners as Jesus did—we’ve missed the resurrection, the gospel and His call to disciple-making.

As stated already, discipleship is life transformation, and some of that is done through the power of God’s Word.

READ THE FOLLOWING VERSES

- Salvation and the assurance of (John 5:24)
- Importance of daily prayer and time with God to include biblical intake (Mark 1:35, Matthew 7:7, 2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- Who you are in Christ (Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 1:1-14)
- Forgiveness and dealing with sin (1 John 1:9)
- Spiritual growth (Galatians 5:22-23, Romans 8:28-30)
- Fellowship in the Church (Hebrews 10:24-25, Acts 2:42)
- And, of course, evangelism and discipleship (Acts 1:8, Matthew 28:18-20)
Disciple-making is concerned with making sure disciples know how to study the Bible for themselves and apply it to their lives. The life application of Scripture is at the core of why accountable relationships are so important to encourage growth. Not only are these relationships an accountable force but, through sharing, they are also a great encouragement. Hearing about one another’s struggles and God’s redemption is a great testimony of what God wants to do in all of our lives, and we’re reminded that we aren’t the only ones who struggle or even doubt. Disciple-making is responding to frantic text messages asking for prayer or guidance; the email that the Holy Spirit prompts you to send to remind them who they are in Christ; patiently listening to the same exciting story twice and offering celebratory encouragement; or just being there. It is being a good listener and not being afraid to lovingly call out behavior that’s not God-honoring because the relational, comfortable environment that’s been created encourages it. Disciple-making is simply inviting them to go with you to the grocery store because their car is in the shop. Disciple-making is being in their corner cheering them onward.

Disciple-making can take place in a one-on-one relationship or in a small group. And, don’t forget your family can be the first place disciple-making begins.

The last thing to consider is that disciple-making is an urgently compassionate call from our loving Savior. He sees great need and sends us out to fulfill it through the strength and love of the gospel and power of the Holy Spirit within us.

“Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.’”

Matthew 9:35-38 (NIV)

Scholars say the above expression here about Jesus “having compassion on them” is translated into deep grieving over their need, so much so that He appeared to be in pain due to the agony of it.
His answer? READ MATTHEW 10:1. Jesus called His 12 disciples to Him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and heal every disease and sickness.

That’s us. Disciple-making is bringing our “sick,” shepherdless friends to Jesus, who will heal them as we walk alongside them. Yes, disciple-making is messy. Let us not forget from what Jesus saved us.

READ MATTHEW 4:23-25 for further example.

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about Him spread all over Syria. People brought to Him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed. And Jesus healed them. Large crowds followed him from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan.

You may have read the above verses and others at an international missions meeting, but do you now see that these verses are speaking to you, wherever you are, about disciple-making in your circles of influence with those whom God has placed in your path and on your heart?

Has God already brought people to mind for you to lead in discipleship? Or, could it be that you’d like to participate in a discipleship group?
Read 1 John 4:7-5:2. Will you answer His commands — in particular, disciple-making?

How would His love, as described in the verse above, drive you toward disciple-making?
MEREDITH SNODDY
is the director of women’s ministry & communications, and manager of adult small groups, at Green Street Baptist Church in High Point, N.C. Meredith’s love of Jesus and people encourages her to serve globally through disciple-making, teaching, speaking, leadership (Shepherd’s Heart Women’s Prison Ministry, Bible Study Fellowship, Journey Abuse Survivors Group, DivorceCare 4 Kids, Crisis Response trained Chaplain) and nonprofit consulting. She is the volunteer U.S. director of Starfish Designs Thailand, an organization that fights trafficking and poverty with hope and love. Meredith is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
What can we learn from sheep about disciple-making?

Why is life-on-life, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, important in disciple-making?

How did Jesus look at the sheep in Matthew 9:36-38, and what was His response?

What does following Jesus by investing in someone else’s life mean?

What are the three simple steps for studying your Bible with expectancy? Read John 10:27-28.

What are the facts in the passage from John 10:27-28?

What does God’s Word mean in this passage?

What does God’s Word mean to you? How can you apply His Word?
WEEK 3

STUDYING THE BIBLE
WEEK 3

**studying the Bible**

**DAY 1**

by Fayeson Tilley

STUDYING THE BIBLE to hear God speak to you personally. Pray, asking God to meet you and give you understanding of His Word.

**STEP I. WHAT DOES GOD’S WORD SAY?**

**FACTS:**
+ Read/re-read the verses (several times, as time permits).
+ Jot down main facts of the verse or verses that you’ve read.
+ In an extended passage, a verse or two may seem to leap from the page. That may be God getting your attention on something He desires to teach you.

**STEP II. WHAT DOES GOD’S WORD MEAN?**

**LESSONS:**
Now look at the facts and search for a truth, a lesson or a principle that God is speaking to you personally. These may be:
+ A promise God wants me to grasp.
A warning to be heeded.

A command to be obeyed.

An example to be followed.

Something to be avoided.

A truth revealed about God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit.

NOTE: There may be multiple lessons for each verse or verses. Others may find different lessons, and that is fine. It’s about God speaking to you right where you are.

STEP III. WHAT DOES GOD’S WORD MEAN TO ME?

APPLICATIONS:

Ask yourself: How does this lesson apply to me and the decisions or issues in my life?

Ask yourself: What am I to do in response to the Bible reading today?

Reword the outstanding lesson in the form of a question that you ask yourself.

Walk in obedience to what God has said to you.

FIVE-DAY ASSIGNMENT

OVER THE NEXT FIVE DAYS, study the following Scriptures using the three steps. Write in your notebook what God is saying to you personally in response to each step.

When we get back together next time, have in mind the one or two “take away” applications that God has called you to obey from each text.

DAY 2: John 7:37-38
DAY 3: Romans 12:1-2
DAY 5: Matthew 28:18-20
“My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of My hand.”

John 10:27-28 (NIV)

**STEP I. WHAT DOES GOD’S WORD SAY?**

- Jesus’ sheep hear Him, know His voice and follow Him.
- Jesus gives His sheep eternal life, and they will never perish; no one can snatch them from Him.

**STEP II. WHAT DOES GOD’S WORD MEAN?**

- Jesus’ sheep know His voice and listen to Him.
- Jesus’ sheep follow Him in obedience.
- Jesus’ sheep are those to whom He has given eternal life, and they will never perish.

**STEP III. WHAT DOES GOD’S WORD MEAN TO ME?**

- Am I one of Christ’s sheep or not?
- Have I ever heard Jesus speak to me personally?
- How do I hear the voice of Jesus? Am I making time to hear Jesus?
- When Jesus speaks to me, am I obediently following what He says?
- Have I received the eternal life that Jesus offers?

*Now walk in obedience to what God has spoken to you from the verse or verses for that day.*
STUDYING THE BIBLE

DAY 1

by Fayeson Tilley

Luke 10:38-42

ALWAYS BEGIN WITH PRAYER.

STEP I. What does God’s Word say?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

STEP II. What does God’s Word mean?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

STEP III. What does God’s Word mean to me?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
DAY 2  John 7:37-38
by Fayeson Tilley

ALWAYS BEGIN WITH PRAYER.

STEP I. What does God’s Word say?

_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

STEP II. What does God’s Word mean?

_________________________________________________________________________
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STEP III. What does God’s Word mean to me?

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ALWAYS BEGIN WITH PRAYER.

STEP I. What does God’s Word say?

STEP II. What does God’s Word mean?

STEP III. What does God’s Word mean to me?
ALWAYS BEGIN WITH PRAYER.

STEP I. What does God’s Word say?

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STEP II. What does God’s Word mean?

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STEP III. What does God’s Word mean to me?

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DAY 4  Luke 9:23
by Fayeson Tilley
DAY 5  

Matthew 28:18-20  

by Fayeson Tilley

ALWAYS BEGIN WITH PRAYER.

STEP I. What does God’s Word say?

STEP II. What does God’s Word mean?

STEP III. What does God’s Word mean to me?
FAYESON TILLEY

was born and raised in North Carolina. She put her faith in Jesus as a young child. She and her husband met in kindergarten, married in college and have three children and grandchildren. The delight of her heart is to open her Bible and personally encounter the living God of the Bible. Fayeson explains, “It is so awesome to open my Bible and hear the God of the universe speak through His eternal Word to ‘little me’ – addressing the issues/circumstances of my heart and life!” She taught a Bible study for approximately 400 women for 16.5 years and is presently teaching a Sunday School class of young married couples at her church, as well as various ladies’ Bible Studies. It is her great joy to encourage and inspire others to know and experience God personally for themselves.
GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

WATCH VIDEO 6 

featuring Fayeson Tilley

Using the three steps to study your Bible, what did you learn from Luke 10 (Refer to your answers on page 64)?

What were some highlights from the other passages (days two-five)?

Why is it important to study God’s Word daily?

WATCH VIDEO 7 

featuring Dave Owen

How do you weave God’s story into yours?

To tell our story is really to tell what story?

When telling your story, how can you keep Jesus the hero of your story and not yourself?
WEEK 4
TELLING YOUR STORY
WHY
Why do you tell your story? You tell your story to glorify God.

As believers, we all have stories to tell about how God has changed our lives through Christ. When we tell our personal stories of redemption, we glorify God by magnifying His goodness in our lives. He has saved us from sin and from this broken world, and when we publicly rejoice in that truth by sharing our stories, God is glorified. Tell your story in light of His story.

The following passages are examples of how the glory of God is declared throughout His Word.

“May His name endure forever, His fame continue as long as the sun! May people be blessed in Him, all nations call Him blessed! Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be His glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with His glory! Amen and Amen!”

Psalm 72:17-19 (ESV)

“In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the
TELLING YOUR STORY

FORGIVENESS OF OUR TRESPASSES, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE, WHICH HE LAVISHED UPON US, IN ALL WISDOM AND INSIGHT.” Ephesians 1:4b-8 (ESV)

“HIS DIVINE POWER HAS GRANTED TO US ALL THINGS THAT PERTAIN TO LIFE AND GODLINESS, THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM WHO CALLED US TO HIS OWN GLORY AND EXCELLENCE.” 2 Peter 1:3 (ESV)

Throughout history, stories have been crucial to shaping beliefs and culture. We share memories, thoughts and experiences through storytelling because they help us identify with one another. Throughout His creation, God continues to write the most significant stories for His fame. God is on mission, moving among His people to show the world His greatness. He desires to extend His gospel to all people so they can enjoy His grace for all eternity.

When we sinned and rebelled against God, we became separated from God. The first of God’s created children, Adam and Eve, weren’t content being with God — they wanted to be like God. Only three chapters into Genesis, the greatest story ever written took a radical turn. Chaos came, sin entered the world and death was certain.

Thankfully, the story doesn’t end in Genesis 3. After the fall, God promised that He would restore everything to Himself through the Messiah. In the fullness of time, God fulfilled His promise by sending His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus lived the perfect life that God intended for us to live and died the death on a cross that we all deserve. Jesus died for our sins and took God’s wrath in our place. Jesus’ sacrifice for our sins displays God’s marvelous grace to us.

Jesus was buried, and on the third day, He defeated death and rose from the dead. This news is the greatest story in the world. We need to tell our personal story of God’s saving grace in our lives to point people to the death and resurrection of Christ. Because of the gospel, Jesus is the hero of all of our stories. All who believe in Jesus and repent of sin are granted forgiveness, righteousness, adoption and love. Righteousness makes us presentable to God, adoption changes our identity and welcomes us into the family of God, and the love of God overflows from our hearts to the people around us.

After Jesus was resurrected from the dead, the Church was born, and believers were given the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit sanctifies believers
and empowers us to tell the story of Jesus’ life, death, burial and resurrection. The book of Acts tells stories of how many people believed the truth of Christ. To this day, the same story — the gospel — continues to change lives. The gospel story gives light to the darkness and glorifies the name of Jesus.

For all who have come to know Jesus, we have a story to tell. We should desire to tell our stories so the gospel can be spread to all neighborhoods and nations for the glory of God. As Christians, we desire to tell our story to glorify the hero of our story: Jesus.

When we tell our personal story of salvation, we must remember that Jesus is the main character of every story. Instead of focusing on ourselves, our story must point to Christ and glorify Him. No one will be redeemed by a story about ourselves. It is our duty to point others to Christ and highlight His glorious work in our lives and the world.

Why are you tempted to make yourself the focus of your story of salvation and sanctification?

What are some truths you can share that will keep your story God-centered?
Why do you think it’s important to make all stories about God’s glory and not about ourselves?

“Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Your name give glory, for the sake of Your steadfast love and Your faithfulness!” Psalm 115:1 (ESV)

John 3:16 is perhaps the most well-known verse in Scripture. It is also a verse that easily glorifies Christ word by word. Read this familiar verse afresh and be reminded of the greatness of God in Jesus.

God the greatest lover so loved the greatest degree the world the greatest number that He gave the greatest act His only begotten Son the greatest gift that whoever the greatest invitation believes the greatest simplicity in Him the greatest person shall not perish the greatest escape but the greatest difference HAVE the greatest certainty eternal life the greatest destiny. John 3:16 (ESV)

Ask God to help you tell your story in such a way that celebrates all He has done and keeps Christ as the focus of your story of salvation.

TELL YOUR STORY IN LIGHT OF HIS STORY.
WHAT
What do you tell in your story? You tell the gospel through your story.

The apostle Paul was a man radically changed by Christ. We see many examples of his teaching throughout the New Testament. When Paul told his story, he made sure the focus of his story was the story of Jesus. Tell your story in light of His story — the gospel.

“I thank Him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to His service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

1 Timothy 1:12-17 (ESV)

What a story! Paul was transformed from a persecutor of Christians to a preacher of the gospel. When we read about Paul, we read about a man who seemed so far from God. But, we are reminded that there is no sin too great that it is out of reach from the grace of God. Paul’s conversion is truly a miracle that only God could have done. When we observe Paul’s story, we see what should be the focus of our personal stories — the gospel, the greatest story of all time. The story of Paul’s conversion is found in Acts 9:1-6.
Paul uses his story in light of the gospel so he can point others to Jesus. The gospel is a beautiful, powerful, captivating story about how God humbled Himself, became a man, walked among us, lived a perfect and sinless life, and then laid down His life so that we can be restored to Him. Jesus defeated death when He was resurrected from the grave, and by His power we are raised to life in Christ.

In 1 Timothy, Paul wrote to a young pastor named Timothy who served the church at Ephesus. The verses on the previous page show how Paul masterfully wove the gospel into his personal story. Paul’s story reveals five things that encourage and instruct us about what should be included in our story.

1. PAUL WAS GRATEFUL.

In verse 12, Paul began his story by thanking God for all He had done in his life. Our stories should always be saturated with gratitude. Our salvation is solely a gift from God, and we must never believe the lie that we have done anything to earn it. When we were dead in our sins, God came to save us and restore us to Himself. He saves and sustains. He brings life out of death, hope out of despair, joy out of sadness, and peace out of chaos. Jesus our Lord took our judgment so we could be justified and made right with God. He calls and appoints us to be storytellers of the greatest story. We must always tell our stories with a grateful heart for all Christ has done for us.

What are you most grateful for in your life? How does gratitude toward God impact your attitude in other areas?
2. PAUL WAS MINDFUL.

In verse 13, Paul explained how he was once a dead man whom Christ made alive. From Paul’s example, we see how we must first tell of our former selves so that Christ can be glorified in our story. Good news is much more appreciated when bad news is delivered first. When we tell about our former life in sin, we can then highlight how Jesus continues to make all things new. Our stories include both our mess and God’s mercy.

Write down your story and be sure to include what God has saved you from, how He saved you, and how He is working in your life today. Try to keep your story brief — no more than one page.
3. **PAUL WAS HUMBLE.**

In verse 15, Paul displayed humility by acknowledging that in his mind, he was the worst sinner of all. He remembered what he was before Jesus made him new. He boasted only in the cross and our Savior. He bent his knee to the Holy One who changed his life forever. Our story must exemplify humility if we are to honor Christ. Our story keeps our hearts humble when we focus on the gospel.

Does your past haunt you or humble you? How do you allow the gospel to soothe your heart as you reflect on the work of Christ in your life?

4. **PAUL WAS MISSIONAL.**

In verse 16, Paul explained how his story displayed Christ’s perfect patience and limitless love. Paul says he received mercy so his life could make much of Jesus. Paul’s story exemplifies God’s mercy toward sinners. To this day, Jesus still takes opponents of His mission and makes them objects of His mercy. He propels us to be ambassadors for the gospel. Our story is missional in that it shows how Christ pursued our sinful hearts and redeemed us to Himself so that our lives can bring glory and honor to Him. Our stories are used to draw sinners to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.
What hinders you from telling others of God’s mercy in your story? In what ways are you being intentional about sharing your story with people who do not know Jesus?

5. PAUL WAS JOYFUL.

In verse 17, Paul concluded by praising God for who He is. This verse gives evidence that when we reflect on what Jesus has done for us, our hearts are filled with joy. As joy consumes us, it spreads to those around us. When we share our story, we share the joy of Christ in our lives.

What is the difference between joy and happiness? What brings you joy? How has Jesus’ work in your life brought joy to your heart?
TELL YOUR STORY IN LIGHT OF HIS STORY.
WHEN
When should you tell your story? Tell your story every day.

As Christians, we are called to tell others about Jesus. We should tell the story of how Christ changed our lives every day. Our story is useful every day to encourage a burdened brother or sister in Christ and also to point unbelievers to Christ. Tell your story in light of His story. Tell your story every day.

“OH SING TO THE LORD A NEW SONG; SING TO THE LORD, ALL THE EARTH! SING TO THE LORD, BLESS HIS NAME; TELL OF HIS SALVATION FROM DAY TO DAY.”
Psalm 96:1-2 (ESV)

There should be an urgency in our hearts to share the gospel daily. Eternity quickly approaches, and the Holy Spirit of God is moving in a mighty way to call many out of darkness and into the glory of knowing Jesus. He is calling, redeeming, changing, justifying and saving people each and every day. We know that we are in the last days (Hebrews 1:2). Therefore, we must not waste our time. We are called to be diligent in sharing our story and making disciples.

The psalms are rich with declarations of how short our lives truly are. Read the following verses and consider how you spend your passing days here on earth.

“BEHOLD, YOU HAVE MADE MY DAYS A FEW HANDBREATHS, AND MY LIFETIME IS AS NOTHING BEFORE YOU. SURELY ALL MANKIND STANDS AS A MERE BREATH!” Psalm 39:5 (ESV)

“OH LORD, WHAT IS MAN THAT YOU REGARD HIM, OR THE SON OF MAN THAT YOU THINK OF HIM? MAN IS LIKE BREATH; HIS DAYS ARE LIKE A PASSING SHADOW.”
Psalm 144:3-4 (ESV)
To live on mission with God is to actively seek opportunities to share your personal story of salvation with others. Now is the time to tell your story. Tell people about how God, in His grace and mercy, opened your eyes to see your sin and the greatness of our Savior, Jesus.

**What are some reasons why you don’t actively and intentionally share your story every day?**


**What do you need to change in your routine and priorities to make sure the gospel is included in your daily conversations?**
“LOOK CAREFULLY THEN HOW YOU WALK, NOT AS UNWISE BUT AS WISE, MAKING THE BEST USE OF THE TIME, BECAUSE THE DAYS ARE EVIL.” Ephesians 5:15-16 (ESV)

We glorify God when we spend our time pointing others to Christ. If life is a breath, as the psalmist described in the verses on page 83, then every day counts.

Jim Elliot understood the importance of glorifying God with every breath of his life. He committed himself to telling his story and pointing people to Christ. In his journal, Elliot prayed that God would not only allow him to share with those around him, but would also send him to a place where Jesus had never been preached: “I only hope that He will let me preach to those who have never heard that name Jesus. What else is worthwhile in this life? I have heard of nothing better. ‘Lord, send me!’” (Through Gates of Splendor, p. 18). Elliot lived a mere 28 years before he was killed as a missionary in Ecuador while preaching to unreached people.

We often find excuses for not sharing our stories on a regular basis. One excuse is that we are too busy to share our stories with others. Other excuses include being too shy, too afraid or feeling irrelevant to the mission of God. No excuse will ever trump the command given in Ephesians 5 about using our time wisely. We glorify God in how we spend our time when we tell our stories to others and point them to Christ.

Other times, we are more than willing to share our stories regularly, but we are too consumed with ourselves to point to Jesus. Jesus is the one who saves us, and if our stories don’t point to Jesus, then we are fooling ourselves into thinking that our stories glorify God. Kristi and T. Lively Fluharty demonstrate how pride deters from the gospel in their book, Fool Moon Rising:
"I heard a cosmic story
And wondered if it’s true.
The Moon was stealing glory
And this is what he’d do.

He bragged each night that his great might
Could make the darkness flee.
And like a kite he scaled the heights
And said, ‘Hey look at me!’

It’s really strange but he could change
His shape throughout the year.
His face would change, then rearrange
And sometimes . . . disappear.

He bragged that he could cause the sea
To rise and swell each day.
Then all could see how mightily
He’d pull the waves away.

He’d boast away and loved to say,
‘I am the greatest light!’
Until one day a piercing ray
Showed him a shocking sight.

He saw his pride and then he cried
For all that he had done.
For he had lied when he denied
His light came from the Sun.

So now each night a new delight
Is what he loves the most.
Reflecting light with all his might,
The Sun is now his boast!

So God I pray for grace each day
To find the joy that’s true,
In all my days and all my ways
In making much of YOU!”
How can you live in such a way as to reflect Jesus daily? How can you tell your story in a way that magnifies Christ and not yourself?

Is there something that you can do each day to remind yourself to share your story with others?

You are called to share your story daily and point others to Christ. Your story serves as a means to tell others about the goodness of God and the grace Christ has given you.

TELL YOUR STORY DAILY IN LIGHT OF HIS STORY.
WHERE
Where should you tell your story? Tell your story to neighborhoods and nations.

“God has a will, and He has made it clear. From cover to cover in the Bible, God wills to redeem men and women from every nation, tribe, language and people by His grace and for His glory.”

David Platt, *Follow Me: A Call to Die. A Call to Live.*, p. 133

What a privilege it is to represent the God of the universe and deliver the greatest news in the history of the world: Jesus saves! While we were sinners, Jesus died for us. Our story must always be centered around that truth. Tell your story in light of His story.

“Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods.” Psalm 96:3-4 (ESV)

“The Lord has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations.” Psalm 98:2 (ESV)

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” John 3:16 (ESV)

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them
For many years, the Western Church has sought to program evangelism in such a way that many see it as something the Church does instead of who the Church is called to be. The gospel is delivered to unbelievers through the people of God. It comes into our hearts and then flows out of our mouths. How will people know the gospel? We must share the good news of Jesus with people everywhere and invite them to follow Jesus.

Where in the world do we share this good news? We must share it in every place we find people — both near and far. The light that shines the brightest at home shines the farthest away. We must never sacrifice local missional living at the expense of international missions, and vice-versa. We must never treat missions as either/or, but always as both/and.

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus shares God’s heart for all nations. He begins the passage by assuring us that He is in control. Because of this, we can rest assured that when we follow the command He gives to go to all nations and make disciples, He will be the one who directs our steps. As He guides us, we are to tell our story of His grace in our lives to everyone who will listen. Jesus knew we could not accomplish this on our own, and that’s why He ends this Great Commission by reminding us that He is always with us.

Jesus commands us to go and tell the world about His love and grace. Be comforted by the following three truths from Matthew 28.

1. **REST IN THE POWER GIVEN TO JESUS.**

   Because God is sovereign, we should go and tell our story in light of His story. All authority has been given to Jesus. Jesus, by His Spirit through His Church, is on mission to redeem people from every town, city, state, nation and continent. His glory will spread, and His gospel will save. Rest in His power as you share your story. In 2 Corinthians 5:20, the apostle Paul calls believers “ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us.” Throughout the world, Jesus has power, and He has given you access to it in order to accomplish His mission.
“For we know that behind all our fumbling efforts and inadequate communication stands the supreme will of the living God, reaching out in loving self-revelation, incredibly willing to open blind eyes and reveal His glory through the treasures of the gospel delivered in the clay pots of His witnesses.” Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God*, pgs. 129-130.

What intimidates and hinders you when you share the gospel?

Knowing that Jesus has power and authority over all things, how does His sovereignty liberate you to share without fear?

2. REMEMBER THE PLAN GIVEN BY JESUS.

Jesus simply, yet profoundly, commands us to go and make disciples. Many have heard preachers yelling the word “go” as if that is enough to mobilize the Church. However, yelling a word at someone is not the best way to motivate and empower them to complete a task. We must pray to the Lord of the harvest to raise up laborers to go and share the gospel, and we must be
continually captivated by the grace, glory and greatness of Jesus. Anything less cannot propel us to tell our story to people everywhere. The command Jesus gave is to make disciples — introduce them to who God is and teach them how to know God through His Son. The command from Jesus is to walk with them as they learn to obey all God has written in His Word. The command from God should never be replaced by our plans or personal preferences. To make disciples is plan A; there is no plan B!

Where is God directing you to share the good news of Jesus? Will you obey His leading and tell others about Him?

Write down three names of people God has put in your path with whom you can share the gospel. (Refer back to your list on page 36.)

3. RELY ON THE PROMISE GIVEN BY JESUS.

As we tell our stories, it is easy to become intimidated and overwhelmed with rejection and the fear of man. When these lies whisper to us that we are useless in the mission of God, rely on the promise that Jesus has given. We are comforted by Jesus’ promise to always be with us. He is with us every time we
share our stories with others, no matter where we are. The Holy Spirit speaks through us when we tell others about His grace and mercy. Take comfort; Jesus is with us.

What fears do you face when telling your story of His grace in your life?

Are you comforted when you remember that Jesus is sovereign and is with you always?

TELL YOUR STORY IN LIGHT OF HIS STORY.
HOW
How do you tell your story? Tell your story with great care and compassion.

When we speak to others and share our stories, it is important that we show two things. First, we must show care in what we say and how we speak. Second, we must show compassion for those to whom we speak. Tell your story in such a way that the one you are speaking about, Jesus, is evident in both the words that you share and the way in which you share. Tell your story in light of His story, which is filled with care and compassion.

“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.” 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison — that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.” Colossians 4:2-6 (ESV)

For centuries, one complaint has carried over against the Church in every culture — the manner in which we’ve shared the truth of Christ. The people of God have often withheld grace and compassion from those who do not know Jesus.

As we tell our stories of His grace in our lives, we must show the grace of God in our speech and conduct. The apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians
while he was imprisoned in Rome. Instead of focusing his concern on getting out of prison, Paul wrote to the Church to encourage them about how they were to share the gospel. Paul gives five instructions in Colossians 4 to help us strengthen our stories and point others to Christ.

1. SHARE PRAYERFULLY

Before we can tell His story well, we must saturate our lives in prayer. Paul instructed us to “continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” This means that each day, we should have an attentive awareness of the presence of God by calling on Him continually. Prayer is talking to God and showing our dependence on God. We must pray with the same attention and awareness as a person in a war. While we are on this earth, we are continually engaged in a spiritual war, and therefore, we must be in continual communication with our King and commander, Jesus. We are also instructed to remain in prayer so that we can maintain thankful hearts to Christ. Our attitudes in prayer should always reflect gratitude toward God for His gospel.

If every prayer you prayed yesterday was answered, would anyone have come to know Jesus?

2. SHARE BOLDLY

We must boldly tell our stories of His grace in our lives. When Paul instructed us to “declare the mystery of Christ,” he did not mean that we are to be arrogant, but instead that we are to be confident in Christ and His work in our lives. When Paul was in prison, he did not ask for the cell doors to be opened. Rather, he asked God to open a door for the gospel to go forth. The gospel that Paul preached landed him in jail, and yet he labored confidently to share while he was imprisoned. Paul knew that he could be confident in Christ, no matter his circumstances. Be bold with Jesus’ story of grace as you share your story with confidence and gratitude.
How can you cultivate confidence and not become cynical when you share your story?

3. SHARE CLEARLY

To tell your story well requires that you are crystal clear about the truth — not culturally cool. So many have lost the truth of the gospel in trying to connect with culture. Connect with the people whom God allows to cross your path by clearly stating how the grace of God has impacted your life through the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross. The gospel is the truth — the good news! Jesus died for our sins, was buried and rose from the dead. Be clear about how we are sinners who deserve death and the wrath of God. Be clear about how Jesus has paid that penalty for us, and there is nothing we can do to reconcile ourselves to God. Jesus is our hero, and He calls us to repent and follow Him. Clearly communicate that it is only because of Christ that we are saved.

What things need to be stated more clearly in your written story?
Does your story communicate a merit-based salvation of moral behavior changes, or does it communicate that you were dead and have been made alive in Christ?

4. SHARE WISELY

Use wisdom when telling your story. Paul reminded us to “walk in wisdom” and make the best use of our time when sharing our stories with others. We must use wisdom in how we speak and live, always being mindful about whether or not our words and actions glorify Christ. Our stories are more than just our words — they include how we live in front of unbelievers. If you lack wisdom, ask, and God will give it generously (James 1:5). Even if the world doesn’t hear our words, they watch our every move. We point unbelievers to Jesus when we walk in wisdom.

How can you better walk in wisdom to point others to Christ? What sins in your life need to be repented of in order to walk in wisdom instead of foolishness?
5. SHARE GRACIOUSLY

We must be gracious in our speech when we tell our stories. To be gracious does not mean you compromise the truth of the gospel. Instead, it means that you show compassion when telling others about Christ. Paul said that our speech must “always be gracious, seasoned with salt.” Salt may sting at first, but it can heal an open wound. The gospel works in the same way as it lands on broken lives. The truth of our brokenness is alarming, but with the truth comes great healing and restoration. Salt also creates thirst, and when our speech is salted with the truth of Christ, people will thirst for the living waters found only in Him. Share your story graciously and point the world to Christ and His living water.

Recall a time when your words were not gracious. How did people react? How do people react when your words are gracious?

TELL YOUR STORY IN LIGHT OF HIS STORY.
DAVE OWEN
serves as the senior associate pastor at Providence Baptist Church in Raleigh, N.C. He has been on staff for 20 years and oversees the discipleship and outreach efforts. He has been married to his best friend, Julie, for 19 years, and they have four children: Josh, Elizabeth, Julianna and Rachel.
TELLING YOUR STORY

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Why tell your story?

What do we tell in our story?

What can keep you from telling your story? (Refer to your answer on page 84.)

Where do we tell our story in light of His story?

How do you tell the story?

What is foundational in gospel conversations?

Why is the Holy Spirit’s role important in sharing the gospel?

Why is intentionality important in gospel conversations?

WATCH VIDEO 8

featuring Dave Owen

WATCH VIDEO 9

featuring Donna Elmore
WEEK 5
GOSPEL CONVERSATIONS
“FROM THE ABUNDANCE OF THE HEART”

When I come home from work at the end of the day, I always take a few minutes to talk with my almost 3-year-old son about his day. I ask him to tell me about what he did and who he saw that day, and he’s more than happy to fill me in on what I missed. The conversations have some familiar themes: the animals he saw, the favorite toys he played with, and the new thing he learned or experienced. The excitement he brings each day never wanes — even if he’s seen that bird four days in a row! Hearing about the bird again may not be the most interesting to me, but my son isn’t trying to come up with a story that’s interesting to me — he’s simply experienced something that excites him, and he can’t help but share that experience with me.

Our conversations about the gospel ought to happen the same way. When we love Jesus and really experience the hope He’s offered us, it will naturally come up in our conversations as we share who we are and what’s important to us.

“The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Luke 6:45 (ESV)
Where does Jesus say the things that we talk about originate?

What is the “good treasure” that Jesus is referring to in this passage?

Think about one thing in your life other than your faith that you talk about frequently. You may want to ask a close friend or spouse to see what they would say. Once you’ve identified something, ask yourself some diagnostic questions:

- Why do I talk so much about that?
- Whom do I normally talk about that with?
- When do I tend to find myself talking about that thing?

When we talk about the things we love and enjoy, we normally don’t try to argue our friends into agreement that they should enjoy it — we share our experience of that thing in the hope that they will experience it, too. It’s not a presentation, but a conversation.

It will be hard to talk genuinely and naturally about the gospel in a conversation if you are not genuinely and naturally experiencing the good news yourself. But, when we are overwhelmed by joy and gratitude at what God has done for us, we won’t be able to stop ourselves from sharing with the people we care about. That’s why engaging in gospel conversations starts with a real living experience of the gospel yourself. Our enjoyment of the gospel will lead us to conversations about the gospel.
Read the following passages out loud to yourself:

“See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God — and so we are!” 1 John 3:1 (ESV)

“My mouth is filled with Your praise.” Psalm 71:8 (ESV)

“In Your presence, there is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.” Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

Write down the words that might describe or characterize the experience of God each of these authors must have had. Do those words also characterize your daily experience with God?

Pray that God would restore the joy of His salvation to you and allow you to grasp the magnitude of the good news. Pray that you would have a fresh experience of that joy that you could share with others every day.
OUR ENJOYMENT OF THE GOSPEL WILL LEAD US TO CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE GOSPEL
“KINGDOM COMMUNITY ON DISPLAY”

Several weeks ago, our small group at our church decided to throw a party and invite neighbors and friends from work. My wife and I offered to host so that we could put our children, ages 1 and almost 3, to bed without having to leave the party. As the kids' bedtime approached, a couple of our friends — one of whom was a Muslim student from a local university — offered to help my wife get the kids ready for bed. Our bedtime routine includes reading a story from the Bible, so my son asked our Muslim friend if she would read him the story of the crucifixion. I'm sure that was uncomfortable for her, but she couldn't turn down a pleading 2-year-old, so she read the story to him. After he was in bed, she turned to my wife and asked why the Bible had a different story than the Quran, and they started talking about what the Bible says about Jesus.

Encounters like this one may be rare, but the story illustrates how God designed people to learn about Him. Jesus teaches us that God set up a way for us to get into spiritual conversations: the normal, everyday love of God’s family for one another.

“A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE TO YOU, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER: JUST AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, YOU ALSO ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER. BY THIS, ALL PEOPLE WILL KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU HAVE LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER.” John 13:34-35 (ESV)

Answer the following questions in light of the passage:

What command does Jesus give us?
One implication of Jesus’ words in John 13 is that we actually need each other to be effective witnesses to our friends and co-workers who don’t yet believe. We won’t be able to put Christlike love on display if we don’t find ways for our unbelieving friends to spend time around the family of God. But, when they do, we won’t have to wonder how to get into conversations about the gospel — those conversations will naturally come up as they observe the difference between Christian community and the relationships they experience. My wife’s conversation about the gospel with our Muslim friend happened because she was invited to join a gathering of our Christian friends, and she observed a normal family pattern that was very different from her own.

“And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at a table with them. And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at His disciples, saying ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’ Jesus answered them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.’” Luke 5:29-31 (ESV)
Write out answers to the following questions based on this story:

What do we see that Levi did in this story?

Who was present at this feast? List all the different groups.

Describe a parallel situation that could take place in your life.

Would it be surprising to find “sinners” at a party that you threw?
We should want to have conversations about the gospel with people who are far from God, but if we don’t intentionally spend time around neighbors and friends who aren’t believers, it’s unlikely that we’ll have that opportunity. Proclaiming good news is important, and presence precedes proclamation.

Ask yourself:

What gatherings or activities am I already doing with Christian friends where I could invite unbelieving friends?

How could I create space like Levi to introduce my unbelieving friends to God’s family?

PRAY. Spend a few minutes praying that God would open the door for opportunities like this. If you don’t already have a few Christian friends who would join you in mission like this, ask God to provide people with this same vision.
“GOD’S DEMONSTRATION OF COMMUNITY”

At our church, there is a team of more than 40 men and women who go inside one of the local prisons each week to teach classes and facilitate small group studies and worship services. They’re also matched individually with prisoners who are about to be released, and they visit those guys frequently to help them prepare for the transition back into society. One day, a prisoner shared with our team that in his nearly nine years of incarceration, they were the first people to have ever visited him. He’d started to believe that he’d messed up so badly that God had forgotten about him, but our team was able to share God’s true feelings for him as they took him through the Bible.

As believers, we are sent to share good news, and tangibly displaying God’s love is an important part of how we do that. When we serve our friends and neighbors, we are able to make our words about the good news believable because they have seen the good news in action through us. N.T. Wright has described the purpose of acts of service and mercy as “sketching out with pencil what Jesus will one day paint over in indelible ink.” We do this because we are imitating Jesus, who, as He preached, also healed the sick and fed the hungry as signs of a Kingdom that is not of this world.

“Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, ‘Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?’ And Jesus answered them, ‘Go and tell John what you hear and see: The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.’” Matthew 11:2-5 (ESV)
Write out answers to the following questions based on this story:

What caused John the Baptist to ask about whether Jesus was really the Promised One?

What did Jesus point to as proof that He was the Messiah?

As the body of Christ, how should we apply this passage to our lives?

Is there anything about your actions that causes people to ask questions about Jesus?
As imitators of Christ, when we serve, we are helping people see God. They should be able to look at us and glimpse aspects of God’s character. Often, the door to a gospel conversation is opened by a posture of service that defies earthly categories.

**EXAMINE.** Write down five aspects of God’s character that you find in the Scriptures. What are you doing or what could you be doing to demonstrate those attributes?

The truth is that as Christians, what we do and how we serve always demonstrates something about God, whether we’re being intentional about it or not. The real question is whether we’re demonstrating what’s true about God or not. A lifestyle that communicates good news makes it much easier to engage in a conversation that communicates good news.

**PRAY.** Ask God to grow your love for unbelieving friends and neighbors and to give you a posture of sacrificial service like Jesus. Pray for opportunities to tangibly display aspects of God’s character and for the boldness to share your motivation for the action.
“INCARNATIONAL QUESTIONS”

As a part of my degree program, I had the opportunity to work in Mexico for a summer with a community development organization. A total of 10 students were accepted to work and live in Guadalajara for the summer, and I quickly found out that I was one of only two believers on our internship team. For those summer months, we did almost everything together — working, learning the language, traveling and living together. Friendships grew deep among people who probably wouldn't have crossed paths otherwise, and I recognized that God was providing me with open doors to share truth.

As we were taking the long bus ride back from a village one day, a friend turned to me and said, “You know I’m not a religious person, but I’ve wondered what my life really means, and this book has brought me comfort.” With that, she pulled out a copy of the Egyptian Book of the Dead and handed it to me. Having never read that book, I desperately asked God to guide my words and jumped in: “Why does it bring you comfort?” She explained that while she didn’t agree with religions, she knew she needed guidance in the afterlife if she was going to make it to heaven. Still not sure how to respond, I asked, “Why would you want to go to heaven to spend eternity with God if you don’t want to spend time on earth with Him?” That question launched us into a conversation about God’s character, her misconceptions of heaven and her problems with God’s judgment.

As we observe Jesus’ conversations with both believers and unbelievers in Scripture, we begin to notice how often He asked challenging questions. The only man on earth who literally possessed all the right answers to every issue raised frequently chose to ask questions.

“Now it happened as He was praying alone, the disciples were with Him. And He asked them, ‘Who do the crowds say that I am?’ And they answered, ‘John the Baptist. But others say Elijah, and others that one of the prophets of old has
risen.’ Then He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ And Peter answered Him, ‘The Christ of God.’” Luke 9:18-20 (ESV)

Write out answers to the following questions based on this story:

What raised this conversation between Jesus and His disciples?

What was Jesus trying to communicate to His disciples in this passage?

Why do you think Jesus chose to communicate indirectly instead of simply telling them who He was?
One of the pastors on our staff talks about how questions are incarnational because they allow others to enter our lives and us to enter their lives. When we ask questions, we are choosing to join the other person in the process of discovery rather than to offer a sales pitch on our own opinion. This is important because God’s gift of grace is not offered to the people with the right answers, but rather to people with the right desire — and simply instructing someone in the right answer cannot produce the right desire.

Jesus also used questions to redirect conversations toward the issues that were really at the heart of the person He was talking with. Asking open-ended questions means we have less control over where the conversation might go, but Jesus did not fear losing control of the conversation.

“And as He was setting out on His journey, a man ran up and knelt before Him and asked Him, ‘Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call me good?’” Mark 10:17-18a (ESV)

Ask yourself:

**Why didn’t Jesus answer the man’s question simply?**

**How did Jesus’ response lead the man into a gospel conversation?**
What do you most fear about asking open-ended questions to your unbelieving friends?

PRAY. Ask God to give you the ability to listen to your friends and hear the questions behind their questions. Pray that the Spirit would lead you in your next conversation and that you would grow comfortable leaving the direction of the conversation in God’s hands.
“FISHING FOR MEN”

I lived for a few years in Central Asia, and while there I worked alongside a local believer who was one of the most effective gospel conversationalists I’ve ever met. No matter what project we were working on, he was looking for people to engage in spiritual conversations. I was never surprised to turn around and find him drinking tea and turning a conversation with a contractor or vendor to spiritual topics. He didn’t wait for the conversations to come up naturally either — he’d plot how to bring them up. At times, he’d turn to me and say, “Come on, let’s go fishing.”

Of course, he’s referencing how Jesus told His disciples that He would make them “fishers of men” in calling them to follow Him.

“And when He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, ‘Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.’ And Simon answered, ‘Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at Your word, I will let down the nets.’ And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats so that they began to sink. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.’” Luke 5:4-10 (ESV)
Write out answers to the following questions based on this story:

How do you think Simon felt about returning to the scene of his frustration from the night before?

Was this a “strategic” time to let down the nets for a catch?

In the end, what caused Simon to let down his nets again?

What are parallels between this story of Simon catching fish and the call we have from Jesus to catch men?
Ultimately, there was only one difference between Simon’s frustrating night without catching anything and his experience the next day when Jesus commanded him. You can tell that he didn’t really think that it was going to work, but he let the nets down in faith — despite all evidence to the contrary — because Jesus told him to do so. The difference between the night of empty nets and the day of overflowing boats was simply that Jesus provided the catch; there was nothing different in Simon’s approach.

“The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” 2 Corinthians 9:6 (ESV)

Examine.

What does this passage promise us?

According to this verse, what is the way to reap lots of spiritual fruit?
How could you apply this principle to your gospel conversations?

Jesus never promised us that everyone we engage will be open to hearing about the gospel — even He was rejected by plenty of people. But He did promise that we will reap in proportion to what we sow. Frequent gospel conversations are a method of bountiful gospel sowing!

Write down the names of five of your unbelieving friends who you think are most likely to be open to a conversation about the gospel. Would you be willing to initiate five conversations with each of them for the chance that one or two might respond?

PRAY. Thank God for His promise that we will reap and for the example of His grace to Simon that points us to the grace available to us. Ask God to give you the faith to obey what He commands, despite how unlikely the odds may seem. Ask boldly that God would give you a “catch” when you take a step of obedience.
MATT MIG believes that the work of Jesus is worth awkward conversations with people who are far from God, and he prays that God can use clumsy words to change lives. He’s had the opportunity to see God change lives in places as far away as Central Asia and as close as the marginalized neighborhoods of Durham, N.C. Currently, Matt serves as the pastor of local outreach at The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, and he lives in Raleigh with his wife, Lauren, and their two kids, Joseph and Hadia.
What does it mean to “cultivate the soil” as you engage in gospel conversations?

Why is worldview important in having gospel conversations with others?

Why should we be involved in the lives of other people? What does this have to do with having gospel conversations?

What are some suggestions in starting gospel conversations with others?

Why do believers need to be part of a community? What does the Bible say about community?

Have you substituted online communication for other people?

According to Paul in Romans 12:38, how are we members of one another?
WEEK 6

COMMUNITY
A LOVING COMMUNITY
The centrality of love

Every human being has a desire to be loved — it is woven into our nature, and it is nurtured within us at a very early age. The psalmist asks God in Psalm 8:3-4, “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” The answer is found in God’s nature, for God is love (1 John 4:8). Human beings were created in His image. Humans, above all other creatures, were made to bask in the loving fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This God-given desire for love is also nurtured in our relationships from birth. From the loving arms of our parents, to the mutual love of friendship, to the sacrificial love of our spouses, we all desire to be loved.

WHAT HAPPENED TO LOVE?

However, something is not right. If we are honest, no matter how wonderful our relationships are, our desire for love is never fully satisfied. When we look around us, we see that families are broken, friendships are lost, and marriages are often on the brink of disaster. Even when our relationships are in good order, we still long for more. Moreover, the most religious of people sometimes question God’s love, especially when struggling through doubt and sin. What has gone wrong? We know from Genesis 3 that with the fall of mankind, sin entered the world, fracturing our relationship with God and with
one another. But, we were not left without hope. How can the gospel and the Church community speak to this deep need?

**Jesus is the foundation for our love for one another.**

Jesus speaks to this deep need within every human during His last supper with the disciples in John 13.

> “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”  

*John 13:34-35 (ESV)*

Just before His crucifixion, He tells the disciples to love one another just as He has loved them. Certainly they would have felt the depth of these words in the hours to follow as Jesus was slaughtered for their sins. The good news of the gospel is that while we are more broken and needy than we ever thought, we are also more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared to hope. This is not only important for us individually, but also corporately as a Church family. Note that Jesus tells the disciples to love one another just as He has loved them.

Moreover, Jesus declares that our love for one another will demonstrate the power of the gospel to the world. So the Church is made up of broken and sinful people who love one another in the same way that Christ has loved them; we accept one another by grace. If we are all accepted into the family of God by grace through Jesus Christ, do we have the right to deny grace to one another?

**How can the love of Christ change our Church community?**
The sad reality is that many of our churches are filled with people who show little love for one another. If we are honest, it is difficult to love others in the same way that Christ has loved us. The irony is, it requires sacrifice. For you and me to meet the need of love that others desire, it requires that we love them with the same amount of energy and force that we use to meet our own needs. Isn’t this the community application of Jesus’ command to love others as you would love yourself (Matthew 22:39)?

What if we, the Church, renewed our commitment to love one another as Christ has called us to? Our loving commitment to one another, despite our differences and our grace toward one another’s failures, are a beautiful testimony to the gospel. True gospel fellowship within the local body transcends the barriers of race, sex, class and education, creating a community bound by the gospel alone. The Church is a community of believers who extend love and grace toward one another in a way that meets our deepest needs. The Church is also a community of believers who fulfill Jesus’ command to love one another in a way that only the Spirit can provide.

Are there any individuals within your church family whom you have failed to show this type of love toward? If so, have you sought forgiveness and reconciliation with them in a way that honors God?

THE LOVE OF CHRIST EXHIBITED TO ONE ANOTHER

Consider some of the “one another” passages in the New Testament, empowered by the Spirit of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ:

- “Be at peace with one another” (Mark 9:50).
- “Love one another” (John 13:34).
“Outdo one another in showing honor” (Romans 12:10).
“Live in harmony with one another” (Romans 12:16).
“Welcome one another” (Romans 15:7).
“Instruct one another” (Romans 15:14).
“Comfort one another” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).
“Serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).
“Bear one another’s burdens” (Galatians 6:2).
“Be kind to one another” (Ephesians 4:32).
“Forgive one another” (Ephesians 4:32).
“Submit to one another, out of reverence for Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).
“Admonish one another” (Colossians 3:16).
“Encourage one another” (1 Thessalonians 4:18).
“Build one another up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).
“Do good for one another” (1 Thessalonians 5:15).
“Exhort one another” (Hebrews 3:13).
“Stir up one another in love and good works” (Hebrews 10:24).
“Confess your sins to one another” (James 5:16).
“Show hospitality to one another” (1 Peter 4:9).

Is there any other type of community in the world that strives to exhibit these traits? Is there any other community in the world that has the power of God to fulfill these traits?

If you were to read through this list and honestly assess yourself and your church community, which ones do you fail to exhibit?
THE BIBLICAL MODEL FOR CHURCH COMMUNITY

The Church’s central mission

The mission of the Church is simple. Jesus outlined the prescriptive goal of the Church (“C”) in Matthew 28.

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘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 (ESV)

So, the ongoing ministry of the Church is centered around presenting and applying the truths of the gospel with the aim of transforming hearts and lives. The visible outcrop of accomplishing this mission is demonstrated by baptisms and disciples who make disciples — that is, individual, baptized Christians teaching and admonishing others to observe all that Jesus has commanded us. We find great confidence in the fact that Jesus is the sovereign authority over heaven and earth (verse 18). At the same time, we find great comfort that Jesus is present with us always, to the end of the age (verse 20b).

THE LOCAL CHURCH AS A BIBLICAL COMMUNITY

Apart from the prescriptive mission of the Church, we also need a descriptive picture of the local church (“c”) that outlines what accomplishing this mission looks like in day-to-day life. We find this description of biblical community in Acts 2.
“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 (ESV)

Without a biblical description of how we are to intentionally build our community life, church leaders will find themselves relying on slick gimmicks and worldly wisdom to accomplish what God has called us to do. In Acts 2:42-47, we see three central functions of the local church that will build a biblical community.

A COMMUNITY THAT IS FOCUSED ON GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION

First, the local church needs to be focused on gospel transformation. Local church families need to focus on heart transformation and character growth by applying the gospel to aspects all of life.

In reflecting on Acts 2:42-43, what are the central attributes of a church that is focused on gospel transformation?
The “apostles’ teaching” is a reference to the body of material considered authoritative because it was the message of Jesus that was proclaimed and accredited by the apostles; namely, the entirety of the Bible. Therefore, the Christian community finds its sense of center in the good news of the Word of God. And this, Luke tells us, was predominantly the reason for the existence and the focus of the early Christian community. The church should be devoted to the apostles’ teaching.

Though the apostles are gone, their voices are still heard in the text. It is often noted that disciple means “learner.” The church is a fellowship of disciples that focuses on heart transformation and character growth by applying the gospel to all of life. It has often been said that growth in the Christian life rarely happens in isolation from other believers. Therefore, it is central that Christians seek gospel transformation in fellowship with one another through the study of God’s Word, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayer.

A COMMUNITY THAT EXHIBITS SACRIFICIAL LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER

**Second**, the local church should exhibit the qualities of a loving community. Local church families should be bodies of believers that love one another in a way that reflects the power of the gospel.

Examine the qualities described in Acts 2:44-46. How do they contribute to building a loving community?

The church has a distinctive form of loving community as compared to the outside world. According to the text, this fellowship is marked by sharing all things in common and regularly breaking bread with one another. The sense of unity of these early Christians is expressed in their communal living. There was a voluntary generosity in sharing possessions, which is commendable.
The language of breaking bread often refers to ordinary meals, as well as to the Lord’s Supper. In this sense, the Christian community is a place where hearts are warmed by devotion and occasions for joy, love and praise connected to Jesus. Christian community also included a commitment to worshiping together as a church and sharing life together in groups scattered throughout the city with gladness and sincerity of heart.

A COMMUNITY THAT IS INTENTIONAL ABOUT MISSIONAL LIVING

Third, a local church should be committed to missional living. Local church families should define their lives by mission in all that they do both here and around the world.

How does the description of the church’s life in Acts 2:46-47 help us think missionally about everyday life?

There is something about the message, quality of life and unity of the church on mission that draws others to Christ. The Christian community, though far from perfect, is sufficiently different and impressive to attract notice, to invite curiosity and to inspire discipleship. The gospel message is the foundation and reason for such missional living.

We are called to praise God and find favor among all people. This is the foundation for missional living, both here and abroad. We scatter out into the world, praising God and calling people to Him. In the text, it is noticeable that as the church is faithful in these things, God brings fruitfulfulness as He adds to its number through salvations.
HOW THEN SHALL WE BUILD COMMUNITY?

Without a clear vision for biblical community, we will end up like Israel without a king: “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Without assessing the life rhythms of the local church, it is very easy to find ourselves being pulled in different directions, trying to figure out the church’s mission. In other words, it is possible to have a lot of good things going on, but also have a lack of focus that can have negative implications on scheduling, planning and coordination of church life.

The overall mission of the church helps align everything with a desired end goal. The mission helps guide our decisions, priorities and actions toward the desired long-term effect of the church’s work. Just as important, the church’s biblical vision of community life reflects the celebrated principles or standards that support the overall vision of the church.

These two components help us answer the question, “What are the best activities and endeavors that we can focus on to build biblical community?” As a local church and as individual Christians, these two components are important to prioritize ministry efforts in order to ensure wise use of our time and energy.

Considering the prescriptive mission and descriptive community life outlined in these passages, how could you as a church family focus more on the most important things?
Moreover, what are some specific things that your church family has done or could do to build a strong biblical community?
EVERY MEMBER CONTRIBUTING TO THE COMMUNITY
We all need to be an active part of a community

We all want to be a part of something that is larger than ourselves. We all want to be a part of something that outlives us. Simply put, we all need a “greater purpose.” The problem is, many of us attempt to find this purpose in solitude apart from the community that God has called us to. In our culture, individualism is the silent killer of church community.

Individualism has become one of the distinctives of modern life. One might argue that we are more connected than ever before with social media. But with all the information we have about others, rarely do people experience intimate relationships with others. To put it another way, today, people are more connected than ever before, but they are also more isolated from community than previous generations. In reality, modern people are often haunted by their own solitude. I would suggest that the social media phenomenon is the technological answer to the fragmentation of our society, and it is how many people connect with something larger than themselves.

OUR CULTURE FIGHTS AGAINST BIBLICAL COMMUNITY

To make things even more complicated, the consumer culture we find ourselves in makes it much harder to find individuals willing to connect to a church community. Many people shop around for churches like consumers; if their needs are not met, then they move on to a different church, taking their gifts and contributions elsewhere. Consider this quote from two secular psychologists in their book, Overcoming Loneliness in Everyday Life.

“Attending weekly meetings, dropping in and out as one pleases, shopping around for a more satisfactory or appealing group — all of these factors work against the growth of the community.” Jacqueline Olds and Richard Schwartz
The problem with the influence of individualism and the consumer mentality is felt in congregations all over our land that are attempting to build a sense of community within their people. But this mentality is an affront to the biblical notion of who we are called to be as individuals and as a community of believers.

Lest you think I am overreaching, let me remind you of how God created human beings “in Our image” (Genesis 1:26). Our Trinitarian God, who has existed in perfect community, created man to enjoy fellowship with Him. Moreover, after Adam was created, God declared that it is not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18). The point is, we were created for community. And while the culture of individualism says you are sufficient by yourself, while consumerism says that your individual needs matter above all else, the Bible tells us that deep down, all of us need to be part of a community. Moreover, the Bible calls us to contribute to the needs of the church community, not shop around for one that can primarily contribute to our own needs. Consider the words of Paul in Romans 12.

**WE ARE CALLED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE CHURCH COMMUNITY**

“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.”

Romans 12:3-5 (ESV)

How does this passage confront the modern notions of individualism and consumerism?
Next, consider the following passages that speak of the gifts that God gives to individuals in order to build up the body of Christ.

+ Romans 12:6-8
+ 1 Corinthians 12:4-12
+ Ephesians 4:11-13

These passages make it clear: Every individual is called to use their God-given talents and gifts to contribute to the greater purpose of the church community. Moreover, these passages inform us that we should primarily ask, “How can I contribute to the church?” not, “How can the church contribute to me?” Therefore, to fight the rampant individualism and consumerism that seeks to destroy the church community, we need to give Christians a compelling vision of biblical community and show how they can be a part of God’s mission through the church. The answer to modern society’s solitude is finding ways for individuals to fulfill a greater purpose within the church. By implication, this strengthens the church as a community.

The biblical vision of a church is not a group of people with a gifted pastor, but rather a group of individuals gifted to do the ministry of the church. This is why Paul argues in Ephesians 4:12-13 that pastors are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. It is possible that many gifted Christians are sitting on the sidelines waiting for the church, as an organization, to do the ministry. The more biblical vision of ministry sees all Christians contributing to the ministry of the church as a body, working together. God has uniquely gifted each person in the church to serve Him. No one pastor has all the gifts necessary to fulfill the ministry of the church. In fact, Jesus Christ is the only individual who ever walked the earth who embodied all of the spiritual gifts. This is why the church is referred to as the body of Christ.

What are the specific ways that God has gifted you to contribute to the ministry of the church? And what is holding you back?
Another benefit of being committed to the church community is that brothers and sisters in Christ can observe your gifting and talents and help you plug into ministry. Many churches rely on spiritual gifts tests to find ways for their people to serve. But to be candid, if you answer the questions correctly, you can find affirmation for any gift you want to have. I believe that the best place to discover your talents and gifts for ministry is within the local church body. Oftentimes others can more clearly see your actual gifts and talents more than you can.

Who are two to three individuals who know you well enough to help you find your most fruitful place of service? Can you ask them to help you discover your gifts?
THE IMPORTANCE OF REGULARLY GATHERING WITH THE LOCAL CHURCH

It takes a whole church to raise a Christian

As Christians, we believe all people are created for, and even desire, the community of fellowship experienced in the local church. One of the indicators that a person is “an active member in good standing” is their attendance in local church gatherings. A commitment to gathering with your brothers and sisters in Christ is important for spiritual growth. In fact, one could argue that Christian sanctification is a group project. Simply put, it takes a whole church to raise a Christian.

But the reality is, times have changed. A decade ago, it was common to find Christians gathering at the church building three times a week — Sunday mornings, Sunday nights and Wednesday nights. However, the rhythms of church life have changed in the modern era. The frequency in which Christians gather seems to be less and less. And while the frequency of Christians gathering seems to be changing, the biblical exhortation to meet together has remained the same.

What are some reasons that Christians seem to meet less often than they used to in years past?

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THE BIBLICAL EXHORTATION TO MEET TOGETHER

The writer of Hebrews reminds us of the importance of gathering with the church community very clearly in the following passage:

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV)

This exhortation is for people to focus their attention carefully on the need for conscious and consistent activities that encourage each other spiritually and morally, which requires meeting with one another regularly.

This type of community life cannot be sustained unless members of the community meet regularly for fellowship, encouragement and exhortation. If the people keep each other at a distance, true community will never develop. Therefore, every opportunity of coming together and enjoying fellowship in faith and hope must be welcomed and used for mutual encouragement. The appeal for this is made with two statements: one negative and one positive.

NEGATIVE:
They must not stop meeting together regularly. The failure of some to meet is explained by the author’s use of the strong word, “neglecting,” which carries the connotation of abandonment. This is a strong warning against those who had been associated with the Christian community but were now forsaking God’s people.

POSITIVE:
In gathering regularly, the church community is called to provoke one another to love and good deeds.

The language of the “day drawing near” is important and must not be overlooked. In his commentary, The Epistle to the Hebrews, F.F. Bruce notes that “apparent postponement of the parousia [the ‘end time’ or ‘coming of the Lord’] was having its effect on their minds; at least the sense of tension created by knowing that they were living in the end-time was weakening
... [since] the first generation of believers were passing away; [and] a new generation was growing up.” See, both encouragement and correction toward spiritual alertness are to be given often as the church gathers in anticipation of Christ’s returns.

WHY DO PEOPLE NEGLECT A COMMITMENT TO GATHERING REGULARLY?

How can someone live out the more than 30 “one-another” commands of the New Testament, or use their spiritual gifts for the common good (1 Corinthians 12:7), or grow to maturity (Ephesians 4:16) without being committed to regularly gathering with their church community? It would seem that for a genuine Christian, neglecting to gather with the church body should not be taken lightly. If one can continue in isolation from a church family without feeling a sense of being severed, it is appropriate to ask if they have ever truly committed to that church community.

In some cases it may even be appropriate to ask if they even have a biblical understanding of the church or if they are genuinely saved. This may be difficult to swallow, but I think it is an appropriate consideration in response to Hebrews 10:24-25.

Consider the people who have neglected to regularly gather with your church family. Who are they and why have they disappeared from the fellowship?

WHAT CAN WE DO TO BRING THEM BACK INTO FELLOWSHIP?

One of the most beneficial actions that a church can take to reconnect missing church members is to simply reach out to them, check on them and invite them to return. These seem like common sense, but you may be surprised by how many church members don’t really think it’s that important to regularly gather with the church community. No one has ever told them otherwise.
Does your church have a strategy to reach out to missing or absent church members? How can you be involved in that ministry?

You may also find that many members gather less frequently because they have no place to plug in and serve in the church. In other words, they do not feel like they are an integral part of the church.

Is there a leadership vacuum in your local church? In other words, do 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the ministry? If so, how can you create space for others to serve?

As we discussed in session three, every member needs to be involved in the ministry of the church. This is how God designed the church to function: as a body with many contributing parts. In light of this, it is every member’s responsibility to stir others to love and good works and to encourage one another.

As we have already stated, people want to be part of something that makes a difference. They desire to be involved in something bigger than themselves. Until we get our church members to see the importance of regularly gathering, we will have a hard time building biblical community. But when all the members regularly meet with one another and are involved in every aspect of the ministry, our churches will become an unstoppable force for the Kingdom and glory of God.
THE CHURCH COMMUNITY AT WAR AGAINST SIN
The lies we hide behind

Every Christian struggles with sin. The sad reality is that we all hide it so well. When we ask a fellow church member, “How are you doing?” on a Sunday morning, we rarely get an honest response. In some cases, we may not want an honest response. Most of the time, we settle for clichés like, “Better than I should be,” or “Everything is fine.” But deep down inside, we know that this is not always the case.

As Christians, we all know that the ground at the cross is level. All of us are saved by grace, which presupposes that we are all broken sinners and will continue to be until the Lord returns. However, in church life, we often hide the fact that we struggle. Perhaps it is a fear of being revealed for who we truly are. Perhaps it is a fear of others’ reactions to our struggles.

Are the people in your church afraid of sinners, or do they sinfully judge sinners? If so, how does this align with the gospel that serves as the foundation of the church community?

The gospel gives us both confidence and humility in admitting our struggles. It is not the strength of your faith or the righteousness of your life that saves you, but the object of your faith, Jesus Christ, and His righteousness that actually saves you. If you believe this, you can humbly admit your struggles and need of help to one another. At the same time, you can confidently stand...
in Christ, knowing that He has not only paid the price for your sin but also empowers you through His Spirit to fight that sin. As surprising as it may seem, there is a sense in which we need to surprise people with how honest we are about our sin and struggles. This may seem controversial because it presupposes that there is something wrong with us and that we are in constant need of Christ.

**Within your church family, is there an acknowledgment of struggle and weakness? Is there a freedom to repent? If not, how does this reflect our understanding of the gospel and community?**

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**THE COMMUNITY’S ROLE IN FIGHTING SIN**

“**Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**”

Galatians 6:1-2 (ESV)

According to Paul, the community not only reveals our need for the gospel in calling for restoration, but it is also through community that we express how the gospel changes us, fulfilling the law of Christ. When we downplay sin and repentance in the church, we create religious people who are on the way to hell. However, the reality is, the closer you get to Jesus, the more you realize how much you need to repent. As I’ve heard my friend Trevin Wax say on several occasions, “You don’t repent less as you grow in holiness; you repent more! The victorious Christian life isn’t the sinless life; it’s the repentant life.” This is why Paul calls us to restore one another and bear one another’s burdens. We need one another to call us out for conviction of sin and to remind us of the comfort we find in the gospel.
Christians in community are to never give up on one another, never give up on a relationship and never write off another believer. The church community is made of individuals who have been saved by grace and continually point one another toward that grace in times of struggle. Confession and repentance are ongoing realities in the Christian life and in the church community. As the Puritan John Owen once said, “Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.” Sometimes we need to fail so badly, so painfully, so frequently, that we can only depend on God alone. We need to hurl ourselves at Him for His grace. And we need one another to point us back to Him in those times of need.

In their book *Transformational Discipleship*, authors Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger focus their research on how people grow in biblical community. After analyzing the research, they confidently concluded that being committed to a church community matters a lot. From a research lens, people committed to the church community pray and confess their sins more regularly, share the gospel more confidently, give more generously and serve more sacrificially.

The Scriptures teach us the importance of community in dealing with our sin. Confession of sin in the presence of others is applying and celebrating the gospel together. Consider James 5:16, which reads “Confess your sins to one another.” This biblical truth reminds us once again that growth in the Christian life is a group project.

In this sense, no individual is spiritually independent of the others. One huge implication of this claim is that sin is a community concern. Our hidden personal sin also affects the community to which we belong; it stops us from growing together as the body of Christ. The church is a community in which we receive help; it is also the context in which deep-seated problems will come to the surface and will require treatment. In community, we often discover things about our own hearts that we never anticipated. This means being honest, open and transparent about our struggles. Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it this way on page 110 in his classic book, *Life Together*:

“The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We are not allowed to be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone in our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. But the fact is, we are sinners.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer
The key is that we accept each other as we really are and accept one another just as Christ has accepted us. In order to help assess your church community's corporate health in the war against sin, there are several questions you can ask about your relationships.

- Do you talk with others about your own struggles with sin?
- Do you study and read together?
- Do you ask each other about your relationship with God?
- Do you call others when you are struggling with temptation and sin?
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edited by J.I. Packer.
What is the prescriptive mission given to the Church by Jesus Himself?

What is the description of this mission in everyday life?

What do we learn from Acts 2:42-47 about biblical community? (Refer to your answer on page 135.)

How is the Church’s form of community different than the world’s idea of community?

How can we be a part of international missions in our own communities in North Carolina?

What is God telling the Church by bringing unreached peoples to North Carolina?

How can you identify the people around your church?
WEEK 7

UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS
THE GREAT COMMISSION
God’s all-encompassing mission for the Church

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘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 (ESV)

There was a time when most churches did not think the Great Commission applied to them. Two hundred years ago, it was common for people to read the command at the end of the Gospels as one already fulfilled. In the minds of most, the command to go and make disciples of all nations was handed directly to the apostles. When Paul made it to Rome, this signaled the completion of that mandate.

That sounds crazy to us today. After all, we talk about the Great Commission all the time, and we certainly think it applies to us.

The Great Commission is perhaps the most important directive in the mission of the Church. In fact, the whole reason that the Church exists can be summed up in these words. That this commission is central to the purpose of the Church is clear both in its placement at the end of Matthew’s Gospel and in the
language Jesus uses to deliver the command. Four separate times, Jesus uses the word “all” to emphasize the grand, sweeping scope of this command for His newly established Church.

“ALL AUTHORITY”

Authority serves as a central theme in Matthew’s gospel. After the Sermon on the Mount, the crowds were astounded by the authority with which Jesus spoke (Matthew 5-7). Here, Jesus references this authority directly, noting that it is granted Him by His Heavenly Father. We cannot underestimate the significance of this authority.

Two things immediately stand out to us. First, the source of this authority is none other than almighty God. He is the sovereign over all creation; therefore, there is no greater source of authority. This authority comes with the seal of the King. Second, the extent of the authority is unending. Since the one who grants this authority has no limits, neither does its extent. Jesus now holds all authority to accomplish the task for which He was sent. Certainly, the resurrected Christ has defeated death and accomplished the redemption of His people. Now remains the task of applying this redemption to His people until His return when He consummates His Kingdom. This means there is nowhere and no one outside the reach of this authority. There is no force over which this authority does not extend.

This authority is invested in the Church. In this statement, Jesus is giving authority to the Church to continue the mission He began. If the Church has this authority, then it has all it needs.

“ALL NATIONS”

The term here is best understood as referring to different groups or cultures of peoples. There are no tribes, no people groups, no population segments that the Church can leave out of this disciple-making mission.

Some people groups are harder to reach than others. Some are in far-away places, and some are in countries that are closed to the spread of the gospel. These places persecute people who accept Christ. This is why it is so significant that God is bringing many of these unreached people groups, the ones that have no opportunity to hear the gospel at home, and placing them in our communities in the United States.
Thus, there is no room for preference or discrimination, no matter the culture, no matter the religion, no matter the nationality. Our call is to reach out for the poor and rich; for the downtrodden and the oppressor; for the victim and the terrorist. Because of the fall, all begin as enemies of God, just as we were once rebels. However, the grace that melted the heart of the Jewish terrorist Saul is the same grace that changed our hearts and can reach into the vilest soul today. We carry the banner of the cross to every people with no distinction.

“ALL THE COMMANDS”

This is the portion of the Great Commission we love to miss nowadays. Making decisions is not, of course, the same as making disciples. Salvation and sanctification are lifelong processes. Discipleship is a journey on which we embark. This means that we continue to teach, and we do it in community.

Here Jesus commands His new Church to teach all the commands, not just some of them. This means that fully-formed disciples are in a context of continuing instruction, and they are instructed in all the words of Scripture.

This type of continued teaching comes from the local church setting. We must realize that Jesus is speaking to His newly formed Church about how to instruct those they reach. This command necessitates starting local assemblies throughout the nations to make disciples. The Great Commission cannot be fulfilled as Jesus commanded apart from the local church.

That means your discipleship should be taking place in and through your local church, and your Great Commission ministry must flow out of the church to see that other disciples are brought in and other churches established.

“ALL THE AGE”

Jesus ends His commission to the Church with the most reassuring words possible. His presence will be with the Church until the end of the age. In other words, they are granted His actual authority to continue His mission and are promised His presence as they do it. What more hope could one ask for?

Not only does this statement provide reassurance that we are not alone in the task, but it also describes the very nature of the task. Jesus’ Church is to make
disciples of all nations until the very end of the age. We are not finished with this task until Jesus Himself returns to sit on His throne.

Thanks to men like William Carey, a British Baptist missionary to India in the 1800s, our understanding of the Great Commission is much healthier today. In fact, Carey and others completely changed the course of missions and began what we refer to as the “modern missions movement.”

Back then, missions was very costly and done at extreme sacrifice. Travel to foreign countries was by ship, and it took months. Many missionaries packed their belongings in caskets because they knew they were not coming home. Nevertheless, the call of Christ in the Great Commission led them to the nations.

Today, missions is changing. We must still send people overseas, and we need to send more than ever. However, the nations are no longer two months away by boat — they are not even two days away by plane. The nations may be a 20-minute drive from your house. With rapid immigration to the United States, many unreached people groups now live in our American cities. The least reached peoples are now in arm’s reach of the gospel.

This means that everyone, not just those who commit to long-term overseas missions, can now participate in reaching the nations. Local churches in the United States must see this new reality and begin to discover and engage the nations that live around them.

How does the Great Commission shape your day-to-day life? Give specific examples.
What is one thing you can change in your weekly schedule in order to discover international peoples around you?

Can you share the gospel? How would you adjust if you were sharing with someone from another culture or even another world religion?
GREAT COMMANDMENT
The all-encompassing service of the Church

The service of the Church is an immensely important topic for the local church in America today. In recent years, the news tells the story of a country with deepening ethnic and religious tension. Hardly a week goes by without hearing an update on refugees, immigrants and world religions. A decade ago, these were all foreign concepts to most members of a church in North Carolina. However, that is no longer the case.

Certainly, now is the time when every church must think through its response to the changing communities around them. We know that Christ commissions us to the nations and that He commands us to love our neighbors, yet we must discover what that looks like today.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells a story that teaches us exactly how to understand this command to love our neighbors.


“DESIRING TO JUSTIFY HIMSELF...”

In reading this parable, we cannot overlook the attitude of the lawyer in his line of questioning. The lawyer’s purpose for asking this question of Jesus is crucial to a right understanding of the story. He does not ask for right understanding, nor did he even obey the words of his master. Instead, he asks simply to justify his current behavior.

The lawyer’s goal was never really obedience. He was not trying to discover a new way of living — he was trying to prove why his current way of doing things was satisfactory. Too often, we run the danger of coming to Scripture
with this same mindset. In truth, we may not want to change our behavior; we may not want to change our affections; but rather, we simply may want a reason to feel good about our current poor behavior.

Such an approach is using God’s words in order to justify our actions. It is possible to construct all kinds of arguments from verses in the Bible that are not God’s heart on a subject. This is what the lawyer was doing, and this is what Jesus points out in his heart.

**YOUR NEIGHBOR MAY NOT BE WHO YOU THINK**

Certainly upon hearing the story, the lawyer would think that the priest, in all his righteousness, would be a neighbor. If not him, surely the Levite, because they were the next best thing to a priest. However, both demonstrate that they are not neighbors at all. The two men in the story who share a likeness with the lawyer and possess customs and religion like his own demonstrate they are not neighbors.

Instead, the least likely of characters emerges as the neighbor — a Samaritan. Just as we cannot miss the lawyer’s poor motive, we must also pay close attention to Jesus’ choice of character to play the role of neighbor. Of all the people in the region, Jews disliked Samaritans the most. Unlike the priest, who would have been seen as a good Jew, the Samaritan was not a Jew at all. In fact, he was a different race from the Jews, had different customs, and he even had a different religion. They were the furthest thing from what a Jew would consider a real neighbor. The Jews were disgusted by them. They were strangers, foreigners and invaders in the minds of the Jewish people.

Jesus makes clear in this passage that your neighbor may not be the person you think they are. Jesus leaves no room for the lawyer to look down his nose at the Samaritan. The surprise ending of this story is that the lawyer should act with the same kind of radical care and service for others that the Samaritan demonstrates. Jesus leaves no room for the lawyer, or for us today, to be anything other than welcoming and loving to those who are different than we are, even if that difference is as significant as customs, a nationality, or even a religion.
“GO AND DO LIKEWISE.”

These words are as much for us as they were for the lawyer. Just as Jesus compels the lawyer to go and be a neighbor, He does the same to us. He makes it clear that we are to love those who are just like us, and we must extend mercy to those He puts in our path, even when they do not look like us, act like us or believe like us.

In Acts 17, Paul tells his Athenian audience that it is God who decides when and where the peoples of the world live. He writes, “And He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him” (Acts 17:26-27). Notice, God is the one sovereign over all the people groups in the world, and He is the one who ultimately moves them around. Regardless of the reasons we hear on the news for immigration, God is at work in His world, moving peoples around, using all kinds of things like war, economic opportunity and education to determine man’s dwelling. But, Paul does not leave it there; he tells us why God determines where people live. It is so that they might seek Him and perhaps find Him. God is moving people all over the world right now, perhaps more than any other time in history, and He is doing it so the gospel can be made known.

Fortunately, there is no better time for such a message as this. At last count, there were over 150 different people groups living in North Carolina, and over half of them are unreached with the gospel. It is no coincidence that God is bringing people from places with no gospel access and planting them in the heartland of evangelical Christianity. As the doors to so many countries are closing overseas, God is dropping their citizens down in the middle of the Bible Belt. It’s brilliant!

As Paul reminds us, God is bringing them here so they may seek God. The least reached are now in arm’s reach of our churches, and the parable of the
good Samaritan makes it clear that we must be neighbors to them. We must extend mercy, even to these people who are so very different than we are — even to people we may fear.

It is a lot easier than you think. The first step is getting to know your new neighbors. Maybe it’s a cup of coffee at that new international restaurant. Maybe it is greeting someone in the grocery store. Extend your hand and be a neighbor. That is the first step. Our job is to love them as Christ has loved us.

The Samaritan was a good neighbor, but Christ was the perfect neighbor. The Samaritan had compassion, got off his donkey and stooped to help the man. But, Christ left His throne in heaven and stooped to earth to help all of mankind. The Samaritan gave of himself and bandaged wounds to keep the man from dying. But, Christ died that we may live. The Samaritan returned to pay the debts of the man in need. But, Christ is coming again in glory to settle all accounts and usher in a new creation. You see, Christ is the perfect neighbor, and He compels us to go and be neighbors ourselves, proclaiming to these new neighbors His story of redemption. To you today, Christ is saying, “Go, and do likewise.”

Do you find it hard to reach out to new neighbors of a different nationality or religion? If so, what are the reasons?
Do we use Scripture, like the lawyer, to try and justify our own attitude toward those different than us?


Does your knowledge of the Scriptures translate into loving your neighbors, even the ones who do not look like you? Cite specific examples.


What are ways your small group or church can intentionally show hospitality and service to international people groups that live in your community? List three specific things your church can do.
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COUNTING THE COST
What will it take to reach the unreached peoples in your neighborhood?

In cross-cultural ministry, especially among unreached people groups, counting the cost is critical. These are peoples whose parents and grandparents have followed after gurus, Buddha or Mohammed. Do you think they will quickly or easily abandon their family, friends and heritage to follow Jesus? Probably not. Reaching unreached people groups will take concerted and consistent prayer, genuine friendship, as well as continual proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If you choose to follow Jesus in this sort of ministry, you will find yourself outside of your comfort zone, around people who speak a language you don’t understand and sacrificing significant time and energy for the benefit of others. Crossing cultures with the gospel will cost you something. Are you willing to count the cost?

JESUS IS LORD

Notice that all throughout this text, Jesus is called Lord. Those along the road said, “Lord, let me first go…” and “I will follow you, Lord, but…” (Luke 9:59, 61). One verse after our text says, “the Lord appointed 72,” and that they should “pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest…” (Luke 10:1-2) so that He might send out laborers into His harvest field. God the Father gives Jesus “all authority” over both Heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18). There is nothing over which Christ does not reign.

This truth is deeply comforting to us as followers of Christ. It allows us to rest in the sovereignty of the Father and reign of Christ, both in our own lives and in the world.

JESUS IS WITH US

When Jesus calls someone to follow Him, He is calling that person to go with Him. In this passage, He sends out the 72 to “places He Himself was about to go” (Luke 10:1). In response to the one who said he would follow Jesus wherever He went, Jesus says, “the Son of Man has no place to lay His head” (Luke 9:58). The text implies the one following the Son of Man would also have no place to lay his head — they would be together. Jesus tells His disciples in sending them out He would be with them always, wherever they go, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).

What a promise! The “withness” of Christ gives us strength, boldness and peace in the face of danger, struggle, suffering and sacrifice. He is going with us, so we have nothing to fear. As difficult as life on mission may become, we are not alone.

JESUS IS RELIABLE IN RISK

Look at where and to what Jesus sends the 72 people. It is such a blessing Jesus does not sugarcoat the cost and risk of what lies ahead. He knows that this will be a difficult road, and so He is honest with His disciples about what they will face along the way. Through this, He calls us to rely upon Him for our every need.
UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUPS

“Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs among wolves. Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road.”

Luke 10:3-4 (ESV)

Why does Jesus send us to difficult and dangerous places and peoples? He does this because He Himself went down the difficult and dangerous road of becoming flesh, identifying with our brokenness, taking our rebellion upon Himself and willingly going even to death on a cross to take the punishment of our sin in our place (Philippians 2:5-8). Through the incarnation, He identifies with us in our struggle.

This gospel reminds us that we, too, are foreigners in a land to which we do not belong. It compels us to risk everything for the King to whose Kingdom we belong (1 Corinthians 15:1-22; 2 Corinthians 11:23-27). In spite of the difficult path, we are able to rest and rely on our resurrected King who is with us and has all authority over heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18-20). This is such an encouraging truth!

In a life of mission, Jesus teaches His followers to rely on Him.

COST OF GOING WITH JESUS

Not only does Jesus tell His disciples that there will be difficulty and danger wherever they go, but He also calls them to leave everything in following Him. He desires complete and total surrender. This means cross-cultural mission, no matter where in the world it takes place, requires this sort of surrender.

Jesus encounters three persons in this text who want to follow Him. The first person considers his home as more important than following Jesus (Luke 9:57-58). The second person counts his family and culture as more important than following Jesus (Luke 9:59-60). The third person is not willing to live up to the commitment he is making — once his hands touch the plow, he wants to turn back again (Luke 9:61-62). Though they recognized that Jesus was Lord, they were not willing to count the cost of surrendering to Him and following Him as Lord.
HOW DO WE CONSIDER THE COST?

Is Jesus Lord of your life?

Are you resting in and relying on Jesus in your life?

Scripture calls us to love the foreigners who are our neighbors. It says we should love them even as we love ourselves and we should show hospitality to those without a home (Leviticus 19:34; Luke 10:25-37; Hebrews 13:2; Matthew 25:31-46; Romans 12:13; Luke 6:31).

Are you willing to count the cost of showing hospitality through opening up your home to a Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist friend?
Christ not only calls us to love the foreigners in our community, but He calls us to love even our enemies. He tells us to pray for those who persecute us so that they, too, might be sons and daughters of our Father (Matthew 5:43-48; Romans 12:20). The broader American culture might consider many Muslims to be the enemy of Christians and say that we should not invite Muslims into our state, much less our home.

Are we willing to be counter-cultural and follow the example of Jesus? He said to love even our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Will we do that? Or will we count our family and our culture as more important than Christ?

For many Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, it takes months and years for them to give their lives to Christ.

When the going gets long and tough, will we be like the man who put his hands to the plow and then looked back? Or will we be the ones who ran the race with endurance (Hebrews 12:1-2)?
Write out a prayer of repentance for anything that you may be holding on to, especially your home, family or culture, and surrender it to Christ.
WHEN JESUS CALLS SOMEONE TO FOLLOW HIM, HE IS CALLING THAT PERSON TO GO WITH HIM.
ENTRY STRATEGY
How do we discover and encounter unreached peoples in our neighborhoods?

One of the first questions people often ask when they begin to think about the possibility of doing ministry among unreached peoples in their neighborhoods is, “How do we find them?” Video 14 in this series will provide ideas on how to discover unreached peoples in your city.

The second question is, “How must we encounter and engage unreached peoples once we do find them?” Well, what does the text say?


While this passage is more descriptive than prescriptive, there are many principles we can gain from the text. In fact, much of the early Christian mission followed this pattern.

GO TOGETHER

THE LORD “SENT THEM ... TWO BY TWO” Luke 10:1 (ESV)

Throughout the book of Acts and most of the New Testament, in almost every case we see disciples of Jesus going on mission together. This is one of the most important parts of making disciples cross-culturally. We go together because: (1) we hold each other accountable to going and sharing well; (2) we encourage each other when we face rejection; and (3) we train up newer disciples in disciple-making.
PRAY EARNESTLY

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

Luke 10:2 (ESV)

One of the most important points I have learned over the years in cross-cultural ministry is a prayer movement always precedes a disciple-making movement. You must pray earnestly for God to do the work of salvation in the unreached people group communities you are beginning to encounter. If we fail to pray, then we effectively choose to try and do something on our own that we will never be able to do. We can do a lot of things that make us look like we are busy in mission, but only God gives the growth (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

You can include these themes when you pray for the unreached peoples in your neighborhood and around the world:

- Pray regularly and sacrificially both with other believers and alone (Luke 6:12).
- Pray for boldness and opportunity to speak (Acts 4:29).
- Pray for laborers to work in the harvest (Luke 10:2).
- Regularly walk through neighborhoods and shopping centers where unreached peoples exist, praying for the salvation of those you see (Luke 10:3; Acts 17:16).

When concerted and ceaseless prayer is the foundation of a cross-cultural ministry to unreached peoples, expect God to answer in mighty and miraculous ways. We must be a people of persistent prayer (Luke 11:8-13).

SEEK PERSONS OF PEACE

“If a son of peace is there, your peace will rest on him.”

Luke 10:5-7 (ESV)

Our hope is to find a person in whom the Holy Spirit is already working. A person of peace is someone who has been prepared by God as a gateway
into a new culture or community. They will be welcoming to you, interested in introducing you to their friends and family and open to receiving the gospel of Christ themselves. If they do become followers of Christ, these people will be compelled to share the gospel with others in his or her community.

**EAT WHAT IS GIVEN**

> “EAT WHAT IS SET BEFORE YOU.” Luke 10:7-8 (ESV)

Within cross-cultural ministry, we must be quick to look past our personal preferences in an effort to go receive their hospitality. Feel the freedom to invite them into your home as well, but it may actually be easier and more comfortable for them to host you in their home. If someone invites you to dinner, do not hesitate to go. Don’t be afraid to owe them one; that is the start of genuine friendship. As you go, be sure to enter with a posture of humility and an attitude of a learner (Philippians 2:5-8).

**HEAL**

> “HEAL THE SICK IN IT.” Luke 10:9 (ESV)

Should we ask God to perform miracles? Yes, of course we should! The early church prayed God would stretch out His hand to heal and perform signs and wonders in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:30). In almost every place of frontier missions, there are still miracles happening today as we see them in the book of Acts. Oftentimes, these signs and wonders are done so an unreached people group will know Jesus is God. We should pray God would use any means necessary to bring spiritually dead men, women and children to life in Christ.

We should also consider how we might be able to serve unreached people groups. Before we jump to serve them though, we should always ask the question, “What can we learn?” Then we ought to ask three questions at once: (1) how can we serve them? (2) how can they serve us? (3) how can we serve the community together with them? These will help ensure we are thinking comprehensively in our serving.
SPEAK THE GOOD NEWS

“Say to them, ‘The Kingdom of God has come near to you.’” Luke 10:9 (ESV)

We always want to do word and deed ministry together, never either/or. We don’t want to feel guilty when we don’t share the gospel every time we spend time with our friends from an unreached people. We should seek genuine friendship with them. However, many of us will spend a lot of time with our lost friends and never ever share the gospel with them as long as we know them.

We should strive to share the gospel: (1) within the first few times of meeting someone; (2) often and in many different contexts to demonstrate Christ transforms every part of our lives; (3) in culturally appropriate ways as we begin to understand their culture and worldview; and (4) in a manner to where you can ask them to learn about God with you by opening up the Bible together.

REJECTION

“Whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you.” Luke 10:10 (ESV)

Jesus said those who hear you, hear Him. So, those who reject you are rejecting the Son and the Father. We must be careful to present the gospel in such a way that they will understand it and accept it. Spend time with those who receive you and are receptive toward the gospel.

HOW SHOULD WE ENTER UNREACHED PEOPLE GROUP COMMUNITIES?

Who could you take with you to go and meet someone from an unreached people group in your community?
How could you encourage others in your church to begin praying for unreached people groups, both in your city and around the world?

Is there anyone you know whom you could invite into your home? Would you go to their home?

How might you begin to sharpen your gospel-sharing skills?

How could you serve someone from an unreached people group in your community? Be served by them? Serve with them?
MAKING DISCIPLES
How do we use God’s Word to reach and disciple unreached peoples in our neighborhoods?

The Word of God must have a central role in the making of disciples among unreached people groups both here in our neighborhoods, as well as overseas in their home contexts. His Word is not only the manual for how to reach them, but it is also the means through which God will reveal Himself to them and bring them to faith. The prophet Isaiah rightly said:

“For as the rain and the snow come down from Heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” Isaiah 55:10-11 (ESV)

All cross-cultural ministry must center around these two things: prayer and the Word. Everything done must be bathed in prayer and guided by the Word. It is through the Scriptures people are brought to faith (“seed to the sower”) and raised up in the faith (“bread to the eater”).

THE WORD IN LEADING PEOPLE TO CHRIST
Philip’s Example

To see this lived out well, let’s take a look at the example of Philip, a member and deacon of the early church.

Read Acts 8:1-8, 26-40.
When we meet Philip, we see he is faithfully proclaiming Christ and healing others in His name as he goes (Acts 8:4-8). We later see it is through him and the apostle Peter that the gospel of Christ is first believed in Samaria (Acts 1:8).

As Philip is going about the work of the gospel in Samaria, he is sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit who calls him to go down a southern road into the desert. Surely there is no work to be done in a desolate place like that! We must remember God may call us to go to uncomfortable places and situations. Philip goes without hesitation, and the Spirit indicates he is to go over and join a chariot that is going along the same road.

Come to find out, an Ethiopian who was returning from worshiping in Jerusalem is reading from the book of Isaiah. Philip begins talking with him there, leads him to faith through the Scriptures, and then baptizes him before continuing on his way, preaching the gospel in towns along the way.

A few principles we learn from Philip are: (1) be the one who is faithfully proclaiming the gospel and meeting the needs of those around you; (2) be sensitive to the Spirit when He calls you to something or someone out of the ordinary rhythms of ministry; (3) study the Word of God regularly so you can explain it to your lost friends when they don’t understand; and (4) invite people to study the Bible with you even before they come to faith, allowing them to discover the story of the gospel for themselves.

Most individuals from unreached people groups have very little knowledge about the Bible, Jesus or Christianity. Think about taking them through a discovery study through one of the gospels, or start with creation and highlight themes throughout the Bible like creation, fall, redemption and restoration.

Remember, many prefer to learn through stories. Use stories from the Bible to help them discover Jesus. Retell the stories they are already telling in their lives in light of the gospel.
THE WORD IN TEACHING NEW BELIEVERS
Commands of Christ

In Jesus’ final commission to His disciples, He says to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them ... and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20). Most of the time, we subconsciously take this to mean Jesus wanted His followers to teach new disciples all the things Jesus said, taught or commanded.

However, this could not be further from the truth. Jesus commissioned them to baptize them and then teach them to observe all that He commanded. The objective here is not knowledge, but obedience and character — a life lived rightly.

As people from unreached groups in your neighborhoods begin to come to faith, we must begin to teach them the essential commands of Christ. What does it mean to live as a Christian in the world? They must be taught and shown these things by those who lead them to faith. We must help them discover these truths for themselves from the Scriptures, model these for them and expect them to live in a way that reflects Jesus’ commands and multiplies believers.

We need to make sure they understand and are rightly practicing the gospel through repentance and faith, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, prayer and fasting, giving, the “one-another” commands, disciple-making and studying God’s Word.

THE WORD IN LONG-TERM DISCIPLESHIP
Books of the Bible

God says the Word is sharper than a double-edged sword and is able to discern, convict of sin, challenge, teach and encourage at just the appropriate times in the life of any believer or any church. Teach new believers to study God’s Word and teach through whole books of the Bible, ideally alternating between the Old and New Testaments, and allow Christ, through the Holy Spirit, to direct His church as He wills.
HOW DO WE USE THE WORD IN DISCIPLE-MAKING AMONG UNREACHED PEOPLES?

Could you help an unbeliever discover Jesus by taking them through a study of one of the gospels? If not, what do you need to do to get there? Make a plan to work toward it over the next two to three months.

Do you know a non-believer whom you could invite to study the Bible with you? Could you contact them this week about this possibility?

Do you know a new believer in an unreached people group community who has not had any sort of short-term discipleship? Could you take them through some of those essential commands of Christ and help them learn how to study the Word for themselves?
CALEB BRIDGES

grew up as a child of a missionary, working among animistic and Muslim people groups in Africa. God brought Caleb to faith at a young age and gave him a zealous passion for seeing the peoples of the world praise the name of Jesus Christ. He is husband to a wonderful woman of God who adventures alongside him in the work of the gospel. Bridges has a bachelor of arts degree in intercultural studies with an emphasis in global studies from Union University and holds a master of arts degree in Christian studies from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also works with the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina as a people group engagement catalyst, assisting churches across the state to discover and engage unreached people groups God is bringing to North Carolina.
What should we do as God has brought the nations to North Carolina?

How do we learn who the unreached people groups are in our cities?

What are some questions you can ask people from other countries?

Luke 10:1-12 – How can we biblically engage people from other nations with disciple-making strategies?

What is our goal in disciple-making, based on the story in Luke 24 and Jesus’ encounter with the two men on the road to Emmaus?

How do we make disciples the way Jesus did?

What are the four worldview questions, and how do they apply in sharing the story of the gospel?
WEEK 8
MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES/STORYING
MAKING DISCIPLES BY TELLING THE TRUE STORY OF THE WHOLE WORLD

Every Christ follower should both be a disciple and make disciples. Why is it that so few Christians can say that they’ve actually been discipled? And why do even fewer have a grasp on making disciples? There are likely many answers for these questions, but the simplest is that most fail to understand how Jesus made disciples. These questions cause some to turn to a curriculum and others to search for a “master teacher” from whom to learn. But at the end of the day, we need look no further than the simple, reproducible model of Jesus in order to be and do all that He has called us to do.

Jesus had two key components to His disciple-making pattern. He spent intentional time with His disciples, and He ultimately taught them the true story of the whole world. Thus, in order to be a disciple, we must spend time with Jesus, and we must devote ourselves to learning from and being transformed by the story that Jesus lived and told.

You’re probably thinking, “What does that look like?” The Gospel according to Luke can lead us to an answer.

Before we begin, take a few minutes to pray and ask Jesus to be with you now.
After you pray, read Luke 24, taking time to write down what the passage tells us Jesus said to His disciples.

This chapter of scripture is divided into several scenes. First, we see the women finding the empty tomb where Jesus had been laid just three days earlier. In this section, an angel reminds them what Jesus taught about His betrayal, death and promised resurrection. And yet, verse 11 tells us some among the so-called disciples thought the women were just making it all up. The section ends with Peter going to see for himself, after which he returned, marveling at the empty tomb he had found.

Second, we find two more disciples, probably from the group of doubters, leaving Jerusalem. Jesus, who is supernaturally unrecognizable to them, meets them on their journey of dashed hopes (see verse 21). After inquiring about their sad skepticism, Jesus lovingly tells them the true story of the whole world. What they viewed as hope lost would become the ground for all their hopes and the means of their “happily ever after.”
“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Luke 24:27 (ESV)

The worldview of these disciples had been shaped by a false story. They viewed the cross of Jesus as the failure of His mission. In reality, the cross stands as the climax of God’s rescuing work. How did Jesus change their worldview? By going all the way back to what the Jews called the Book of Moses, or the Torah, which is comprised of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy in our Bibles. Why did Jesus begin there? Because they needed to understand that the events of what we call “Passion Week” were actually serving to fulfill the mission of God. They couldn’t see this on their own. Jesus explained to them how His death, burial and resurrection fit within the broader story of all history. He didn’t stop there. Jesus walked them through all of what we call the Old Testament and helped them understand it in light of His cross and resurrection. And when they really got it, it changed their worldview.

“Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?” Luke 24:32 (ESV)

Transformed by this new understanding, they backtracked to Jerusalem with burning lips to accompany their burning hearts. Isn’t it interesting we don’t have trouble talking about things that really matter to us? This new worldview changed their story of dashed hopes to unwavering faith. And it was their unwavering faith that spurred them on to discuss it with others.

The final section of Luke 24 finds Jesus joining these two along with other disciples who were still struggling with doubt. He did for them what He had done on the road to Emmaus: “He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures” (verse 45). After commissioning them all to be witnesses to the true story of the whole world, He promised to fill them with His Holy Spirit. The final verses recount how several weeks later, Jesus ascended into heaven, leaving His newly transformed disciples to make other disciples. How were they to do that? Simple. They were to intentionally invest time with them and teach them to obey the true story of the whole world. Why are you still sitting there? Now, it’s your turn.
How will you make yourself available this week to spend intentional and transformational time with Jesus?

What needs to change on your priority list and your calendar to carve out time to “walk with Jesus”?

What is your plan for growing in your understanding and being transformed by the true story of the whole world?

Neither this resource nor any other can ever replace time with Jesus and in His Word. Consider this an invitation of sorts to take a walk with your King.
I don’t care for the word “discipleship.” Why, you ask? Because when we hear that word we can’t help but think of a subject to be studied. Perhaps this is why when most churches are surveyed about their disciple-making strategies they typically respond with what classes they’re teaching to help individuals go deeper in their faith. Don’t get me wrong, you can learn a lot from a class. I wouldn’t be a teacher if I didn’t believe that to be true. However, there are some things that simply can’t be learned as effectively with workbooks and class lectures. This very resource can teach you about disciple-making, but completing it won’t make you a disciple.

Instead of “discipleship,” I prefer to use the active verb — make disciples. The difference may seem subtle, but it is actually profound. Discipleship can be mastered as a subject by reading books and listening to lectures — without ever having to engage another person relationally. The art of disciple-making, on the other hand, can only be learned in the context of a relationship. Consider the invitation of Jesus:

“And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him.” Matthew 4:19-20 (ESV)

Jesus didn’t say, “Come to my class and you’ll learn about God.” He wasn’t looking to transform students into sages. Instead, Jesus promised to transform followers from being fishermen into being fishers of men! In other words, the world was their classroom, His life was their curriculum, and their ultimate objective wasn’t a completion certificate, but to gather more followers.

How’s your following going? Following involves more than merely knowing facts about Jesus. Following entails a relationship and there are no shortcuts in cultivating those. There’s too much talk among Christians about
“leadership” and not enough about following. Suppose we were driving separate cars to a destination that only I knew and I told you to follow me. What would you do? You’d keep your eyes locked on my car, not let anything come between us, and you’d do everything you saw me doing. That pretty much sums up what our following Jesus should look like.

How about your fishing? If you’re following Jesus by keeping your eyes on Him, not allowing anything to come between you, and doing everything you see Him doing, then you’d better have a hook in the water! Jesus was always fishing — everywhere he went. If we are really following Him, fishing isn’t optional. You may be able to master the subject of discipleship, but followers will seek to be in close relationship with the Master. Which takes us back to the text we read yesterday...

“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. YOU ARE WITNESSES OF THESE THINGS.” Luke 24:46-48 (ESV)

Peter, Andrew, James and John had left their nets three years earlier when Jesus invited them to follow and become fishers of men. Over that period of time Jesus taught them much about the true story of the whole world. In the final verses of Luke 24, we find Jesus commissioning the followers to get busy fishing. That’s what it means to be his “witnesses.” There’s no “pleading the fifth” for disciples. There are no silent witnesses. It was time for their burning hearts to fuel burning lips. It was their turn to tell the true story of the whole world. But, they wouldn’t be alone in their fishing because Jesus would send “the promise” of the Holy Spirit to empower them to both follow and fish.

THINK ABOUT IT. It was their faithful following and Spirit-empowered retelling of the true story of the whole world that brought you to this moment. Are you following Jesus? Better grab your nets — He’s going fishing again, and He wants you to join Him.
What have you allowed to come between you and Jesus, obstructing your view and impeding your following? Take a moment to confess and forsake those things and ask Him to help you be a faithful follower.

Who in your circle of influence needs to hear Jesus’ true story of the whole world? Write down the names of five people you know who are far from God and begin praying for and working toward drawing the nets.

What other followers might you invite to join you on a “fishing trip?” What will you say to the five people you have listed, and for whom you are praying? See www.yourpartinthestory.com for help. Remember, we are after disciple-making, not just discipleship. Follow and fish!
GEORGE ROBINSON serves as the associate professor of missions & evangelism and occupies the Headrick Chair of World Missions at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has been an author/contributor to books, evangelism training materials and small group curricula. Prior to joining the faculty at Southeastern in 2008, George served as a missionary in South Asia and has also served as a pastor and high school history teacher in Georgia. George is married to Catherine, and they have three teenaged children: Aidan, Tori Beth and Caleb. In his free time, George enjoys riding his 1998 Harley Davidson Softail Custom motorcycle, boating on Kerr Lake, watching Georgia Bulldogs’ football and hunting wild game.
THE ROLE OF BIBLE STORYING

Chances are, there is more to story than we give it credit.

The role of story is regularly misunderstood and undervalued. In life, stories are mainly for kids and are mostly for fun. As we grow up, we are encouraged to put away childish things — like stories — and enter into the adult world of facts. In business, politics, and even in the church, story is often seen as add-on or window-dressing. Story is used to embellish or “to put a spin” on something. We hear, “Why didn’t she just tell us the facts? Is she trying to cover something up with a story?” In this light, stories are seen as half-truths at best.

Has the misunderstanding of story caused many to dismiss one of the most powerful communication tools for sharing the good news? Stories can reach into the minds and hearts of people, teaching beliefs, values, and attitudes where other approaches have difficulty.

Of course, the content contained in a story may be true or false, imagined or real. But, let’s not throw the baby out with the bathwater. Story is a valuable communication style with characters who have challenges in trying to reach a goal. And as we listen, we can enter into their story, triggering our thinking toward relevance to our own lives.

Research has shown that 80 percent of the world’s population, including 70 percent of Americans, prefer to learn in a story approach. While some of us prefer to learn through concepts and principles, research demonstrates everyone learns through story — not that everyone can learn through story, but that everyone does learn through story. As created by God, we are “hardwired” to respond to story.
Most Bible schools teach systematic communication styles. These styles consist of conceptual thinking and theoretical principles. This is what we have come to expect in the Church. I heard some pastors say, “The Word of God is too important. I can’t rely just on the story. I have to make the truth clear.” This is often done by enhancing or replacing the story with exposition. It seems that many preachers don’t make the connection when a person says, “I don’t remember your sermon, but I will never forget the story.”

No matter how much education we have, no matter how old we are, stories still move us. They connect with us. They challenge us. They change us. If we want our family, friends and neighbors to respond to the truth of the gospel, then why not present it in a way that most people are enthusiastic about? A story approach, with truth embedded in the midst of characters, challenges and goals, helps everyone learn.

The Bible is a story. It’s His story. It describes who God is, what God has done, and how He can be known in a personal way. Most of the Bible is written in story form. Most of the Bible can also be taught through story. As we read and as we listen to God’s story, we walk with real people, struggling through real challenges, moving toward a real goal. These are important truths we can all relate to, all served up in a story.

Jesus knew the power of story. Jesus’ primary teaching method was storytelling. For Jesus, not using story was the exception. Through story, He stirred the imaginations and emotions of His listeners for both evangelism and discipleship.

When Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus said, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.” Jesus then immediately told the story of a master who wished to settle accounts with his servants. In Jesus’ story, the master forgives a servant of the debt that he could never repay. But, when the same servant does not respond with forgiveness toward another servant who owed him a small amount, Jesus concludes His story with the words, “Then his master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?’ And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart” (Matthew 18:21-35). This parable of the unforgiving ser-
vant grips our hearts and minds, far more than the words, “Just continue to forgive.”

Even Jesus’ teaching on prayer used story. Jesus modeled prayer until the disciples asked Him to teach them to pray. He taught them a prayer in outline form: “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name …” (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). Yet, almost all of Jesus’ teaching on prayer is in story form. Among others, Jesus told the story of the son asking his father for bread (Matthew 7:9-11) to teach how our heavenly Father gives good gifts to those who ask. He told the parable of the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8) to encourage us to always pray and not give up. Jesus told the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) to show the kind of humble attitude in prayer God accepts.

Many misunderstand the place and power of story. Jesus didn’t. We shouldn’t either. Throughout the centuries, Bible stories have tugged at people’s hearts and minds. Story has the power to lead us and draw us into a deeper relationship with God.

As you reflect back on your school and your church experience, what part has story played in your life and faith?

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Which method of learning do you prefer? Learning truth in an analytical, conceptual approach, or learning truth in the context of a story with characters facing challenges in quest of a goal?

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What Bible stories have most impacted your life? How have they impacted you?

How might you relate what you have learned in God’s Word to others in a meaningful way?
EVERYONE LISTENS TO A STORY

Why are we so captivated by a good story? What is the charm? Why do we yawn during the sermon, yet perk up as soon as the preacher tells a story? Regardless of the story’s content, story provides the backdrop for characters who experience conflict and face challenges in their quest to reach a goal. People can often identify with the characters in a story. Story can hold up a mirror for the listener’s reflection.

Storying can also take us to places where other evangelism and discipleship methods get bogged down. Stories can reach into the hearts and minds of people, teaching beliefs, values, attitudes and facts where other approaches may have difficulty.

For many, storying is the only way they will hear God’s Word. D.A. Carson, a well-known Christian leader, points out most discipleship methods are merely subsets of systematic theology, with the good news of Jesus Christ virtually incoherent to most of the listening world. The typical expositional, propositional form of evangelism and discipleship is actually viewed suspiciously. Many embrace the idea that all religions are the same and that truth is relative. They distrust propositional truth as confrontational. They think, “What are you trying to force on me?” Story can avoid this tension, and over time, can actually change a person’s way of thinking and their view of life. Where a head-on attack should certainly fail, story hides the wisdom of the serpent behind the innocence of the dove, which can be used to change faulty ideas and beliefs.

The Bible is not merely — or even primarily — a collection of objective propositions. It is a grand story declaring who God is and what He has done as told through hundreds of different perspectives and different settings. Bible stories allow people to visualize context and to better apply understanding, meaning and relevance in their own lives.
STORIES BRING THE TRUTH TO LIFE.
As it was in Bible times, story also can play a part today. Teaching through story was effective when Jesus walked the earth, and it is still transformational today in our high-tech culture. Many people resistant to the gospel are not so resistant when they hear the good news in story.

One Bible storyteller shared a conversation she had with a friend. In the midst of a friendly conversation, the friend asked, “Why is there pain and suffering, and why doesn’t God — if there is a God — do something about it?” The storyteller replied, “Could I have a go at sharing something I’ve learned using a story from the Bible?” The friend said, “I don’t believe the Bible.” To which the storyteller said, “That’s no problem. I hope you’ll find the story helpful anyway.” As they talked, one story led to the next, and the next, and the next, with the truth of God’s Word impacting not only the friend’s life, but also her husband’s, and their children’s lives. Finally, the friend and her family begged, “Don’t leave us in suspense. Tell us how Jesus saves!”

Stories bring the truth to life. People understand best when they view something from the perspective of a character in a story. It may be the information you want to communicate, but it is the story that creates the context. It may be the goal you want to get across, but it is the story that makes it comprehensible. It may be the concepts you want to present, but the story gives the listener a reason to care. In Bible storying, the characters and events linger in our minds and are made more memorable and help us to change the way we think about life.

In college, I studied biology and chemistry. During the summers, I worked as a lifeguard and taught swimming. Sheryl was a fellow swimming instructor. She was a Christian. I was not. She believed the Bible. I believed in evolution. During our breaks and over our lunch hours, I would ask Sheryl my “hard” questions — my “heart” questions. Of course, I thought I already knew the answers. The purpose of life? There isn’t any. What happens when people die? They just rot. Obviously, Sheryl had different ideas. But she didn’t preach at me, argue with me or condemn me. She just talked with me and pointed me to stories in the Bible. One lunch hour, while the pool was closed and the other instructors were away, I was sitting alone on the lifeguard stand. I was reading in the Gospel of John in Sheryl’s Bible. Suddenly, the truth of Jesus’ story hit me like a grace-filled ton of bricks. Jesus was exactly who He said He was! He was God in human flesh. Jesus did exactly what He said He came to do — He died for my sins so that I could walk in new life. Sheryl did not tell me these
things; she just pointed me in the right direction. As I entered into the stories of the Bible, I discovered the truth that changed my life and way of thinking.

Our Christian efforts to shape minds and hearts with only reason and logic are similar to holding back the ocean’s tide with a plastic bucket and toy shovel. It is not enough that our reason and logic is true. Our families, friends and neighbors need to know how the Bible can change and shape their lives. One of the best ways is by letting the Bible speak for itself — through story.

How have stories impacted your life where a well-thought out propositional presentation fell flat?

What would happen if we began using Bible stories with our families, friends and neighbors? Might they engage more actively with the truth contained within?
How could you make a transition from a friendly conversation to sharing a Bible story in the following situations:

+ Buying a Christmas tree

+ Commenting on the start of the spring season

+ Going on an Easter egg hunt

+ Sitting at the beach in the summer

+ Enjoying a fall harvest festival
MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES / STORYING

DAY 5
by Tim Brannagan

USING STORY IN MINISTRY

How do we begin to use Bible storying to reach the lost around us?

The first part is learning the Bible story:
Understand the Bible is the grand story declaring who God is and what He has done. It is good to notice how the many stories fit together in God’s Word.

1. Choose a story to learn and read it over and over.
2. Imagine the setting of the story in your mind.
3. Imagine the action taking place in the story.
4. Read the story aloud using your voice to convey the story realistically.
5. As best as you can, memorize the story, but allow the story to flow naturally.
6. Practice telling and retelling the story.

The task might sound daunting, but it is a lot easier than you might think.

The second part is learning to ask good questions:
The better you learn the story, the better your questions will be. Two of the best questions I have found are: (1) what do you think about this story? and (2) how do you feel about this story? These questions can really open up some good discussion. You can then build upon these questions, helping the listener discover the truth for themselves.

How might this all work? Let’s look at a familiar story.

Take time to read through and contemplate Luke 15:11-32. Read it several times.
On the surface, the plot is pretty simple:

A FATHER HAS TWO SONS. The younger son asks for his portion of the family estate, his inheritance. Once he receives it, he promptly leaves for a far country and begins to waste his fortune on wild living. When the money runs out, he takes a job feeding pigs. He is so destitute that he even longs for the food that he is giving to the pigs.

The young man remembers his father and finally comes to his senses. He recognizes his foolishness and decides to return to his father and ask for forgiveness and mercy. The father who has been watching and waiting, receives his son back with open arms. He is overjoyed by the return of his lost son. Immediately the father turns to his servants and asks them to prepare a giant feast in celebration.

Meanwhile, the older brother is not one bit happy when he comes in from working in the fields and discovers a party going on to celebrate his younger brother’s return. The story closes with the father appealing to his firstborn son. He tries to dissuade the older brother from his jealous rage explaining, “You are always with me, and everything I have is yours. Please join in the welcome and forgiveness of your younger brother.”

Imagine the setting of the story in your mind.

What would it be like to be a part of this community? What emotions might the father, the younger son and the older son experience? What would the community think about the actions of the father and the actions of the two sons throughout the story?

Imagine the action taking place in the story.

What would you expect to happen, and what actually happens in the story? How should a distinguished Middle Eastern man respond to such inconsiderate behavior from his two sons? How should the sons have treated their father?
With these and other thoughts and feelings in your mind:

- **Read the story aloud using your voice to convey the story realistically.**
- **Memorize the story, but allow it to flow naturally.**
- **Practice telling and retelling the story.**

You are ready to go, but you are not yet finished. Just as important is asking good questions so the listener can discover truth embedded within the story. You will want to guide them toward, but not tell them, what they should learn. In this way, the actions of the characters and their challenges will cause your audience to remember and reflect. The story itself can hold up a mirror for the listener’s reflection without you pressuring for a response.

After reciting the story, you may begin by asking: (1) what do you think about this story? and (2) how do you feel about this story? These questions can really open up some good discussion.

Through additional questions, you might further explore the listener’s thoughts about the actions of the younger son, the older son and the father. If the setting is right, you might say, “It seems to me that there are two wayward sons. The younger son who messed up and eventually came around, and the older son, who remained mad at his father because he kept all the rules but seemed to gain nothing for it. Which brother can you identify with more?”

Additional comments with a question could include: It seems that we have two sons. One “bad” by conventional standards and one “good,” yet both are at odds with their father. Then what happens?

It appears the “bad” son enters the father’s feast, but the “good” son will not. Could it be that the wild son is saved, but the moral son is not? What do you think about that? How do you feel about that?
If God is like this distinguished father with his two wayward sons, it seems that in the gospel, everyone is wrong, everyone is loved and everyone has the opportunity to restore a relationship with a gracious, loving Father.

Perhaps going through this Bible story exercise has made you think. That is the power of Bible storying — to draw us in and then encourage us to think and respond in a personal way to the truth contained in God’s Word.

Think through a few people with whom you would like to share a Bible story. What need or faulty belief would you like to address with them? What Bible story or stories could speak to their issue?

Would you commit to learning a Bible story and thinking through some questions in the coming week? Whom can you share this commitment with and who will pray for you and encourage you?

Pray for opportunities to share the Bible stories that have impacted your life and can impact the lives of others.
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GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

When you hear “story,” what comes to mind?

How can stories help others understand who Christ is?

How did Jesus use stories in the Gospels?

How can we use stories in our ministry opportunities?

What does it mean to “live intentionally” as a believer?

What are the items included in our “toolbox?”

What parts of our story could we share with others that God could use to bring glory to Himself?
WEEK 9
LIVING INTENTIONALLY
SHARPENING OUR FOCUS

In order to become disciple-makers, we must live life intentionally. In other words, we must live life with a single intent or purpose — that of glorifying God and making His Son Jesus known to the whole world.

Consider what Romans 11 says about God the Father:

“FOR FROM HIM AND THROUGH HIM AND TO HIM ARE ALL THINGS. TO HIM BE GLORY FOREVER. AMEN.” Romans 11:36 (ESV)

Colossians 1 talks about Jesus in a very similar way:

“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.” Colossians 1:16 (ESV)

Based on these passages, who or what is the source of all of creation?
Who or what sustains creation?

Who or what is the purpose of creation?

How can the phrases “from Him” and “through Him” and “by Him” help us not become overwhelmed when we consider the task of making Jesus known to the world?

If our lives have one source, sustainer and purpose, it follows that we should live our lives in a single direction. Living intentionally requires having undivided minds. When we focus completely on God’s glory, our focus will naturally translate into living each moment with “making Jesus known” at the forefront of our minds. We will ask questions such as, “How can I best bring God glory today?” or “How might God use this circumstance in my life to make Jesus known?” This mindset infuses the everyday with meaning and compels us to examine the seemingly insignificant aspects of who we are in a new light.

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”

1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)
According to this verse, as well as Romans 11:36 and Colossians 1:6, is it legitimate to consider some activities or areas of life as “spiritual” and others as “not spiritual?” Why or why not?

Living single-mindedly forces us to consider all aspects of life as significant. If all that we do is done for the purpose of glorifying God, then all that we do is in some way related to making disciples. It follows, then, that a significant part of making disciples will be living gospel-filled lives alongside others. People are transformed by what they see and experience, not just by what they hear. Therefore, discipleship cannot be reduced to a transfer of spiritual information. If it could be, we might simply pressure people into attending a Bible study, and they’d all come out on the other end saved and spiritually mature. Making disciples does involve passing on information about God, but it also involves introducing people to God. In order to introduce people to Jesus with our lives, the gospel must be allowed to transform all of who we are.

Let’s consider 1 Corinthians 10:31 in context. In 1 Corinthians, Paul provides the Corinthian believers with practical instructions about how to live wisely and apply God’s Word in their own context and their own everyday lives, from sharing meals with neighbors to participating in holiday celebrations. Big picture, Paul wants them to avoid what is clearly sinful and to make decisions about everything else in terms of what will most clearly communicate the gospel to those around them. Paul even tells them to sacrifice their own comfort or personal preferences if it will help them to live out a more accurate picture of who God is. First Corinthians 10:31 is a summary statement of sorts, reminding believers of the reason behind it all: GOD’S GLORY.
What is the difference between caring deeply about what our lives communicate to others and being afraid of what other people think?

Another passage that provides practical help for living intentionally is Ephesians 5:15-17:

“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Ephesians 5:15-17 (ESV)

In these verses, “how you walk” refers to how you live your life. As in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul doesn’t narrow the discussion to “spiritual” activities. He addresses life as a whole, from our possessions to our interaction with others. He says our lives must be characterized by wisdom and not foolishness. Three things stand out in Paul’s depiction of wise living.

- The first is our reason for living wisely: “because the days are evil.” The world around us is enslaved to sin and desperately needs Jesus.

- The second is that in order to live wisely, we must know God’s will or “think the way God thinks.” The more time we spend in God’s Word and prayer, the more we will think like Him, and the more our desires will align with His.

- The third is that as we grow in wisdom by gaining God’s perspective, our wisdom will show itself in a very practical way: how we use our time. Colossians 4:5 communicates this as well: “Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of your time.”
What connection do you think Paul wants us to make between the lostness of the world and our need to think the way God thinks and use our time wisely?

In Ephesians 5, Paul challenges us to examine our lives through the lens of God’s wisdom, weeding out those things that do not fit with our main purpose.

Hebrews 12:1 describes this same concept in terms of an athletic competition:

“THEREFORE, SINCE WE ARE SURROUNDED BY SO GREAT A CLOUD OF WITNESSES, LET US ALSO LAY ASIDE EVERY WEIGHT AND SIN WHICH CLINGS SO CLOSELY, AND LET US RUN WITH ENDURANCE THE RACE THAT IS SET BEFORE US, LOOKING TO JESUS.”

Hebrews 12:1 (ESV)

Both passages call us to rid our lives of anything that holds us back from glorifying God and making Jesus known. This clearly includes sin. Is it possible for more “innocent” things to distract us or weigh us down as well? Does either passage support this idea?
Left unexamined, our lives naturally veer off course. They become so cluttered with activities, commitments and personal pursuits that we are left without the time or energy to make disciples.

We need God’s help to order our days wisely. Set aside some uninterrupted time this week to think through each aspect of your life, including your weekly schedule. Ask God for wisdom as you answer questions like these:

- How necessary is this?
- What role does this play in helping me glorify God or point others to Christ?
- Does the amount of time, energy or finances this uses reflect its relative importance?
- What things should I rearrange, cut back on or cut out completely to free up time and energy for disciple-making relationships?

During this process, you may discover areas of your life that seem so necessary to your happiness or fulfillment that you resist questioning them at all. These “untouchable” areas indicate idols — things we value more than Christ. Ultimately God may not ask us to give up the things we love, but He does ask us to love Him most. Living intentionally requires more than a tweaked schedule. It requires heart transformation.
RECOGNIZING OUR POTENTIAL

The Bible teaches that Christians should live intentionally, with a single-minded focus on glorifying God by making Jesus known. Yesterday we concluded that we should ask God for wisdom to examine our lives and consider how to better align them with this purpose. The process of becoming intentional disciple-makers is not easy. We may become discouraged when we assess our lives. We may even make excuses for why we aren’t able to live life focused on God’s glory or why it’s impossible for God to use us.

**Complete the following sentence:**

*I want to live more intentionally, but* 

Whether we feel unprepared, “unspiritual” or just too busy to squeeze in one more thing, most people don’t consider themselves ideal candidates for making disciples. No one possesses the perfect preparation, maturity or life circumstances for the job. Thankfully, God knew this about us long before He commanded us to make disciples. He created us. He knows everything — assets and liabilities — and He still called us.

Let’s read a passage that addresses our disciple-making potential:

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us to His own glory and excellence.” 2 Peter 1:3 (ESV)
According to this verse, what have we been given by God’s divine power?

This is great news! According to 2 Peter 1:3, God calls us as we are to go and make disciples. Because we know Jesus as our Savior, God has given us everything we could possibly need to live godly lives and glorify Him. We don’t need to wait until our circumstances change or until we get better training. We possess all we need in order to do all that God wants us to do right now.

The problem is that we often don’t recognize the extent of how God has equipped us or what tools He has given us to work with. It may help to inventory our lives, like the way we would a kitchen or a toolbox. In this case, our toolbox includes everything about who we are. Each person’s toolbox is unique, and its contents change over time. Items in our tool box may include:

- Life experiences, education, training and vocation.
- Relationships and spheres of influence.
- Stage of life and health.
- Genetic and ethnic heritage.
- Strengths and weaknesses.
- Skills, talents.
- Spiritual gifts and spiritual maturity.
- Possessions and financial resources.
- Passion and interests.
- Where we live.
We know that God has equipped us with all that we need to obey Him. This knowledge helps us view the contents of our toolbox with thankfulness and expectation, rather than disappointment, comparison or guilt. It also spurs us to ask God for wisdom so that we can know how to use all of it for His glory.

What has God put in your toolbox? Take a moment now to think through who you are and how God has equipped you. Ask Him how each thing can be used for His glory, including your painful past, your hobbies, everything.

Let’s move on to another passage that addresses our disciple-making potential:

“No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be faithful to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

Matthew 6:24 (ESV)

Here we discover more good news: because God calls us as we are does not mean He plans to leave us in that same state. This passage, in a sense, asks God to do what He has already promised to do. It asks God to sanctify us — to continue changing us so we become more and more like Jesus.

According to these verses, who will equip us?

How will He equip us?
What will He equip us with?

Why will He equip us?

Hebrews 13 reminds us that God is the source and the purpose of every good thing we do, including our work of making disciples. He is also our enabler. We can obey with confidence, knowing that He has equipped us and will continue to equip us as we obey. Therefore, living intentionally involves making disciples while we are still learning how to be disciples ourselves. For some of us, the idea is terrifying. We would rather “arrive” as a disciple before we ever attempt to make disciples.

The example of the New Testament, however, is one of leading while following. One of equipping while being equipped. And one of not only imitating Christ, but also imitating those who imitate Christ. This may bring to our minds questions concerning hero worship and the dangers associated with following others blindly. These questions are valid.

Let’s consider two verses that represent biblical teaching about following the example of others. As you read, keep in mind that the Christians being discussed could not possibly live sinless lives:

“Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.” Philippians 3:17 (ESV)

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” Hebrews 13:7 (ESV)
What do these verses teach us about whom to follow and how to follow them wisely?

Paul specifically talks a lot about imitating and modeling in his letters to a young believer named Timothy. Here are two passages for us to consider:

“Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.” 2 Timothy 1:13-14 (ESV)

“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.” 1 Timothy 4:12-13 (ESV)

Paul’s letters indicate that Timothy is a young believer who is at the same time discipling and being discipled. Pay attention to Paul’s wording when he invites Timothy to follow his example.

How and what does Paul want Timothy to imitate?
Notice also Paul directs Timothy to actively set an example for others. He doesn’t say, “Keep your faith private until you’re more mature, so you don’t make God look bad.” In fact, his wording implies that Timothy should intentionally open his life to the scrutiny of others. This will require him to live transparently and to take the time to go beyond surface relationships with those around him. The New Testament as a whole clearly establishes this pattern of disciple-making: believers living in a way that allows them to observe and follow the example of other godly believers, while at the same time providing newer believers with the opportunity to observe and follow their own lives.

This way of living interdependently and in close community with others doesn’t fit the experience of most American Christians. It clashes with our cultural values of independence, privacy and busyness.

Ask God for help valuing what He values and for wisdom for applying it in real life.
LIVING INTENTIONALLY INVOLVES MAKING DISCIPLES WHILE WE ARE STILL LEARNING HOW TO BE DISCIPLES OURSELVES.
KNOWING OUR MESSAGE

When it comes to sharing the gospel, are you ever unsure about what to say? God provides specific wisdom in His Word to prepare us for talking about His truth with others. Take a moment to read our focal passages:

“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” 1 Peter 3:15-16 (ESV)

“Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” 1 Peter 2:12 (ESV)

According to these verses, what attitudes and actions should characterize the life of a Christian?
SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH OUR LIVES

Our lives serve as the opening paragraph of our gospel presentations. Therefore, if we want to introduce the gospel well, we’ll play close attention to how we live. In his letter to followers of Jesus, Peter addresses the likelihood that some people won’t appreciate our attempts at sharing the truth. They may ridicule or even slander us. According to Peter, this depressing reality should actually motivate us to live good lives. We should understand that when others mistreat us, it is because of our message and not because of our own sin or carelessness. Consider his phrasing: honorable conduct, good deeds and good conscience. The focus here is on the message we communicate before we ever speak a word.

According to Peter, though, the purpose of our good works is not to manipulate God into loving us or other people into liking us. We are called to live good lives for God’s glory. As those who bear Jesus’ name, everything about our lives communicates something about who Jesus is, from the way we spend money to our interaction with neighbors. This means we have the opportunity to honor and glorify God even in the mundane parts of our lives. It’s all about being intentional.

This week, how have you honored God and reflected who He is with your life?

In what ways has your life not matched up to the gospel message?
According to 1 Peter, we introduce the gospel well not only by our goodness, but also by our hope. Our hope should be evident to others. This doesn’t mean we should just put on a “happy face.” It means our lives should be deeply and genuinely marked by our hope in Christ. This hope is often most visible to others when our lives aren’t happy or perfect. It shines in the darkest times, sustaining us through unemployment, messy relationships and miscarriages. It defies circumstances and compels people to ask, “Why do you have hope?”

We naturally want to hide our struggles, but we communicate the gospel most clearly through a life that is genuine. It is in the very way that we respond to struggles and failures that we have an opportunity to live out the gospel. A repentant attitude toward our own sin speaks volumes and provides an opportunity for us to talk about our ongoing need for Christ. Admitting our weakness and pain communicates humility and allows us to point to God’s strength and provision.

**Does Peter’s teaching imply Christians shouldn’t share their faith until they stop sinning completely? Why or why not?**

**SHARING THE GOSPEL WITH OUR WORDS**

Living out the gospel is incredibly important. It should not, however, become a substitute for speaking the gospel. According to 1 Peter 3, we should be ready to explain the reason for our hope. Our lives can’t help bring spiritual transformation to others unless we also introduce them to the One who transformed us.
PREPARING OUR WORDS

The Bible calls us to rely on the Holy Spirit's guidance while we are witnessing, but it also teaches that we should prepare ahead of time. Look back at 1 Peter 3:15-16 and then read Colossians 4:5-6:

“WALK IN WISDOM TOWARD OUTSIDERS, MAKING THE BEST USE OF THE TIME. LET YOUR SPEECH ALWAYS BE GRACIOUS, SEASONED WITH SALT, SO THAT YOU MAY KNOW HOW YOU OUGHT TO ANSWER EACH PERSON.” Colossians 4:5-6 (ESV)

Both passages imply that we should expect witnessing opportunities. If we wait and pray in expectation, we will be more likely to recognize and make the most of the opportunities God provides.

These passages also talk about preparing to give a “defense” or an “answer” to others about why we have hope. This does not mean that we have to memorize and recite a particular gospel presentation. In fact, it’s far more important that we actually understand the gospel. Anytime we understand something well, we feel more comfortable talking about it. Our goal, then, should be to familiarize ourselves with the storyline of the Bible as well as the heart of the story — the gospel. It may help to read a simple retelling multiple times and practice telling it in our own words.

As we grow in our own understanding of the gospel, we can focus less on “getting the words right” and more on our particular gospel-sharing opportunity. Colossians 4:5-6 reminds us of our need for wisdom.

What role does wisdom play in our gospel conversations? What role does the Holy Spirit play?
Does this passage imply we might need to vary the way we communicate the gospel, depending on the listener?

THE ATTITUDE BEHIND OUR WORDS

When it comes to telling others about Jesus, 1 Peter 2-3 teaches that not only our preparation, but also our heart attitude is important. We are to “honor God as holy” in our hearts. Such a reverent attitude toward God will transform our gospel sharing.

How might reverence for God motivate us to focus on God’s words rather than our own opinions?

First Peter 2-3 also addresses our attitude toward the people to whom we witness. We are called to speak “with all gentleness and respect.” Colossians 4:6 calls for our words to be “gracious, seasoned with salt.” The key to this is found in 1 Peter 2:10, where Peter calls to mind the grace and forgiveness we ourselves have received in Christ. Such grace humbles us. It causes us to view others as fellow sinners in need of forgiveness, not as inferiors, enemies or projects. It enables us to share the gospel respectfully regardless of their attitude toward us.
The command to speak graciously, however, should not be interpreted as a command to avoid offense at all costs. Some people will take offense at the gospel itself. Consider the phrase “seasoned with salt.” Just as literal salt stings in an open wound, the truth can sting. But salt also flavors. If we compromise truth to avoid offense, our words lose all flavor or value. Our task, then, is to communicate an “offensive” message in a gentle and gracious way.

As we seek to become more intentional in how we communicate the gospel, let’s remember that God is the one who saves people. We are called to introduce them to the God who saved us and to invite them to join us in the journey of faith.
IMITATING JESUS

Jesus is the ultimate example of how to live intentionally as a disciple-maker. We may not be able to heal people or predict how they will respond to our message, and we certainly won’t be able to live a sinless life. We can, however, learn from how Jesus lived His life. Overall, Jesus discipled deeply and widely. He invested incredible amounts of time and energy in a small group of people, taking everyday opportunities to model and teach. He also invested widely, making the most of even brief conversations with the people He encountered. John 4 reflects this pattern.

Read John 4 on your own before reading the summary below.

JOHN 4 SUMMARY

Jesus and His disciples travel through Samaria on their way to Galilee. Midday, the disciples go to buy food while Jesus rests. When a Samaritan woman comes to fill her water jug at the well, Jesus asks her for a drink. Surprised, the woman wants to know why He’s asking a Samaritan for help. He says, “If you knew who I really was, you would ask Me for living water.” She misunderstands. “You don’t have a bucket, so how can You help me? Are you somehow greater than the man who built this well?” Jesus explains more about living water. “Alright,” she says, “I want some.” Jesus answers, “Call your husband first.” “I don’t have one,” she says. Jesus affirms this by summarizing her relationship history, including divorces and a live-in boyfriend. Shocked, she says, “I guess you’re a prophet.” Then she tries to start a religious debate. Jesus avoids debate and addresses heart issues. She says she’ll hold off judgment until the Messiah comes. Jesus says, “I am the Messiah.”
Jesus’ disciples return with lunch and the woman runs off to tell her neighbors that she’s met the Messiah. Although shocked by Jesus’ conversation partner, the disciples prioritize lunch over asking for an explanation. Not Jesus. He explains, “I was obeying God, and that’s more satisfying than eating lunch.” He draws their attention to the spiritual needs around them, calling them to action. The woman returns with her curious neighbors. They persuade Him to change His travel plans, and in the end many put their faith in Jesus.

Geographically-speaking, Jesus didn’t have to travel through Samaria. There were other routes. In fact, ethnic Jews despised ethnic Samaritans so much that they bypassed Samaria and doubled their travel time. Does the text indicate that Jesus had specific business in Samaria? Why might it mean that Jesus “had” to pass through Samaria?

Jesus was genuinely tired and thirsty from His journey, but He could have waited for His disciples to meet His needs when they returned. Why might He have asked this woman for help instead?

Jesus’ respectful interaction with the Samaritan woman didn’t fit her stereotypes, and she wanted to know why. She even questioned His motives. Instead of getting defensive, Jesus communicated concern for her spiritual well-being and offered His assistance in a way that created curiosity.
What does the woman’s response to His offer (verses 11-12) reveal about her and her assumptions?

The woman tried to compare Jesus with Jacob, who built the well. However, He avoided comparison and returned the discussion to her need and the solution to her need. Why?

The woman said she wanted the solution, but Jesus knew she didn’t really understand. She only recognized her physical needs and wanted a material solution. How did Jesus help her recognize her spiritual needs in a way that reflected truth and graciousness?
Forced to face her own sin, the woman diverted attention by asking an ethnically and politically-charged question involving a dispute between Jews and Samaritans. Since the Jews technically had the Law of Moses on their side, Jesus could have used Scripture to demolish her position. His response, however, barely addressed the subject. Instead He spoke of God’s nature and the importance of genuine heart worship.

Consider Jesus’ response in verses 21-24. Why do you think He chose not to debate with this woman? How might debating have affected the outcome of their conversation?

At this point, the woman sidesteps a personal response by saying she’d leave spiritual matters to the experts. “If the Messiah ever comes, He’ll explain it all to me.” Jesus told her that He Himself was the one who could explain “all things” to her — she could trust His authority.

Unlike Jesus, we cannot claim to have all the answers or to possess ultimate spiritual authority. What authority do we have? Why should people listen to what we have to say?
Notice when the disciples returned, Jesus recognized the teachable moment and explained His actions. He described, firsthand, the joy and satisfaction that comes from obeying God. He also called the disciples to join Him. This disciple-making pattern was typical for Jesus. He demonstrated. He explained. He called others to do the same. Consider how this pattern might be applied in your own life.

How can you observe more mature disciple-makers as they share Christ in ordinary social settings? How can you invite other believers to observe and join you in a similar setting?

We can apply these same principles in our own lives. Here are a few ways we can make disciples like Jesus did:

- **We can plan our lives so they naturally intersect with people who need Jesus**, especially those whom others marginalize or avoid, including ethnic minorities, social outcasts, foreigners and people with other religious beliefs.

- **We can make ourselves vulnerable and admit our own neediness**. We do this genuinely, not as a ploy. We can turn to nonbelievers or new believers for help when appropriate, instead of meeting our needs exclusively in our Christian friendships.

- **We can refuse to take it personally when others don’t respond the way we hope**. When they reject our message, make assumptions about us, question our motives or our credentials, insult our intelligence, or completely misunderstand what we’re saying, we can focus on who Jesus is rather than defend who we are.
We can refuse to get pulled into pointless arguments or controversies. We do this by focusing on the main thing and stating gospel truths, not parading our knowledge and spouting off personal opinions.

We can respond with patience and persistence to the spiritual hesitations of others. One example of this is not pushing people to make decisions they lack the spiritual understanding to make. We must not view people as items on our “to-do” list to be checked off or to be abandoned when success seems improbable.

We can rely on God’s Word as our authority. We can admit we don’t have all the answers and direct others to God and His Word. We don’t need all the answers. We just need to know Who does.

We can initiate discipleship relationships. We can do this by inviting others to be a part of our everyday lives by demonstrating, explaining and calling others to join in.

We can prioritize relationships over efficiency and productivity. Refusing to live lives that are too busy or too scheduled to make time for the needs of others is one way to prioritize relationships. We should be willing to accomplish less in order to love more.

Ask God for wisdom in applying these principles to your own life. Consider specific ways you can use them to become more intentional as a disciple-maker.
IMITATING THE FIRST CHRISTIANS

The book of Acts depicts everyday disciple-making in the early Church. Today, we’ll focus on two representative passages, going beyond the plotline to identify the underlying principles — why the first Christians did what they did and why God wants us to read about it. We can then apply these same principles to our own lives as we seek to live more intentionally.

First, read Acts 10 and then read the summary below.

ACTS 10 SUMMARY

Cornelius is a highly moral non-Jew. God tells him in a dream to invite a man named Peter to be his guest. Meanwhile, in Joppa, God interrupts Peter’s mid-day prayers with a vision of animals the Law of Moses forbade Jews from eating. God says, “Eat!” Peter says, “No!” God says, “I’ve made it clean.” Peter has the same vision three times and then Cornelius’ servants arrive. Peter accepts their invitation at the Holy Spirit’s prompting, and the next morning, he and several other Christians journey to Cornelius’ home. When they are greeted by an expectant crowd, Peter tells his host, “Supposedly Jews can’t associate with non-Jews, but God has changed my thinking.” Cornelius asks Peter for a message from God.

Peter says God isn’t prejudiced by a person’s nationality or ethnicity — He accepts all who fear and obey Him. Peter acknowledges the news that’s going around about finding peace through Jesus. He says, “You already know part of the story — how Jesus did good and worked many miracles — we witnessed this ourselves. Perhaps you don’t know the Jews crucified Jesus, and three days later, God raised Him from the dead. It really happened! There are many eyewitnesses, and we ourselves ate dinner with
Jesus after His resurrection. Jesus commanded us to tell everyone He’s the judge of the earth and the message of Scripture is this: ‘Everyone who believes in Jesus will have their sins forgiven.’” All of Peter’s listeners believe this good news. Filled with God’s Spirit, they praise the Lord in many languages and are baptized. They visit together for several more days.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Peter didn’t have meals with non-Jews because Jewish law included significant dietary restrictions. Their law was based on the Law of Moses, given to the Jews by God Himself. The Law of Moses was temporary in nature, and its ultimate purpose was to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. Over the years, however, layers of human tradition obscured this purpose. By Peter’s lifetime, the law functioned more as a symbol of Jewish cultural superiority than as a light pointing the nations to Christ. Jesus entered and fulfilled the law and freed all who trusted in Him from living under its stringent requirements. Many of Jesus’ first followers were ethnically Jewish. Therefore, the early Church struggled with the issue of how Christians should relate to the law.

Peter grew up in an environment of prejudice and hostility toward non-Jews. Now he was trying to follow Jesus while still keeping Jewish law. Based on Acts 10, in what practical way did Peter’s upbringing hinder him from making disciples of all nations?
Acts 10 describes Cornelius as a good person. What did he still lack in order to be saved, and how did God directly intervene to meet this need? What role did Peter and other Christians play?

God uses Peter’s daily prayer time to prepare him for a disciple-making opportunity. How might this fact encourage us in our own spiritual disciplines?

Consider Acts 10:9-16, 28-29, and 34-35. When God transformed Peter’s views about food, God also transformed Peter’s views about people. Ultimately, Peter changed in his understanding of how God views people of other ethnicities, nationalities and religious backgrounds.

Do any of your own cultural beliefs negatively affect your interaction with certain groups of people?
Verses 34-43 outline Peter’s gospel presentation.

1 The good news of the gospel is for you. God doesn’t discriminate.

2 You’ve already heard some things about Jesus. Peter found common ground and verified the accuracy of assumptions.

3 Here are some details you don’t know. Peter focused on Jesus’ death and resurrection and included his personal testimony and that of others.

4 Here’s who Jesus claims to be and what the whole Bible says about Him. Peter gave a summary of the gospel and identified the authority behind his claims.

Peter didn’t use the exact same words each time he talked about Jesus, but these same basic principles are repeated throughout the New Testament. How can we apply these principles to our own gospel sharing?

Peter’s obedience resulted in God’s glory. As you pray about living more intentionally for the glory of God, consider what other insights this chapter may provide.

Read Acts 16:11-34 and then read the summary on the following page.
ACTS 16:11-34 SUMMARY

Paul travels to Philippi with a mature believer and a young Christian named Silas. They spend their Saturday by the river, where people often come to pray, and they end up telling a women’s prayer group about Jesus. One woman believes, along with her family. Paul and his friends become their guests. When Paul heals a slave girl, her furious owners drag him and Silas to court. Paul and Silas are falsely accused, beaten and thrown in prison. They pray and sing praises all night while the other prisoners listen. Philippi then experiences a violent earthquake. Rather than escape the damaged prison, Paul and Silas save the jailer’s life, tell him and his family about Jesus, and end up baptizing them all.

According to verse 13, how is Paul’s choice of a Saturday afternoon hangout intentional? How does it relate to disciple-making?

Paul and Silas are unjustly beaten and imprisoned, but midnight finds them praying and singing praises to God in front of an audience. What does Paul and Silas’ response to suffering communicate about what they believe? How does their response affect the lives of the jailor and his family?
MORE NEW TESTAMENT PRINCIPLES FOR LIVING INTENTIONALLY

Now that we've drawn applications from today's passages individually, let's consider a few more big-picture principles found in both chapters and throughout the book of Acts.

- **Practicing hospitality.** Believers invited people into their homes and accepted the invitations of others. This resulted in deeper relationships and natural opportunities for sharing God’s truth in word and deed.

- **Making disciples in community.** Disciple-making was an activity done by the church, in community. Ministering together, believers combined their strengths and spiritual gifts, encouraged each other and learned from each other. It was also common for believers to evangelize and disciple entire families or groups of friends together.

- **Making disciples cross-culturally.** Believers took the gospel to people of different ethnicities, nationalities, social classes and religious backgrounds.

- **Sharing simply and personally.** Believers talked about God’s story in their own words, in the context of their own story. They shared relevant Scriptures or stories, as God led, that related to the conversation topic or life circumstances of the individual audience.

- **Focus on God’s Word, prayer and worship.** As integral parts of their own lives, these things also characterized their interaction with others. Believers spoke naturally about the Bible, prayed for people and praised God publically.

Consider rereading today’s passages, as well as the entire book of Acts for examples of how to put these principles into action. Ultimately, God desires that we come away from His Word changed.
How has this week’s study changed your perspective on disciple-making?

In what ways can you begin living more intentionally right now?
KATHERINE CARTER
and her family served in Central Asia for more than a decade. They now reside in North Carolina, where Katherine works as a freelance writer and speaker. She enjoys equipping everyday believers and helping them discover how God has uniquely fitted each of them to fulfill the Great Commission.
How can we be intentional about building relationships with people in our communities?

What is a point of common need over which we can connect with others?

What are some ideas to keep the ultimate purpose of Christ at the forefront of every conversation?

What are ways we can show biblical hospitality to others?

How can we prevent “just giving information” and help people be transformed into the likeness of Christ?

Why is transformation needed?

Why are we unable to transform ourselves?
WEEK 10

TRANSFORMATION

NOT

INFORMATION

// SENDING
“THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS YOUR LIFE”
Transformation is God’s job

We spend so much time and energy trying to change things we don’t like about our personalities, looks, or habits. Many times, we are tempted to think that maybe the next trend, self-help guide, or just a “go get ‘em attitude” will fix our issues and bring contentment and joy to our lives. Our natural inclination is to take information, new or old, and seek to use it in our lives in order to bring about that which we most desire. But oh, how that always fails us! With our spiritual lives, we have convinced ourselves that only the right biblical information will get us doing what God wants us to do. “Give me the verses I need to read and apply, and I’ll be good!” But, this is not good news; it is legalism. Legalism says we can transform ourselves if we are given the right information, but grace says only God can transform us through His divine power and salvation. Legalism says “do” so that God will feel obligated to help you, but grace says “rest” because God already has helped you.

Transformation is God’s job, not ours. We simply receive His gracious salvation and respond with thoughts and actions demonstrating a transformed life.

Why do we need transformation?

Before we look at how the gospel transforms our lives, we need to know why our lives need transformation in the first place.
Look up Genesis 1:26–28 and jot down what God created mankind to do as His image-bearers.

God created man to fill the earth with more worshipers (multiply and fill) and to oversee and care for God’s creation (subdue and have dominion). Now read Genesis 3:15–19 and see how things turn after Adam and Eve rebel against God’s direct, loving commands. People now bear the image of selfishness and pride; pain comes with multiplication; and the earth fights against our dominion while we also try to force dominion over each other. Not quite the “good” intended in Genesis 1:26–28. Everything is broken and groaning for redemption. Our relationship with God, each other, the creation and even our own selves is now broken. Mere information about how we should be fixed is utterly insufficient. We each need to be personally and holistically transformed by someone more powerful than we are — we all need our shattered reflection of God’s image repaired by the one who made us. We need Jesus.

Who can transform our lives?

Mankind’s original sin described in Genesis 3 had cosmic ramifications. Sin brought death to humanity, separation between everyone and everything, and cursing to the ground itself. A self-help manual won’t help with that! The extreme of our sin is beyond repair by our own actions. So, what information does the Bible give about who actually restores all of creation, beginning with transforming each of our own lives?
Read Ephesians 2:8-9 and write out your own “formula” for salvation based on this text.

“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 (ESV)

Your “formula” should allude to the fact that God’s work, a free gift to us, plus nothing we’ve done out of our own ability equals a salvation we don’t deserve (by grace, through faith). Only God has the power to rescue and repair our broken lives — to transform us from shattered reflections of His image to fully restored mirrors of His grace. We receive gospel transformation when we believe that God saves us by His grace and not our efforts. That is good information!

What does a transformed life look like?

Now read the following verse, Ephesians 2:10, and underline what we were transformed to do as our response to God’s transforming salvation.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:10 (ESV)

List two “good works” you have done lately:
TRANSFORMATION NOT INFORMATION

What was your motive for doing them?

A life transformed by God’s gospel rests in the fact that the saved person did not have to do anything to earn God’s gift of salvation and on the fact that the saved person does good works for the glory of Jesus and the sake of their city. God’s task list for mankind in Genesis 1:26–28 was “good work” since it was a command given before the fall and still applies to us today. Yes, we’re broken image-bearers, but we multiply worshipers of God through making, maturing and multiplying disciples of Jesus (Matthew 28:19–20). We oversee creation when we work to bring gospel hope to our broken communities.

God transforms our total being from death to life, and we simply live as if that’s true.

TRANSFORMATION PRODUCES A RESPONSE.

Paul reminds us in Romans 12:1 that because of the mercies of God lavished on us undeserving beings, we are to worship God by sacrificing ourselves through service to Christ and His mission. Christ literally gave up His life for you and me, so we must daily give up our lives through worshipful service. But, what does that look like? Read the rest of the book of Romans. Paul is clear that the gospel isn’t merely good information for us to know, but rather, it transforms us and creates in us a worshipful response on display for the lost to see.

Jesus transformed our lives through His act of worship while we wanted to conform our lives to the worship of a broken world. That’s good information!
Gospel information must lead to gospel transformation. If it doesn’t, then it was never good information. Your transformed life must be multiplied in the lives of others. So:

* **Rest** in the fact that Jesus transforms your heart based on His works and not your own.
* **Rekindle** a passion for filling the earth with Christ-following worshipers.
* **Replicate** your transformed life into the lives of those putting their hope in gospel-less information.

**POST-LESSON EXERCISE**

Read all of Romans 12, and in your own words, finish this statement based on at least three of the “marks” of a Christian that Paul lists:

A gospel-transformed life

Did you pick the three “marks” that you succeed at or struggle with?

Pick one of your three “marks of a Christian” and explain how Jesus lived it out perfectly.
Remind yourself that you bear Jesus’ image and can only live out the “marks” of a transformed person because He lived them out perfectly and gave you His righteousness, even though you cannot live them out perfectly. That’s good news!
GOSPEL INFORMATION MUST LEAD TO GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION.
“THE GOSPEL TRANSFORMS YOUR CITY”
Transformation is God’s job

Every single person needs the power of the gospel to transform their individual lives, but we were not created to be alone. Before the sin of mankind in Genesis 3, everything was good. The sun, moon, stars, land, plants, animals and Adam were all good. Yet in Genesis 2:18, God says, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” God made us to be in community with others — He wanted more and more people to worship Him alongside each other. As mankind began to multiply, we see that they had families and built cities (see Genesis 4:17, 10:1-32, 11:1-9). Cities today are home to millions of people rubbing shoulders daily, selling goods and services, and existing alongside each other. They are full of information regarding taxes, codes and laws to guide their citizens in harmonious living. But because cities are built by sinful people, they are saturated with broken families, greed and disharmony — things that mere information just simply cannot help. Just as we individually need transformation, our cities need it, too. God has placed His Church in your city and uses many different local congregations of different stripes and flavors to work together to saturate your city with more than just better information — He wants to saturate it with the power and hope of the gospel.

Love your city while you’re there.

Read Jeremiah 29:1-7 and answer these questions:

+ To whom was this passage originally written?
What was their situation?

What did God want them to do in the city where He placed them? List what you see in the text.

Jeremiah had a word from the Lord for the Jews living in punishment in Babylon, but God’s instructions really didn’t make sense given the situation. In essence, God told them to seek the good of Babylon, flourish there and be part of the city, even though they were there as captives from war. God wanted them to multiply. Sound familiar from our previous lesson? God also wanted them to work to see the city prosper, the result of good dominion from Genesis 1:28. Bless the city that has imprisoned you? Yes. Work to see a corrupt city be transformed into a better city? Yes.

Most likely, you are not in exile in a city in North Carolina like the Jews were in Babylon. You may not like everything about your town, but I doubt that you can say that you are in exile. We are not the Old Testament Jews, and the promise in Jeremiah 29:11 isn’t directly given to us, but this passage has much to teach us about how our church — and even we as individuals and families — should view the city in which we live. God wants us to not just spread gospel-sounding information throughout the municipal geography in which we reside, but to labor to see lives and families within our city transformed by God’s good news of hope, salvation and restoration. While
you’re living in your city, make disciples who are transformed by Jesus. When you move to a new city, make disciples who are transformed by Jesus. When you leave a city, remember to pray for more disciples to be made who are transformed by Jesus.

Love the city in which God has placed you for as long as He keeps you there.

HOW DO WE SEE A CITY TRANSFORMED BY THE GOSPEL?

Many would try to answer this question with information about political restructuring, education reform or economic growth. These are all good things, and they do keep a city functioning, but they are not ultimate. These do not holistically transform families from broken to restored. That is God’s job. Legalism will try to convince the people in our churches that we can transform a city for Jesus by just disseminating the right information to people. We’ve convinced ourselves that if we simply let everyone know where our church building is located and what time we host events, we’ll see lives transformed. Undoubtedly, this has happened a few times — perhaps a person arrived at the church, and they were gloriously saved. However, this is not the typical response in our present-day culture. God wants to transform your city with His hope, salvation and restoration, and He wants to use your church to carry this out. God wants His children in your city — no matter what local congregation they call family — to collaborate together to see every man, woman and child in your area have repeated opportunities to hear, see and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The story of the early church in the book of Acts provides a great snapshot of what this city transformation looked like. Read the passages below and answer these two questions based on each passage:

+ What were the Christians doing?
+ What were the results?

Acts 2:42-47
WEEK 10

Acts 4:32–35

Acts 5:12–16

What was their secret? Through the power of the Holy Spirit, they filled Jerusalem with their teaching about the risen King who saves lost people (Acts 5:27–32), worked to serve every man, woman and child in their city (Acts 6:1–7), and were later accused of turning the world upside down with the gospel (Acts 17:6). That’s good news and something worth emulating. Your church can reenact the book of Acts in your city today.

POST-LESSON EXERCISE

Reflect on this lesson and the Great Commission passage in Matthew 28:18–20. On the following page, write a mission statement for your city that centers around gospel transformation — not just distributing good information.

THEN ASK YOURSELF, “Would every man, woman, and child in our city have repeated opportunities to hear, see and respond to the gospel if our church carried out this mission statement?”
NOTES
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DISCIPLESHIP THAT DELIGHTS IN JESUS
What are your delights?

If I asked you the question, “What do you do for fun?” how would you answer? Perhaps, you would list hobbies you enjoy or people you like spending time with.

But, what if I asked, “What do you delight in?” How would you answer? Asking about our “delights” cuts a bit deeper than “fun” doesn’t it? Our delights involve our deepest loves and joys, the most meaningful parts of our lives.

So, if I asked, “Do you delight in Jesus?” how would you answer? Does Jesus connect with your deepest joys, loves and delights and the things that are most meaningful in your life?

“How happy is the man who does not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path of sinners, or join a group of mockers! Instead, his delight is in the Lord’s instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. He is like a tree planted beside streams of water that bears fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.” Psalm 1:1-3 (HCSB)
WHERE BURDEN BECOMES DELIGHT

A friend recently confided in me that while he is committed to Christ, he struggles to delight in Him — especially in His law. He said, “I feel burdened by the law. How am I supposed to delight in it?”

As I inquired further about his “burden,” it became clear that my friend viewed his walk with Christ as if Jesus were standing before him, whip in hand, waiting to crack it over his back at every mistake or misstep. But, this is not the case!

Jesus does not stand before us, whip in hand, waiting to strike when we fail. Instead, Christ stands before us, scars in hand, reminding us of His great gift of love and grace. This is where burden becomes delight!

DELIGHTING IN CHRIST

The “happy” or “blessed” person of Psalm 1 is held up by the psalmist as the model God-follower. While he is aware of the “way of the wicked,” he walks in the “way of the Lord” — indeed, he delights in His way! And, by walking in this way, “whatever he does prospers.”

This is not support for a false, prosperity gospel. Instead, it is the assurance that people are built to live (walk) according to the Creator’s design. And, His law is the road map for that way of walking.

Furthermore, God’s way is not just an illustration for life — it is a person, Jesus, the Christ.

Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Thus, as we delight in God’s way of life in the world, we delight in Christ, who is the way, truth, and life. This is our great joy, love and delight. This is what gives purpose and meaning to all of life. The crucified and risen King stands before us not to condemn, but to compel us toward life that delights in Him, His law and His way.

“How I love Your teaching! It is my meditation all day long. Your command makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me.” Psalm 119:97 (HCSB)
DELIGHTING IN DISCIPLE-MAKING

But, how does our delight in Christ translate into disciple-making?

First, if Christ is truly your delight, others will want what you have. Christ is contagious. His love and joy radiate from His followers, and this fullness of life is missing for most people. If you truly delight in Jesus, opportunities to make disciples will abound as others will want what you have, and they will want to learn from you about delighting in Christ.

Second, if you delight in Christ, not only will people want what you have, but you will want them to have it, as well. Thus, you will not “wait and make disciples,” you will “go … and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19) under Christ’s authority. And, this is not a burden. How can it be? Seeing people who are made in God’s image restored to their Father through Jesus, then living joyful, Spirit-filled lives is a delight!

PRAYER: Lord, grant us grace, that we may delight in You and delight in making disciples.

Do you delight in Christ, and would others testify that this is true of you? Why or why not?

What lesser things do you delight in? How can you begin to replace those delights with the delight of Christ?
Do you feel burdened by God and His law, or are you motivated by God’s love in Jesus to live for Him?

Are you motivated to teach others the way of the Lord? Why or why not?

What must happen for disciple-making to become a regular part of your life?
WHERE TO DISCIPLE? “HIDE HIM UNDER A BUSHEL? NO!”
Show me Jesus!

If I came to your town and asked you to take me to Jesus in your town, where would we go? Perhaps the first place we would go is to your church, where we would doubtless meet many people who exude the joy of Christ.

But, where else would we go? What about the banks? The city-center? The places where you shop? The restaurants? Schools? Ballfields? Theaters? Art studios? Could you show me Jesus in these places?

A friend once posed this question to a crowd, and a collective gasp could be felt across the room with the realization that most of us would struggle to identify Jesus anywhere outside the walls of our local churches.

This raises an important question: where do we make disciples?

Consider the following passages:

“The earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord; for He laid its foundation on the seas and established it on the rivers.”
Psalm 24:1-2 (HCSB)

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible ... all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together.” Colossians 1:15-17 (HCSB)
WHERE DO WE MAKE DISCIPLES?

In order to answer this question, it is important to identify various domains of life. These may be different from person to person, but for many, they are generally the same. I’ve found it helpful to categorize life’s domains as church, home, neighborhood/community and workplace. We might also call these our “vocations,” or places in life to which we are called.

**CHURCH** seems a natural place for discipleship to take place, and indeed it is. This is where our Christian foundations are laid, reinforced from week to week, and where our marching orders as Christ-followers are given. But, there is a problem: despite the fact that many (maybe even most) “disciple-making” strategies are designed for Sundays or Wednesdays during church meeting times, most of our time is not spent within the walls of our church buildings.

Thus, it is critical that we not hide Jesus under the bushel of our local churches. Instead, we must unleash Christ into the whole of His world, the world that was made by Him, through Him and for Him. This is the world that God so loved, He sent His only Son to save. And, this is the world that Christ is restoring into a new heaven and earth.

It is in this world that Jesus has placed us to love God and neighbor and to teach others to do the same.

**HOME** is another domain to which we are called. Allow me directly to address parents for a moment: mom and dad, do not neglect the discipleship of your children. My childhood pastor wisely said just days before my wedding, “I can always pastor another church, but I only have one family.”

Parents, we must not neglect the godly training of our children. At times, we entrust this to others such as teachers, youth pastors, and so on. But, the primary responsibility is ours to promote the great commandment and the Great Commission in our home — and not merely to promote them, but to practice them. Discipleship is as much caught as taught, and perhaps nowhere is this truer than at home.

A third domain in life is the **NEIGHBORHOOD/COMMUNITY**. Ironically, it seems that Christians admit to being less intentional in this domain than any other. It is ironic because Jesus’ command to “love your neighbor” is so clear, yet arguably our next-door-neighbors receive the least amount of love.
Why is this the case? I suggest that we are weak at making disciples in our neighborhoods because we do not love our neighbors, and thus we do not prioritize spending time with them. While our time may be spent on many good things, may our neighbors never say of us, “Depart from me, I never knew you.”

A final domain where we must make disciples is at WORK. American adults spend some 50 percent or more of their waking hours at their workplace. Yet, American Christians struggle to explain how Sunday connects to Monday. If “the earth and everything in it, the world and its inhabitants, belong to the Lord,” why is there such a disconnect between our work and our worship?

Could it be because we’ve tried to protect Jesus from the world by hiding Him under the bushel of our local churches? I assure you, Jesus needs no protection. Unleash Him into every domain in creation to claim what is rightfully His. And, let it begin with the domain of your own life.

PRAYER: Lord, grant us grace, that we might see the world as that which belongs to You. And may Jesus be recognized in our lives at church, at home, in our neighborhoods and at work.

Are you making disciples in every domain of life? If not, why not?

Do you hide Jesus under the bushel of your local church instead of unleashing Him into the whole of His world?
If your neighbors graded you on “neighborliness,” what grade would you expect to receive? What neighborly improvements can you make immediately?

How do you connect Sunday to Monday through Saturday?
HOW TO DISCIPLE?
Discipleship as apprenticeship

A few years ago, a newly married woman in our small group asked my wife, Ashley, a rather strange question. She asked, “Can I come over occasionally in the evenings and watch you with the kids?”

In short, our friend and her husband were preparing to be parents but felt ill-equipped, as we all do! She was especially anxious about evening bath and bedtime routines, so she wanted to watch and learn from Ashley.

I interpreted this initially as mom-to-mom apprenticeship. But, then it occurred to me: this isn’t just apprenticeship; this is mom-to-mom discipleship! How so? Because one mom was transferring to another soon-to-be-mom the ways of Christ in motherhood.

HOW TO MAKE DISCIPLES?

Consider the following passages:

“I’m not writing this to shame you, but to warn you as my children. For you can have 10,000 instructors in Christ, but you can’t have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. Therefore I urge you to imitate me. This is why I have sent Timothy to you. He is my dearly loved and faithful son in the Lord. He will remind you about my ways in Christ Jesus, just as I teach everywhere in every church.” 1 Corinthians 4:14-17 (HCSB)

“Therefore whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God’s glory. Give no offense to the Jews or the Greeks or the church of God, just
Christian discipleship is about learning and promoting the ways of Christ in His world. Notice that I didn’t limit discipleship to learning and promoting the ways of Christ in His Church. We are called to be salt and light to God’s world, and thus we must faithfully promote Christ’s ways in all areas of life.

If this is true, then answering the question, “How do we make disciples?” begins with a shift in mindset that discipleship is apprenticeship for Christian living at church, home, in our neighborhoods/communities and at work. It is whole-life discipleship, not just church-life discipleship.

Thinking this way brings disciple-making a little closer to Christians who do not view themselves as equipped to disciple others. The language of apprenticeship familiarizes the concept of discipleship while also expanding our understanding of it to stretch beyond the walls of the church.

Ashley is a perfect example of this. She is not seminary-trained, and she hyperventilates at the thought of speaking in front of adults. She is, however, serious about Christ and His ways in all of life — especially in her favorite role as “mom.” And this was evident to our small group friends who wanted to learn from her.

We must also be bold enough to be a Timothy from 1 Corinthians 4. Perhaps we should be bold enough to call people to “imitate me” as Paul did, but maybe taking Timothy’s place feels more likely. Paul sent Timothy to remind the Corinthians of the ways of Christ, and this is precisely what we do in disciple-making. We call people to remember the ways of Christ — and these begin with loving God and loving others.

Also, we should be available and looking for people to apprentice in our church, home, neighborhood/community and work. Perhaps you are thinking, “Who would want to learn from me?” Indeed, it is important for us to self-reflect on the faithfulness of our walk with Christ, but our insecurities about being imperfect do not dismiss the responsibility to make disciples. Instead, acknowledging our blemishes and imperfections, let us cling to Christ and invite others to join with us.
WHAT DO I TEACH?

Consider Jesus’ words from Mark 12:

“One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, ‘Which command is the most important of all?’

‘This is the most important,’ Jesus answered:

‘Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is One. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other command greater than these.’”

Mark 12:28-31 (HCSB)

While there is much to say about what to teach a disciple or apprentice, according to Jesus, there is nothing more important than loving God and loving others. If this is true, then it applies to every domain, and it must take top priority in disciple-making.

Not only does our disciple-making reach beyond the walls of the church building, but moreover, the most important goal for Christians in every domain is the same: love God and love neighbor. Whether a farmer, educator, politician or stay-at-home mom, the twin loves apply as the chief aim of every activity.

Love for God and others is the way of Christ in the world. Any Christian can teach love. One does not need a Bible degree to apprentice believers in God-love and neighbor-love. Particularly, in specific vocations, we must actively recruit Christians who work in the same or related fields to “follow me as I follow Christ,” learning and promoting the way of Christ in our churches, homes, neighborhoods/communities and at work.

So much more could be said, but let us conclude with an exhortation to transfer love for God and neighbor to those you apprentice in every domain.
PRAYER: Lord Christ, motivate us in teaching others your commands, beginning with love for God and love for others. Despite our imperfections, help us promote your ways in your world with all humility and grace.

Have you ever taught someone a skill? Sewing, typing, cooking, carpentry? How does this overlap with teaching someone to follow Christ in every area of life?

What do the “ways of Christ” look like in your work, home and neighborhood? How can you transfer this to others?

Who is one person whom you can apprentice in the ways of Christ?
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Where do we make disciples?

Where can people see Jesus in your community?

Which places do you go every day where you could make disciples?

How are you loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself?
If you have moved into a relationship with God through Jesus, we believe that it is essential to invest in and build up your relationship with Jesus. Here are five practical ways to continue your walk with Jesus:

**REHEARSE THE GOSPEL**

The good news of Jesus’ perfect life lived, death in our place, burial and resurrection has rescued you from your sin and gives you hope for an eternity with God. This same Jesus will strengthen you daily in your fight against sin and will sustain you until the end of your life on earth. Now that you have repented from sin and turned to Jesus and trusted in His great work, the Holy Spirit now lives in you and is the means through which Jesus strengthens and sustains you.

**READ YOUR BIBLE**

This book called the Bible is an amazing book. It will become to your soul what food is to your body — it sustains. As you read and meditate, it will strengthen your resolve to keep following Jesus. It will help you grow toward God and fight against sin. It will shape your thoughts, encourage your heart and guide your path. Treasure this book as you continue to trust Jesus. There are great reading plans that can serve you such as this one: [www.bible.com/reading-plans/14-first-steps-reading-plan](http://www.bible.com/reading-plans/14-first-steps-reading-plan).

**RELY ON PRAYER**

Prayer is simply conversing with God. It is talking to God and listening to God. Prayer will become an integral part of your following Jesus, and yes, prayer can be done at anytime and at anyplace because of what Jesus has accomplished.
Here is a simple grid using the word PRAY that could serve you in your prayer life:

**P:** Praise God.
**R:** Repent of continual sin struggles.
**A:** Ask Jesus to help you follow Him, and never hold back expressing to Him all that’s on your heart.
**Y:** Yield your life to God’s mission to make Jesus known to all people, including the neighborhood you live in and the nations that have little to no access to the gospel of Jesus.

**RUN IN COMMUNITY**

Join a Bible-teaching, Jesus-loving, Spirit-filled, local church — quickly. God never intended for you to follow Jesus by yourself. Surround yourself with others in a local church who love Jesus and learn from them, be encouraged by them and be an encourager to them. Once you find a local church, join that church, get baptized and let the church know that you are a follower of Jesus. Begin taking communion and let that serve you in remembering all that Jesus has done for you and that He is returning soon.

**RECITE YOUR STORY**

Tell anyone and everyone all that Jesus has done for you. It’s your story of God’s grace in your life. Tell it concisely, joyfully, passionately and as often as possible. Our city and this world need to hear the good news of Jesus, and you have it. Make disciples.
notes


In Patterned an Arthur Hopkins quote was used. It is cited by most sources on the internet as: *The Christian Treasury Containing contributions from Ministers & Members of Various Evangelical Denominations* (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter & Co., 1875).


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SHARING & IMITATING CHRIST TOGETHER