

Gospel Christianity



Participants Guide | Course 2

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

Luke 9:24

Table of contents

1	Study 1	How do I follow Jesus?
11	Study 2	How do I meet Jesus myself?
22	Study 3	How do I meet Jesus with others?
31	Study 4	How do I relate to other Christians?
42	Study 5	How do I relate to my neighbor?
53	Study 6	How do I relate to those who don't believe?
62	Study 7	How do I relate to those who wrong me?
72	Study 8	How do I relate to money?
83	Study 9	How do I relate to love and marriage?
95	Study 10	How do I relate to my work?

Gospel Christianity

How do I follow Jesus?

Study 1 | Course 2

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

KEY CONCEPT — DISCIPLESHIP

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

Called to relationship

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

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

Called to ultimate allegiance

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

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

Called to unconditional obedience

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

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

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

Called to listen and learn

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

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

Called to suffer and serve

Many times Jesus called his disciples to:

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

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

Called to mission

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

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

Called by grace

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

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

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

BIBLE STUDY #2

Luke 9:22-25, 51-62

1. What do we learn about discipleship from vv.22-25?

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

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

READINGS

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

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

– Rebecca Pippert¹

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

– Barbara Boyd²

Cheap grace is the enemy of the church. It means forgiveness of sins proclaimed as a general truth... an intellectual assent to that idea is held to be itself sufficient to secure remission of sins. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance... grace without discipleship, grace without a cross... Costly grace is the gospel [of the church]... It is costly because it costs a man his life, and grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin and grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his son... it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God... When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die. That is why the rich young man was so loath to follow Jesus, for the cost of his following was the death of his will. In fact, every command of Jesus is a call to die, with all our affections and lusts.

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer³

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

2. Consider the Pippert and Boyd quotes. What reasons do they give for making Christ Lord of our lives?

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

When Hitler came to power in 1933, a group of younger ministers, including Dietrich Bonhoeffer, opposed him, but the Nazi bishop of the German church ordered ministers to "preach the pure gospel" and forbade them from speaking out about Hitler's policies because that was preaching "politics." Most of the German ministers and church members complied. The resisting ministers spoke out and persecution followed. Bonhoeffer was eventually arrested and executed by the Nazis.

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

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

4. Think of the main areas of your life:

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

Look at each area and ask the following questions:

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

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

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

¹Rebecca Pippert, *Out of the Saltshaker* (2nd ed. IVP, 1999), p. 52-54.

²Barbara Boyd was Inter-Varsity staff for many years. This quote is from notes taken from her "Lordship" talk that was part of the *Bible and Life* course of training she developed.

³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (MacMillan, 1959), p. 45-48.

Gospel Christianity

How do I meet Jesus myself?

Study 2 | Course 2

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

KEY CONCEPT — MEDITATION

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

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

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

The Biblical term meditation often appears in the Psalms.

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

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

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

Meditatio – Reflecting*Meditate and listen for the voice of God*

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

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

Oratio – Praying

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

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

Contemplatio – Sensing

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

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

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

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

Set #2 – John 1:29-34

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

Set #3 – John 1:35-42

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

Set #4 – John 1:43-61

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

Which set of questions did you prefer? Why?

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

READINGS

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

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

– George Mueller¹

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

– Richard Baxter

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

– Jonathan Edwards²

"First comes the actual exercise of the mind, fixing thoughts and meditations upon spiritual truths... Next comes the inclination of all the affections toward these things, whereby they cleave to the spiritual truths and make an engagement unto them... Finally comes a relish and a savor in which lies the sweetness and the satisfaction of the spiritual life. We taste then by experience that God is gracious, and that the love of Christ is better than wine... If we settle for mere speculations and mental notions about Christ as doctrine, we

shall find no transforming power or efficacy communicated unto us thereby. But when, under the conduct of spiritual light, our affections do cleave unto him with full purpose of heart, our minds fill up with thoughts and delight in him — then virtue [change in character] will proceed from him to purify us, increase our holiness, and sometimes fill us with joy unspeakable and full of glory... Where light leaves the affections behind, it ends in formality and or atheism; where affections outrun light they sink into the bog of superstition.”

– John Owen³

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

– Blaise Pascal

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

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

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

³John Owen, *The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded*

Gospel Christianity

How do I meet Jesus with others?

Study 3 | Course 2

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

KEY CONCEPT — WORSHIP

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

What is worship?

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

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

When is worship?

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

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

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

How do we worship?

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

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

READINGS

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

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

– Archbishop William Temple¹

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

– N.T. Wright²

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

means]... no matter how much we suffer, no matter our doubts, no matter how angry we get, no matter how many times we have asked in desperation "How long?," prayer develops finally into praise. Everything finds its way to the doorstep of praise. This is not to say that other prayers are inferior to praise, only that all prayer pursued far enough, becomes praise... Don't rush it. It may take years, decades even, before certain prayers arrive at the hallelujahs, at Psalm 146-150. Not every prayer is capped off with praise. In fact, most prayers, if the Psalter is a true guide, are not. But prayer is always reaching toward praise and will finally arrive there. So... our lives fill out in goodness. Earth and heaven meet in an extraordinary conjunction. Clashing cymbals announce the glory. Blessing. Amen. Hallelujah.

– Eugene Peterson³

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

2. Consider the Temple quote. How well does this definition fit with the Biblical material on worship that we have looked at in this unit?

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

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

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

³Eugene Peterson, *Answering God*

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to other Christians?

Study 4 | Course 4

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

KEY CONCEPT — MEMBERS

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

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

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

AFFIRMING ONE ANOTHER

Affirming one another's strengths, abilities and gifts

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

Affirming one another's equal importance in Christ

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

Affirming one another through visible affection

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

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

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

Sharing one another's needs and problems

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

Sharing one another's beliefs, thinking and spirituality

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

SERVING ONE ANOTHER*Serving one another through accountability*

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

Serving one another through forgiveness and reconciliation

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

Serving one another's interests rather than our own

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

1. Which statements impressed or helped you and why?

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

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

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

READINGS

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

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

– D. Bonhoeffer²

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

– D.A. Carson³

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

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

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

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

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

– D. Bonhoeffer⁴

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

2. Consider your own relationships with other believers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to my neighbor?

Study 5 | Course 2

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

KEY CONCEPT — JUSTICE

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

What do we owe our neighbor?

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

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

Who is our neighbor?

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

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

What is ‘justice’?

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

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

Should we still be concerned about injustice today?

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

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

Why should we do justice?

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

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

Summary

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

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

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

READINGS

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

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

–Roman Emperor Julian (360 A.D.)¹

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

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

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

– Harvie Conn³

"Christians should form communities that establish a voluntary consensus on minimum levels of income and resources below which people in the community should not be allowed to fall, and maximum levels of consumption and expenditure on self, above which people ought not be allowed to continue... Christians should focus on the creation of small local groups of a cross-section of major political, economic, and religious leaders of individual communities, taking the needs of their local settings into their own hands, as an alternative both to the impersonal and often ruthless policies of multi-

national corporations that dominate global capitalism and to the large interventionist and statist machines that often characterize western and particularly European governments."

– Craig Blomberg⁴

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

– Cornelius Plantinga⁵

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

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

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

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

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

⁶ Stark, p. 76.

⁷ Stark, p. 94, 211.

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

Gospel Christianity

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

Study 6 | Course 2

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

KEY CONCEPT – EVANGELISM

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

“Gospelizing” in the Book of Acts

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

The Gospel in the Book of Acts

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

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

Household "Gospelizing" in the Book of Acts

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

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

1. Which statements struck you and why?

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

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

READINGS

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

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

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

- LS** I guess Karl Marx is my hero. [Editor's note: Remember, this was 1979!]
- BP** What makes him your hero?
- LS** I think his ideas were great — they haven't always been carried out rightly.
- BP** But what exactly is so great about his ideas?
- LS** He's my hero because of his passionate regard for the oppressed.
- BP** I agree with that concern, but I know Marx holds no belief in God.
- LS** Yes, he sees the universe as godless, and we have meaning only in a corporate sense of class. We are not significant as individuals.
- BP** Yet you admire his regard for the oppressed even though they are ultimately insignificant. It seems strange to value people so highly when they are random products of a universe. Why not manipulate them as you please?
- LS** I couldn't do that. I guess if my natural response is to feel [individuals] are significant then I need a philosophic system that says the same things. But I believe we are basically good. If we could just live in a classless society, we would be free of the things that weigh us down.
- BP** Listen, I know a guy who is one of the worst racists. If he lived with you for 50 years in your classless society, he would still think "nigger."

How can Marx wipe out the ugliness and hatred of a bigot?

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

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

LS Hey, what kind of revolution are you into?

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

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

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

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

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to those who wrong me?

Study 7 | Course 2

KEY CONCEPT – FORGIVENESS

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

God’s Forgiveness and Ours

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

A Balance

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

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

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

The Definition of Forgiveness

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

Which statements struck you and why?

BIBLE STUDY #2

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

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

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

READINGS

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

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

– Don Carson¹

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

– Dan Hamilton²

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

– Miroslav Volf³

"Why do we 'keep score'? First, it makes us feel superior to the person we resent. Also, it gives us an excuse for indulging in exquisite plots for revenge, such as hurting the person by withholding our ultimate treasure — personal friendship... Third... There is a sense in which we remember past wounds to

hurt ourselves. [Why?]... We feel noble and worthy as the decent person who was wrongly hurt. They give us a chance to justify ourselves. But we do, in fact, also hate resentment... It depresses us, robs us of gratitude, sneaks into other relationships... If you cannot free people from their wrongs... you enslave yourself to your own painful past, and by fastening yourself to the past, you let your hate become your future. You can reverse your future only by releasing other people from their pasts.

– Lewis Smedes⁴

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

– L. Gregory Jones⁵

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

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

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

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

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

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to money?

Study 8 | Course 2

KEY CONCEPT – MONEY

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

A community for radical giving

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

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

The guidelines for radical giving

The tithe

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

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

Surplus and sacrifice

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

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

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

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

Community

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

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

The dynamic for radical giving

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

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

Which statements struck you and why?

BIBLE STUDY #3

Luke 11:37-42

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

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

READINGS

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

When we were first married more than eighteen years ago, my wife and I committed to begin with a tithe, based on the very modest income I had when I was a graduate student, and then to increase that percentage if God increased his annual provisions for us. Over the years God has blessed us... Our overall combined family income... puts us \$4,000 below the average household income for our affluent suburban community. Nevertheless, we are able to give over 30% of our income to our church and to para-church organizations and individuals involved in Christian ministry. This was our fifth consecutive year of topping 30%, following the principle of the graduated tithe. I must quickly confess that we live in a large, comfortable suburban home. It is true that our neighbors for the most part are working class or retired rather than professional and that our suburb is surrounded by considerably more affluent ones, to which most of my once professional neighbors have moved. We are happy to give nice gifts to our children so as to make them feel not too different from their peers socio-economically, and to enjoy recreational activities, cultural and sporting events, a meal out — though compared to our suburban friends we do these latter things considerably less frequently... We refuse to go into debt for anything but property and education, bought cars only that we could afford to pay cash for, bought goods in bulk, at discounts, at garage sales and thrift shops. We have not amassed the number or nature of clothes most Westerners seem compelled to accumulate. Nor is anything I have written meant to suggest that I believe savings, investments, insurance or pension schemes are wrong. I have all these and hope their earning continues to grow. While I know of others who, for a variety of reasons have adopted a much more radically simple lifestyle, God has not yet led me to follow them, even after considerable discussion, prayer, and soul-searching. In short I feel I have a very rewarding life, materially speaking, and am not a particularly exemplary model of sacrificial giving... but when the American Christian average of total giving per family is below 3% of per capita income, surely we can do considerably better!

– Craig Blomberg ⁵

By the gospel we must give aid even when we can't do it without suffering ourselves... how else will we bear one another's burdens? If we are never obliged to relieve others' burdens but when we can do it without burdening ourselves, then how do we bear our neighbor's burdens when we bear no burdens at all?"

– Jonathan Edwards ⁶

Personal Memorandum - December 1868

Thirty-three and an income of \$50,000 per annum. By this time two years I can so arrange all my business as to secure at least 50,000 per annum. Beyond this never earn — make no effort to increase fortune, but spend the surplus each year for benevolent purposes. Cast aside business forever except for others...

...Man must have an idol. The amassing of wealth is one of the worst species of idolatry. No idol more debasing than the worship of money. Whatever I engage in I must push inordinately therefore should I be careful to choose a life which will be the most elevating in character. To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares and with most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time, must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery. I will resign business at Thirty-five...

– Andrew Carnegie 7

4. Consider the following exercise, if you have never done something similar:

- Estimate what percentage of your money is currently going to:
 - a) Christian ministry – church, Christian workers, other ministries
 - b) People outside your family with economic needs
- How close is this to 10% of your income?
- Develop a plan for regular giving:
 - a) Decide what percentage of your income you will give this year.
 - b) Make it a sacrificial level. Identify the sacrifices in your own mind that you will probably have to make.
 - c) Prayerfully determine how this giving portion will be distributed among causes you feel will honor him.
 - d) Decide at what intervals you will give and have a way to keep a record of how well you follow your plan.

¹ L. Vischer, *Tithing in the Early Church* (Fortress, 1966) p. 10.

² Craig Blomberg, *Neither Riches nor Poverty* (Apollos, 1999) p. 136.

³ *Ibid*, p.132.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.145.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.248-249.

⁶ Jonathan Edwards, "The Duty of Charity" in *Works* ed. by Edward Hickman, vol. 2, p.171 (Banner of Truth, 1974.)

⁷ Quoted in Os Guinness, *Doing Well and Doing Good: Money, Giving, and Caring in a Free Society* (Navpress, 2001), pp.281-282.

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to love and marriage?

Study 9 | Course 2

KEY CONCEPT – MARRIAGE

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

What are the purposes of marriage according to the Bible?

- To build kingdom-exhibiting community before the world (1 Cor 7)
Christians should choose partners not primarily for personal fulfillment or social status/security. Rather, we choose marriage and a partner to be a *sign* of the future kingdom.
 - a) We marry to show how God’s grace creates unity across the gender barrier and reunites humanity.
 - b) We marry to bear and disciple children, creating a new Christian community in which relationships of truth and love exist in interdependent balance.
- To be a vehicle for our spouse’s future-selves through sacrificial service (Eph 5)
Christians should choose marriage partners not just for what they are, but in view of what they can become. We are to develop a vision for ministry to our spouse. It is a life-long commitment to our spouse’s future beauty and glory.
 - a) We want to do whatever it takes to be a vehicle for that and so we develop strategies of service to our spouse that confront, affirm and forgive.
 - b) And of course, nothing will help your spouse grow more than if he or she is committed to your growth in the same way.
 - c) This view of marriage in the long run provides great personal fulfillment, but not in the sacrifice-less and superficial way that contemporary people want it to come.

What is the purpose of the single life according to the Bible?

- Christianity was the first major religion that held up the single life as a valid way to live. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 holds both marriage and singleness before his readers as options.
 - a) Traditional cultures tend to make an idol of marriage and family, so singleness is seen as aberrant.

- b) Contemporary Western culture tends to make an idol of individual freedom, so marriage is delayed or derided.
- c) Christianity does neither. The strongest ties are not those of blood, but of faith (Mark 3:31-35), so the church is our ultimate security and community.
- If through the gospel our security and hope is in Christ, we will neither fear nor over-desire marriage. This means that Christian singles should do seasonal marriage-seeking.
 - a) While much of the time you may be passive, waiting to come across someone, there should be other times in which you deliberately look for prospective marriage partners among people that you may be overlooking.
- As Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 7, the advantages of the single life is the greater amount of discretionary time and money that can be given to others in ministry.

What is the purpose of sex according to the Bible?

- Sex is God's way for one person to say to another, "I belong completely, exclusively to you in every aspect: socially, legally, economically, spiritually and emotionally."
 - a) In 1 Corinthians 6:17, Paul forbids sex between unmarried persons.¹ He insists it is radically dissonant to give your body to someone to whom you will not also commit your whole life.
 - b) Sexual integrity means we should not split off the body from the rest of the life. Don't give your body if you aren't willing to give your whole life.
- When physical one-ness is an expression of whole life one-ness, then sex deepens the trust and love between two people.
 - a) Sex outside marriage is asking for physical union without the willingness to give up your freedom.
 - b) So sex is a way God invented to do "whole-life-entrustment" and self-giving. It mirrors the whole-life commitment we make to Christ (Eph 5:22ff).
 - c) If you use sex for physical and emotional gratification instead, you weaken your ability to do this entrustment.

1. Which statements struck you and why?

2. What is wrong with wanting to marry for personal fulfillment or for social status and security?

[Note: If your group consists mainly of married persons, you may do only Bible Study #'s 1, 3 or 4. If your group consists mainly of single persons, you may do only Bible Study #'s 1, 2 or 4.]

BIBLE STUDY #1

Genesis 2:18-24

1. Verse 21 says Adam did not have (literally) 'a help fit for him.' Consider the other uses of this word in Exod 18:4, Ps 121:1-3, Hos 13:9. What does this tell us about the woman?

2. Verse 24 says "for this reason" a man shall unite with his wife. What is this "reason" referred to?

BIBLE STUDY #4

Matthew 5:27-30

1. How does Jesus' teaching here subvert the classic double standard of male and female sexual mores?

2. What does Jesus urge us not to do? What does he urge us to do?

READINGS

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

Immediate erotic thrill is the most superficial benefit of the sex act. The bodily exposure that arouses and accompanies it can be both profoundly symbolic and powerfully healing. It is the healing, concrete sign of what is happening in the whole relationship — the uncovering of our inner selves, our deepest fears and yearnings. As I look tenderly on the body of another — and as I experience what it is to feel the tenderness of another's caress — then the one who accepts and touches my most intimate body and caresses it with tenderness caresses also my inmost being — or so it seems when all is right... So it only makes sense that sexual relations be confined to marriage. For mutual disclosure and tender acceptance is not the activity of a moment, but the delicate fabric of a lifetime's weaving. Each time sex springs from casual encounter—physical disclosure and touching — some of its life-giving and healing nature is destroyed.

– John White ¹

The monstrosity of sexual intercourse outside marriage is that those who indulge in it are trying to isolate one kind of union (the sexual) from all the other kinds of union which were intended to go along with it and make up the total union. The Christian attitude does not mean there is anything wrong about sexual pleasure, any more than about the pleasure of eating. It means you must not isolate that pleasure and try to get it by itself, any more than you ought to try to get the pleasures of tasting without swallowing and digesting, by chewing things and spitting them out again. ²

We use an unfortunate idiom when we say of a man prowling the streets, that "he wants a woman." Strictly speaking, a woman is what he does not want. He wants a pleasure for which a woman happens to be a necessary apparatus... [Real love] makes a man really want, not [even] a woman, but one particular woman. In some mysterious fashion, the lover desires the Beloved herself, not the pleasure she can give. ³

Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one... avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe... But in that casket — safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, and irredeemable. ⁴

It is probably impossible to love any human being simply “too much.” We may love him too much *in proportion* to our love for God; but it is the smallness of our love for God, not the greatness of our love for the man, that constitutes the inordinacy.

Being in love is a good thing, but it is not the best thing... Love in a second sense — love as distinct from “being in love” is not merely a feeling. It is a deep unity, maintained by the will and deliberately strengthened by habit, reinforced (in Christian marriages) by the grace... from God. They have this love for each other even at those moments when they do not like each other... It is on this love that the engine of marriage is run; being in love was the explosion that started it. ⁵

We must not attempt to find an absolute in the flesh. Banish play and laughter from the bed of love and you may let in a false goddess... We are under no obligation at all to sing all our love-duets in the throbbing world-without-end, heart-breaking manner of Tristan and Isolde; let us often sin like Papageno and Papagena instead. ⁶

– C.S.Lewis

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Which statements impressed you and why?

2. The first quotes speak of the Christian principle that sexual intercourse is only for marriage. How (on the basis of what we've studied) would you respond to some of the following typical objections to this principle?

a. Why can't Christians have sex outside of marriage?

b. "But isn't that a negative view of sex?"

c. "What's so harmful about it?"

d. "Sex is a private matter — no one's business but mine."

3. The third quote has to do with the power of sexual desires and urges. What are some practical ways single Christians can embrace chastity?

3. How active (or passive) should a single Christian be in seeking marriage?

4. On the basis of what we've studied, how can we know when we should marry someone?

5. For marrieds: How do the last four quotes give us practical guidance that could improve our marriages?

¹ John White, *Eros Defiled* (IVP, 1977) pp.18-19.

² C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, bk. 3, chp. 6.

³ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, chapter 5.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, chapter 6.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, chapter 6.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, bk. 3, chp 6

Gospel Christianity

How do I relate to my work?

Study 10 | Course 2

KEY CONCEPT – WORK

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

God’s creation and our work

The importance of work

- Human beings were put into paradise and given work to do (Genesis 2:15) before the Fall, before sin and before anything was wrong with the world.
- Therefore work is not a curse — it is something we were designed to do. Without work there is a sense of significant inner loss or emptiness.
- Though sin makes work often frustrating and difficult (Gen 3:17ff.), it is intrinsically good.

The goodness of all kinds of work

- Human work means being partners with God in *his* work. That is the obvious implication of Genesis 1-2.
- Since God’s Spirit does not simply save souls but also sustains, cultivates, and renews the material world by his Holy Spirit (Psalm 104:30; 145, 147) then making clothes, practicing law, tilling fields, mending broken bodies, advancing science, or nurturing children all participate in God’s work. God does not only send ministers to give the world sermons, but doctors to give medicine, teachers to impart wisdom, and so on.
- The view, then, that an artist or a banker is doing secular work while a minister is doing spiritual work does not fit with the Biblical understanding. God is also an artist and an investor in the material world. And in Gen 1 God’s hands are literally in the dust — he is also a manual laborer. So all work has dignity.

The limits of work

- The fact that God himself rested after work (Gen 2:2) proves that work is not everything — it is not all there is.
- You will not have a meaningful life without work, but you must not make your work the meaning of your life. To make any work — even ministry — your meaning in life is to create an idol.

Jesus' redemption and our work

- Both ancient Greek and modern thought tend to separate faith-beliefs from the public world and life. This has been called dualism.
- But the Bible does not support a sacred vs. secular distinction. We cannot separate our heart faith from our work and our life in the public sphere.
- Every part of our lives — work, family, civic involvement, recreation — is now to be done for God's glory (1 Cor 10:31).
- The glory of God means his ultimate importance, so in every area of life we must ask: "If God is the most important thing then how should I be conducting my business? How should I be spending my money? How should I live in my neighborhood and municipality?"

Work and Rest

One of the key themes of the Bible is *Sabbath*.

- Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28) — the Lord of Rest! Jesus urges us to come to him because "*I will give you rest.*" (Matt 11:28-30) and no one else will.
- The Sabbath means to regularly cease from, and to enjoy the results of, your work.
 - a) In Deut. 5:12-15, God ties the Sabbath to freedom from slavery. Anyone who cannot rest from work is a slave — to your own need for success, your materialistic culture, exploitative employers, or to all of the above.
 - b) They will use and abuse you if you are not disciplined in the practice of Sabbath. Sabbath is a declaration of freedom.
- External rest of the body, however, is impossible without inner rest from anxiety and strain. It takes the deep rest in Christ's finished work for your salvation (Heb 4:1-10) to avoid over-work. Only then will you be able to regularly walk away and rest from your vocational work.

1. Which statements struck you and why?

2. What are some of the practical implications of the Biblical teaching that all work is good and has dignity and we must not separate God from our work?

BIBLE STUDY #1

Eph 5:21, 6:5-9

1. Verse 21 is a governing principle for all the relationships that follow — wives and husbands, parents and children, masters and servants. What is the implication of this for relationships at work?

2. What practical guidelines are given here working and for managing workers?

BIBLE STUDY #2

Exod 20:8-11; Deut 5:12-15

1. Each of the two statements of the command to rest ties the observance to a different event in history. What does each event tell us about the reason we must rest?

2. What practical guidance do we get from these two passages for our inner attitude during Sabbath time?

READINGS

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

The church... has no blueprints for proper economic behavior in the world. Rather it communicates its core religious and moral vision to its members and allows them to draw the implications of that vision for their own lives in the world. Christian notions of calling, of gratitude, of modesty and humility, of compassion and justice, of covenantal existence, of respect for the natural world, and, above all, of justification by grace and not by economic works — are pregnant with meaning for life in the modern economic world.

– Robert Benne¹

My mood would darken every weekend, until by Saturday afternoon I'd be unresponsive and morose. My normal routine, which involved brunch with friends and swapping tales of misadventure in the relentless quest for romance and professional success, made me feel impossibly restless. After a while I got lonely and did something that, as a teenager profoundly put off by her religious education, I could never have imagined wanting to do. I began dropping in on a nearby synagogue... Finally I developed a theory for my condition. I was suffering from the lack [of a Sabbath.]... There is ample evidence that our relationship to work is out of whack. Let me argue on behalf of an institution that has kept workaholism in reasonable check for thousands of years. Most people mistakenly believe that all you have to do to stop working is not work. The inventors of the Sabbath understood that it was a much more complicated undertaking. You cannot downshift casually and easily. This is why the Puritan and Jewish Sabbaths were so exactingly intentional. The rules did not exist to torture the faithful. Interrupting the ceaseless round of striving requires a surprisingly strenuous act of will, one that has to be bolstered by habit as well as by social sanction.

– Judith Shulevitz²

It is commonly agreed that Sabbath... becomes decisive for Israel's faith in the exile. The imperial pressure of Babylon was endlessly demanding of productivity but this counter-provision for regular rest was a visible, public assertion that people of faith would not have their lives defined by [economic] expectation. Thus Sabbath is an act of refusal and resistance, a vigorous assertion of a different identity grounded in God's freedom and enacted as socio economic freedom from every production system and every commodity ideology.

– Walter Brueggemann³

The gospel of Jesus points us and indeed urges us to be at the leading edge of the whole culture, articulating in story and music and art and philosophy and education and poetry and politics and theology a worldview that will mount the historically rooted Christian challenge to both modernity and post-modernity, leading the way into the post-postmodern world with joy and humor and gentleness and good judgment and true wisdom. I believe we face the question: if not now, then when? And if we are grasped by this vision, we may also hear the question: if not us, then who? And if the gospel of Jesus is not the key to this task, then what is?

– N.T. Wright⁴

¹ Robert Benne, "The Calling of the Church in Economic Life" in *The Two Cities of God*, ed. Carl Braaten (Eerdmans, 1997) p. 102, 107

² J.Shulevitz "Bring Back the Sabbath" *New York Times Magazine*, March 2, 2003

³ Walter Brueggemann, "Sabbath as Active Faith," *Sunday Magazine* Summer 2002. When the Jews were dispersed and living in pagan societies, the practice of Sabbath was profoundly 'counter-cultural' and a witness to their neighbors as to the nature of their God.

⁴ N.T. Wright, *The Challenge of Jesus* (IVP, 1998)

