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## Gospel Partnership Introduction

### PURPOSE OF COURSE

This course is designed to be the first point of connection for those considering CrossPointe as their church home. The purpose of this course is to explain what it is to be a Christian, to equip you to live a gospel centered life, and show how that fleshes out at CrossPointe.

Though this course is necessary for partnership, you are not obligated to partner with us. We invite you to work through this material as a means of growing in understanding of the gospel and searching out if God is calling you to partner with us at CrossPointe.

Paul wrote these words to the Philippians:

*"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your **partnership in the Gospel** from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:4-6).*

Church participation, in recent years, has been drastically reduced to religious consumerism, instead of a called-out people who, being radically transformed by the gospel, live their lives deeply committed to being an integral part of the body of Christ. The result is that the local church becomes impotent to effect the change so desperately needed in our communities. Our Gospel Partnership course is designed so you would not simply join the church, but that you would be the church. That is why we use the language of partnership.

It is our hope that God would work both in and through you as you consider partnering with CrossPointe Church.

### CROSSPOINTE PARTNERSHIP PROCESS

The elders of CrossPointe believe the Scriptures take seriously the call for Christians to partner with a local church and for the local church to care for Christians. We consider it a privilege and find great joy in following Jesus and caring for His church.

*"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping a watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning for that would be of no advantage to you" (Hebrews 13:17).*

Toward this end, we have the following process as a means to best equip and care for the those who desire to partner with CrossPointe Church. All who desire to partner with CrossPointe need to complete the following:

- ➡ Read through the material in this book
- ➡ Attend Gospel Partnership Meeting(s)
- ➡ Complete the Partnership Covenant / Questionnaire
- ➡ Complete Partnership Interview with a CrossPointe leader

We are excited that you are considering partnership with CrossPointe Church as we seek to point our community to Jesus.



## **OUR MISSION - What drives everything we do**

Pointing our community to JESUS so that people would KNOW GOD, FIND FREEDOM, EXPERIENCE BELONGING, and LIVE GENEROUSLY. Our mission as a church centers around four ideas or phrases. These four ideas represent our hopes for you. Allow us to unpack them a bit.

**KNOW GOD** - Our first hope is that you would KNOW GOD.

John 17:3 says this...*And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*

Our desire is that you would truly know God. Not just in an intellectual sense, but in a deeply connected, relational sense. See when the Bible uses this idea of “know” it isn’t simply about knowing facts and details, but it implies intimacy, relationship. We long for you to have that kind of knowledge of God.

**FIND FREEDOM** - Our second hope is that you would FIND FREEDOM.

John 8:31-32 says this...*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*

So many of us feel stuck. We feel enslaved. Slaves to sin patterns, to expectations of others, to being liked, to being attractive, to being funny. The list can go on and on. It’s idolatry. And Jesus wants to free you from it. And so He invites us to move from striving to abiding. To abide in His word. His gospel. He says when you know that truth, then you will be set free. When you know that Jesus both had to die for you and that he was glad to die for you, something unlocks. You get set free.

**EXPERIENCE BELONGING** - Our third hope is that you would EXPERIENCE BELONGING.

But it’s not just that you would know God and find freedom as an individual. You were also created for community.

Romans 12:4-5 says this...*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.*

If you’re a follower of Jesus, it means you are part of His body. You belong. Now you may know that cognitively, but are you experiencing the reality of belonging? If we’re honest, we still feel like we’re in the middle school lunch room, wondering who we can sit with? Who will accept us? Well guess what? Those days are over. You are in Christ and you are part of His church, His body. You belong. Welcome.

**LIVE GENEROUSLY** - Our fourth hope is that you would LIVE GENEROUSLY.

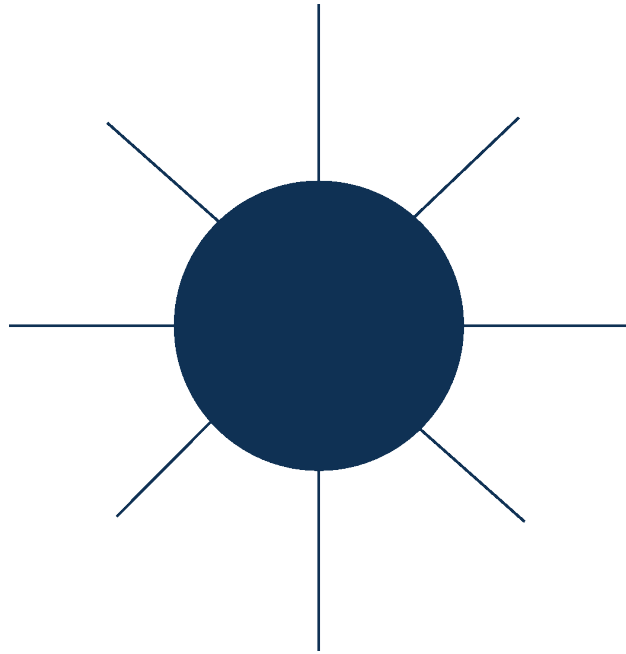
We believe you were created for a great purpose. God wants to use you.

1 Timothy 6:18-19 says this...*They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.*

You have a role to play in seeking to point our community to Jesus through being generous and doing good. The time, talent, and treasure you have been given are not for your benefit alone, but for the good of your neighbor. In living generously, we experience that which is truly life.



# KNOW GOD



*This is eternal life, that they know you,  
the only true God, and Jesus Christ  
whom you have sent. (John 17:3)*



## SESSION 1 | THE GOSPEL AND GOD

There is much we want to communicate **to you** about Partnership in the Gospel with CrossPointe Church, however, it can be overwhelming to know exactly where to begin. Since we are striving to be about Jesus and His story given in the pages of the Bible, it would seem helpful to start where every story starts – in the beginning God ...

These are the opening words of our Bible and, with them, the assumption that God is at the center. Without Him we have no story. We have no creation. We have nothing. So let's start out by saying a few things about God.

### 1. HOW WE CAN KNOW GOD EXISTS

#### a. Internal:

Everyone is born with an inner sense that God exists (Romans 1:18-20). Only the fool can say in his heart there is no God (Psalm 14:1).

#### b. External

- Scripture and Nature
- Proofs:
  - *Cosmological*: Everything in the universe has a cause. The ultimate and original cause must be God.
  - *Teleological*: The universe reveals an intelligent purpose, so there must be an intelligent creator, God.
  - *Moral Argument*: Our inner sense of right and wrong leads us to a belief in a giver of a sense of justice and morality. God must be the source of right and wrong.

### 2. WHAT GOD IS LIKE<sup>1</sup>

There are many attributes of God that reveal His character and how He relates to the world. God has both unshared (incommunicable) and shared (communicable) attributes. His unshared attributes are unique to Himself. His shared attributes are those possessed by God and, in a limited sense, are shared by us as people made in His image. Why do we need to know the attributes of God? There are many practical reasons, and below are just a few:

- Sin distorts our view of God and thus distorts our view of ourselves, others and the world around us (Genesis 3:1-3). Scripture helps us understand the truth about God and thus transforms our perspective on everything. The root of many people's problems is a result of a distortion of God's character. A.W. Tozer (an American Pastor and author who died in the earlier 1960's) wrote, "The low view of God entertained almost universally among Christians is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us" (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, pp. 6-7).
- The more we grow in our awareness of God's holiness, the more we become aware of our sinfulness (Isaiah 6:1-7). Until we are aware we are great sinners, we will never know our need for a great savior. The more we become aware of our sinfulness, the sweeter God's grace becomes. The cross of Christ looms larger and large in our lives and transforms us.
- The more we understand the attributes of God, the more deeply we will rest in the freedom of God's grace. His forgiveness is based upon His character not our character (Psalm 25:11).
- The more we understand the attributes of God, the more deeply they transform our prayer lives. What we really believe about God shows up in our prayers. Knowing the character of God invites us to pray with great confidence relying on the strong hand of our redeemer to move (Nehemiah 6: 3-8).
- The more we understand the attributes of God, the more we will understand God's plan for our lives. Until we have a vision *of* God, we will never have a vision *from* God (Isaiah 6:8).
- The more we understand the attributes of God, the more we will fear God. There is great joy in standing in awe of the greatness and holiness of God (Nehemiah 1:11). It is a life-altering and life-shaping joy. It will deepen our worship and affection for God. Tozer continues to write, "What comes

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2 :: The Gospel and the Attributes of God



into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us ... Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God" (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 9).

## ATTRIBUTES

Though this list is in no way exhaustive, it does give a picture of God.

### Unshared Attributes

- ➡ Omniscience: God has perfect and complete knowledge of all things past, present, and future. His knowledge cannot be thwarted. It is comforting to know that God knows everything about us (our needs, our sin, our desires, etc.) and still chose to save us (Job 42:2, Psalms 139:1-6; 147:5, Isaiah 40:12-14; 46:10, Hebrews 14:13).
- ➡ Omnipotence: God has supreme power and can do anything He wills. His power ensures us of our salvation and ensures us that everything He does has a perfectly good purpose (Job 42:2, Psalms 147:5, Matthew 19:26, Ephesians 3:20, Romans 1:16; 8:35-39, Genesis 18:14, Jeremiah 32:17 and 27, Luke 1:37, Romans 8:28).
- ➡ Omnipresence: God is present everywhere, at all times; in the highest heavens He is there and in the deepest sea He is also there (Psalms 139:7-12, Jeremiah 23:24, Proverbs 15:3, Deuteronomy 31:6, Colossians 1:17).
- ➡ Immutability: God's character and being does not change. He is the only constant in the universe and will remain so for all eternity (Numbers 23:19, Psalms 102:27, Malachi 3:6, Romans 11:29, Hebrews 13:8, James 1:17).
- ➡ Eternality: God exists outside of time, yet He created time and chooses to operate within it. Because He can see all events in the context of eternity, He knows what is best for all events that take place in our lives (Psalms 90:2; 93:2; 102:12, Ephesians 3:21).
- ➡ Self-Existence: God is the only being that has existed without being created and does not continually rely on another being for sustained existence. It is very reassuring to know that God is the sustainer of all things and that He is ultimately in control of all events (Exodus 3:14, Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12, Revelation 1:8 and 17; 2:8; 3:14; 21:6; 22:13).
- ➡ Sovereignty: God is sovereign over all events, but He does allow human freedom as He wills. He has ultimate authority over all things past, present, and future and most importantly He is sovereign over our salvation (2 Samuel 7:28, 1 Chronicles 29:10-13, Psalms 103:19, Genesis 50:20, Romans 1:18-32; 8:28).
- ➡ Transcendence: God is completely distinct from anything else in the universe. It is comforting to know that His greatness and power is unsurpassed in all of the world (Genesis 1:1, Psalms 102:25-27, Isaiah 42:5, Acts 17:24, 1 John 2:15-17).
- ➡ Creator: God has formed all things in creation ex nihilo (out of nothing). We should take pleasure in His creation and also take joy in knowing He created everything out of His own self and by His own power (Genesis 1:1, Psalms 33:6; 102:25, Isaiah 44:24, John 1:3, Romans 11:36, Hebrews 1:2; 11:3).

### b. Shared Attributes

- ➡ Spirit: God is found in a state that is invisible as well as immaterial. The Spirit has cognition, emotions and a will. Since we are made in the image of God, it is incredible to know that we have a spirit that will go on eternally with Him if we know Him (John 1:18; 3:1-10; 4:19-24; 6:40; 14:16-17; 16:12-16, 2 Corinthians 3:15-17, 1 Timothy 6:15-16, Psalms 139:1-4, Ephesians 4:30).



➡ Holiness: God is entirely pure and separate from everything evil. Since He is absolutely holy, we can only come into relationship with Him through the imputed righteousness of Christ. And through sanctification we are made holy and conformed to the image of Christ (Exodus 3:5, Leviticus 19:2, Psalms 5:4-6; 99:5, Isaiah 6:3; 8:13; 57:15, Habakkuk 1:12-13, 1 John 1:5, 1 Peter 1:14-19, 2 Corinthians 3:18, 1 Peter 1:2).

➡ Love/Goodness: God is perfectly good and loving, and all that is good and loving is a gift from Him. This same love should be the example and motivation for all that we do in our lives (Exodus 34:7, Psalms 84:11, John 3:16, Ephesians 2:4-7, Galatians 5:22, 1 John 4:8-16, Matthew 22:37-40, Proverbs 13:24, Hebrews 12:6).

➡ Truth: All truth comes from God, and we are to speak the truth as well as live in the truth (Numbers 23:19, John 14:6; 17:17, Titus 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:20).

➡ Justice/Righteousness: God is perfectly just in all He does. He does not conform to what is deemed right and wrong, but rather, right and wrong flow out of who He is. God deals fairly with all people in all times and so should we (Genesis 18:25, Exodus 34:7, Deuteronomy 32:4, Acts 17:31, Romans 2:11).

➡ Mercy: God does not enact His wrath on some people because He is loving and merciful. Christ's crucifixion in our place was the ultimate act of mercy in history. Out of God's mercy for us, we should be people who are constantly merciful to those around us (Exodus 34:6-7, Matthew 18:23-35, Romans 12:8, Ephesians 2:4-7, Titus 3:5).

➡ Beauty: God is beautiful and His creation reflects this. We should take time to reflect on His beautiful creation as well as His own personal beauty and glory (Psalms 27:4; 50:2, Ecclesiastes 3:11, Isaiah 33:17).

### 3. THE TRIUNE GOD

We believe there is one God who is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. This one God has eternally existed in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

1. **The Father is God** - God the Father is the Creator of heaven and earth. By His word and for His glory, He freely and supernaturally created, sustains, and rules over all. In His grace, He gave His Son Jesus for mankind's redemption (John 6:27; 17:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6, 2 Corinthians 1:3, Ephesians 1:3, 1 Peter 1:3).
2. **The Son is God** - Jesus Christ is the Son of God and is fully God and fully Man. He is coequal with the Father and is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. Jesus lived a sinless life and offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice for sins by dying on the cross. He arose from the dead three days later to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended into heaven's glory and will return again to earth reigning as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Isaiah 9:6, Matthew 1:22-23, John 1:1-5; 14:10-30, Acts 1:9-11, Romans 1:3-4, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, 1 Timothy 6:14-15, Titus 2:13, Hebrews 4:14-15).
3. **The Holy Spirit is God** - The Holy Spirit is equal with the Father and the Son and has come to glorify the Son, who in turn came to glorify the Father. He is present in the world and makes people aware of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He persuades people to repent of their sins and confess Jesus as Lord. He also lives in every Christian from the moment of salvation and provides power for living, understanding spiritual truth, and guidance in applying the truth of God's Word (John 14:16, Acts 5:3-4, 2 Corinthians 3:16-18).



The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God who are coequal, coexistent, and coeternal. Yet they are distinct from each other; the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, the Spirit is not the Father. This triune God is the foundation of the Christian faith and life.

#### 4. HOW GOD COMMUNICATES TO US

- **General Revelation** - This is the theological term for the way God has spoken to all people in all times. He has made Himself known in some attributes of people (made in His image) and in nature.
- **Special Revelation** - This is the theological term for how God has spoken to us through the physical person of Jesus, the Holy Spirit and Scripture.

#### 5. WHAT GOD COMMUNICATES TO US

God has *good news* that He wants us to embrace. This good news or gospel is told within the context of a grand, over-arching story throughout the pages of the Bible. We believe the Bible is God's Word. It is living and active, and graciously given to lead us in the good news/gospel. It is what we orient our lives around. This Word is perfect. It is without error. It is not simply instructions for living, sprinkled with stories. Rather it is one, over-arching story that is sprinkled with instructions.

#### 6. TWO GOSPEL PERSPECTIVES

The Bible can be read through two lenses: the gospel on the *ground* and the gospel in the *air*.

1. **The gospel on the *ground*** is the personal redemptive implication of the gospel. Through this lens we come to understand the *means* of salvation – the gospel power (Ephesians 2:8-9).

##### REGENERATION – JUSTIFICATION – SANCTIFICATION – GLORIFICATION

In this case, the good news is that God, in and through the work of Jesus Christ and the power of His Spirit (regeneration), accepts us (justification), *and* changes us (sanctification) to ultimately glorify God in every aspect of our lives (glorification).

2. **The gospel in the *air*** is the historical redemptive implication of the gospel. It is the story line of Scripture. Through this lens we come to understand the *reason* for salvation — the gospel purpose (Ephesians 2:10, 14-22).

##### CREATION – FALL – REDEMPTION – RESTORATION

**CREATION:** *Genesis 1 and 2* - The beauty of God's original creation is described in *Genesis 1 and 2*. The world is as God intended it to be, with humans made in His image, full of worth, value and dignity in perfect relationship with Him and each other. Deep within all of us is a desire to have this world as it was originally intended to be.

**FALL:** *Genesis 3* - The Bible clearly acknowledges that man has been separated from God through the rebellion of our first parents, Adam and Eve. From this point on, the entire world has been in rebellion against God. We live in a broken world.

**REDEMPTION:** *Genesis 3 through Revelation 19* - God in His infinite mercy and grace sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. Jesus lived the perfect life we can never live and died the death we all deserve. He bore our punishment, so that by believing in Him we could be in a right relationship with God. Believing in His literal life, death and resurrection, and surrendering our lives to Him are the only means of salvation.

**RESTORATION:** *Revelation 21* - One day Jesus will return to *fully* establish His Kingdom and His reign. At that time, He will usher in a new heaven and a new earth. There will be one final





consummate judgment where Jesus puts the world right. Until that time, we get to be His agents for good and change in this world.

God, in Jesus Christ, has given us both the *message* of reconciliation (the gospel power) and the *ministry* of reconciliation (gospel purpose).

## 7. WHY WE NEED TO KNOW BOTH GOPSEL PERSPECTIVES

We must know the gospel power (regeneration, justification, sanctification, glorification) and the gospel purpose (creation, fall, redemption, restoration) and see them both as God's story together – the gospel on the *ground* and the gospel in the *air*.

When we communicate both the *gospel power* and the *gospel purpose* it connects the story of people's lives to a great, redemptive story that is unfolding through history. This gives meaning and purpose to people's lives. If we only focus on the gospel work (power of the gospel – what Jesus did), but do not know the gospel story (purpose of the gospel – what Jesus is doing through the church), we will tend toward a gospel that is about saving individuals and miss the mission of the gospel – it becomes about us.

“God is at the center of the Gospel word. Yet much of evangelism tends to place people in that position. The Gospel becomes skewed toward me and how Jesus meets my needs. But the Gospel Jesus proclaimed is about God exercising His life-giving rule through His Messiah for His Glory” (Tim Chester & Steve Timmis, *Total Church*, p. 55).

If we only focus on the *gospel power*, but miss the *gospel purpose*, we will tend to produce “consumer Christians” versus “missional Christians.” The “consumer church” is seen as a dispenser of religious goods and services. People come to church to be “fed,” to have their needs met through quality programs, and to have the professionals teach their children about God. “*I go to church.*” The “missional church” is seen as a body of people sent on a mission who gather in community to celebrate the grace, goodness and glory of God. “*We are the church.*”

## THE STORY IS ALL ABOUT HIM ... IT'S NOT ABOUT US

If we only focus on the *gospel story*, but miss the *gospel work*, we will tend toward works of man without the power of God (We believe it is up to us to change the world, and we are more acceptable and significant to God by doing more.) – it becomes *dependent upon* us.

## 8. GOSPEL EXPLANATION

**a. Short-Hand Definition** - “Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God fully accomplishes salvation for us, rescuing us from judgment for sin into fellowship with Him, and then restores the creation in which we can enjoy our new life together with Him forever” (Timothy Keller, Pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church).

At CrossPointe we often use the term “cross-centered” and “gospel-centered” interchangeably and synonymously. The cross represents all of who Christ is and what He accomplished for us through His life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension.

**b. Jesus' Life** - The most central and important belief of the Christian faith rests on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Since the fall of man in Genesis 3, man has been separated from God because of a totally sinful nature. God in His infinite wisdom and mercy, sent His Son to earth to live as a perfect, sinless man who is fully God. Because Jesus is the only perfect God-Man to ever live, He is the only one who can reconcile man back to God (1 Timothy 2:5-6).



People in our culture will often praise Jesus as a great moral teacher, but many have a problem when it comes to praising Him as God. Jesus Himself says He is much more than just a good teacher, more than a good man (Mark 10:17-18):

- ➡ Jesus said He was the Son of God and that He is in the Father (John 10:36-39).
- ➡ Jesus said He was God (Mark 14:61-64).
- ➡ Jesus said He was sinless (John 8:46).
- ➡ Jesus told us to pray to Him as God (John 14:13-14).
- ➡ Jesus said He was the only way to heaven (John 14:6).

C.S. Lewis wisely said:

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."<sup>2</sup>

**c. Jesus' Death** - Through His death on the cross, Jesus took our sin upon Himself, and He died in our place for our sins. This is where we get the beautiful doctrine of *penal substitutionary atonement*.

- ➡ Penal refers to the penalty and punishment for our sin. Paul wrote in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." This death encompasses both the physical and spiritual aspect of humanity.
- ➡ Substitution(ary) refers to Jesus as our substitute, who stood in our place and died the death we deserve to die. The simple fact that Jesus died a horrible death on the cross to bear the weight of our transgressions is simply incredible to think upon.
- ➡ Atonement refers to the reconciliation between God and man that occurs through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – the perfect and ultimate sacrifice (Isaiah 53:5, Romans 5:8, 1 Peter 3:18).
- ➡ Jesus was also our propitiation (Romans 3:21-26, Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 2:1-2). This is the term theologians use to describe how the wrath of God was diverted from sinners to Christ on the cross.

Unlike the gods of Greek and Roman mythology, or any other god of paganism, who demand a sacrifice to appease their wrath, God turned around and did the exact opposite. Instead of demanding a sacrifice and demanding that we shed blood, He comes and sheds His own. The wrath of God is placed on God's Son and is diverted from men and onto Jesus.

The result is forgiveness, justification, imputation of Jesus' righteousness, and our acceptance as children into God's family with Jesus as our Lord and brother.

**d. Jesus' Resurrection** - After His death, Jesus was buried and sealed in a tomb. In order for anything about Christ as our atonement and propitiation to be true, Jesus must have risen from the grave. On the third day, He rose to life and victory over Satan, sin, and death. Through His resurrection, the very life of God has broken into this world to give us life that is new in character and eternal in duration (Luke 24:36-49, 1 John 4:9-10, 1 Peter 2:22-24, Isaiah 53:3-12).

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<sup>2</sup> Mere Christianity, pp. 40-41



**e. Jesus' Ascension** - Jesus then ascended into heaven where He is on His throne at the right hand of God the Father. Jesus Christ is presently ruling and reigning as Sovereign, King, and Lord over everything and everyone. The Bible repeatedly and emphatically teaches that nothing is beyond the rule and authority of Jesus Christ.

In a day when most people sat on the floor, squatted, or reclined, thrones were reserved for kings, priests, and warriors. Throughout the book of Revelation, Jesus is portrayed in each of these roles:

- ➡As King: Jesus rules over all creation from His throne.
  - ➡As Priest: Jesus mediates between us and God the Father.
  - ➡As Warrior: Jesus sits in triumph over Satan, sin, and death.
- (Acts 1:6-12, John 16:28, Isaiah 6:1-7, Revelation 19:11-16, Revelation 21:1-8)

## 9. WHY THIS IS OF FIRST IMPORTANCE

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul writes about the gospel – that Jesus lived, died and was resurrected – as being of *first importance*. But why is this so important? The Scriptures tell us repeatedly that we are not only people who sin, but people who are born sinners. Because of this, we have been separated from God.

What is needed is a *sinless substitute* for our *salvation*. This is what Jesus achieved for God's glory and our benefit. Sin needed to be dealt with, so Jesus became sin for us. This does not mean He sinned, but rather He took our sin upon Himself.

This is what 2 Corinthians 5:21 is all about:

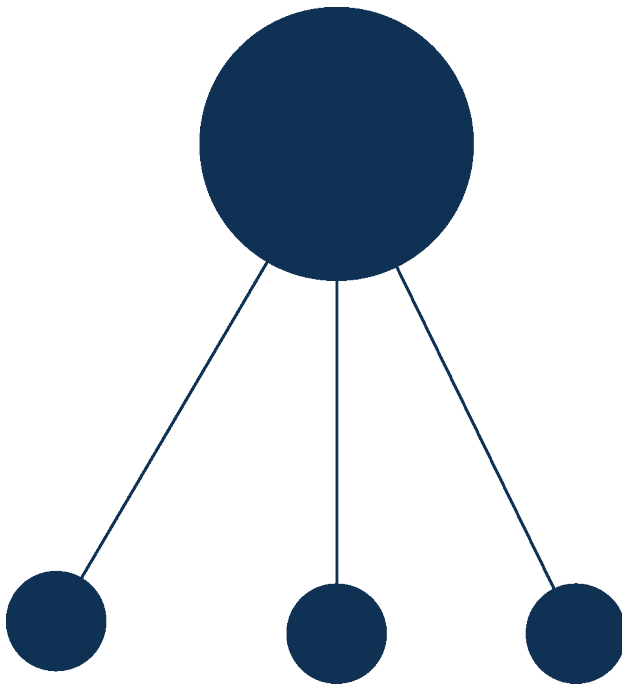
*"For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."*

When this happened, Jesus became our *substitute*. He took our deserved place. In doing so Jesus made the only way for our *salvation*. However, the way of salvation would never have come to fruition if He had not conquered both *sin and death*. Jesus' resurrection then is the "other side of the coin" so to speak. Quite frankly there would be no point to talk about Jesus if He hadn't resurrected. By Jesus resurrecting He ushered in the dawn of a new age, one that will see final completion when He returns.

This work of Jesus, the gospel, brings a realization that through Him – while we are more sinful, flawed and wicked than we dare believe – we are more loved and accepted before God than we could ever dare hope.



# FIND FREEDOM



*For freedom Christ has set us free,  
stand firm therefore, and do not  
submit again to a yoke of slavery.  
(Galatians 5:1)*



## SESSION 2 | THE GOSPEL APPLIED

### 1. THE GOSPEL ASSUMED

“The gospel” is a phrase that Christians often use without fully understanding its implications for all of life. Christians speak, teach, and preach about the gospel with the assumption that one fully understands the depth, beauty, truth, and power of it. When one lives with a truncated view of the gospel, one sees the gospel as just the “door” in which one enters God’s Kingdom.

But the gospel is so much more! It is not just the door, but the path we are to walk every day of the Christian life. It is not just the means of salvation, but the means of transformation. It is not simply deliverance from sin’s penalty, but release from sin’s power. The gospel is what makes one right with God (justification), and it is also what frees one to delight in God (sanctification). The ongoing working power of the gospel must never be assumed in one’s life. If one is to grow in maturity in Christ, one must deepen and enlarge their understanding of the gospel as God’s appointed means for personal and communal transformation. One must live every moment of life in full view of the Cross.<sup>3</sup>

*“... Of this you have heard before in the Word of the Truth, the Gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing – as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth” (Colossians 1:5-6).*

*“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 on one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:8-10).*

### 2. THREE WAYS TO LIVE: THE GOSPEL VS. RELIGION AND IRRELIGION

In Luke 15, Jesus tells a powerful parable about a father and two sons. This parable is commonly known as the “Prodigal Son” or “The Younger Lost Son.” However, the narrative is as much about the older brother and the father as it is about the younger brother. The parable might better be called the two lost sons.

There are three ways to respond to God’s revelation of Himself and His plan for this world:

- Religion (moralism): I trust in my own ability to obey God to be accepted by Him.
- Irreligion (relativism): I decide my own truth and meaning in this world outside of God.
- Gospel (Christianity): I am accepted perfectly in Jesus, therefore, I can obey God.

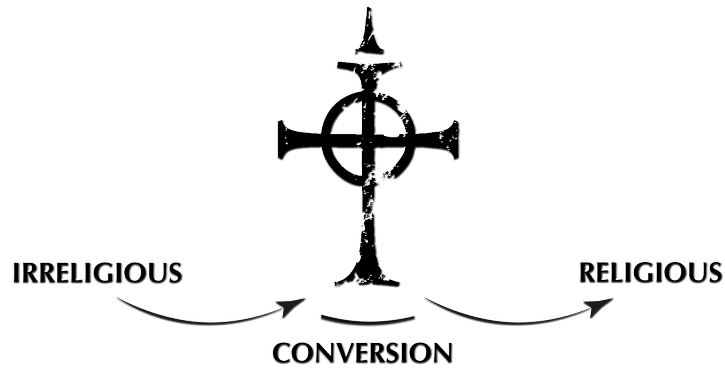
When one becomes a Christian, the tendency is to jump from irreligion (disregard for God) to religion (working to be accepted by God). The way we know Jesus is not by moving from irreligion to religion, but by a life oriented *around* the *gospel*. (I am accepted through Jesus, therefore, I get to obey.)

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<sup>3</sup> Adapted from The Gospel Centered Life Study, World Harvest Mission



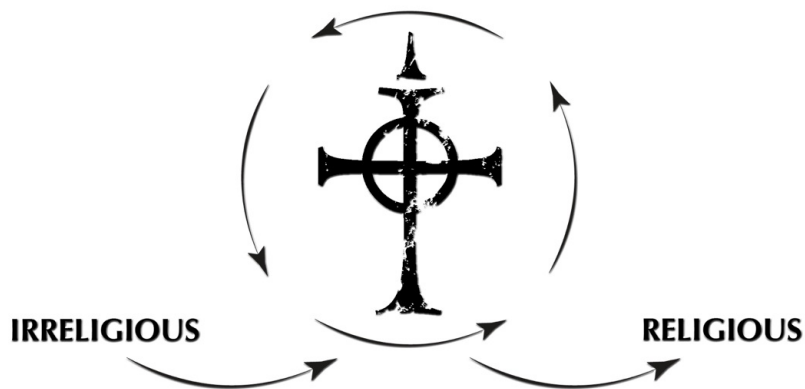
**a. Traditional Spiritual Formation Chart**



**b. Cross-Centered Spiritual Formation Chart**

*"For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Romans 1:17, Habakkuk 2:4).*

*Sanctifying Grace by Faith*



*Justifying Grace by Faith*



### c. Gospel vs. Religion

The gospel changes us and changes the motivation, purpose and goals of everything we do. God becomes the goal of everything we do – not to gain acceptance (religion) or avoid Him (irreligion), but to find pleasure in Him (gospel). Life centered on the gospel of Jesus has huge implications on our relationship with God, ourselves, and the world. The following is a chart of differences between “religion” and the gospel.

#### ***RELIGION (performance-based)***

I obey – therefore I’m accepted.

Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.

I obey God in order to get things from God.

When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or myself, since I believe, like Job’s friends, anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.

When I am criticized, I am furious or devastated, because it is critical that I think of myself as a “good person.” Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs.

My prayer life consists largely of petition and it only heats up when I am in a time of need. My main purpose in prayer is control of the environment.

My self-image swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to my standards, I feel humble, but not confident. I feel like a failure.

My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work or how moral I am, and so I must look down on those I perceive as lazy or immoral. I disdain and feel superior to “the other.”

#### ***GOSPEL (grace-based)***

I’m accepted – therefore I obey.

Motivation is based on grateful joy.

I obey God to get to GOD – to delight and resemble Him.

When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle but I know my punishment fell on Jesus, and while He may allow this for my training, He will exercise His Fatherly love within my trial.

When I am criticized, I struggle, but it is not critical for me to think of myself as a “good person.” My identity is not built on my record or performance but on God’s love for me in Christ. I can take criticism. That’s how I became a Christian.

My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with Him.

My self-view is not based on a view of myself as a moral achiever. In Christ I am simul iustus et peccator – simultaneously sinful and lost yet accepted. I am so bad He had to die for me, and I am so loved He was glad to die for me. This leads me to deeper and deeper humility and confidence at the same time. Neither swaggering nor sniveling.

My identity and self-worth are centered on the one who died for His enemies and who was excluded from the city for me. I am saved by sheer grace. So I can’t look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. Only by grace am I what I am. I’ve no inner need to win arguments.

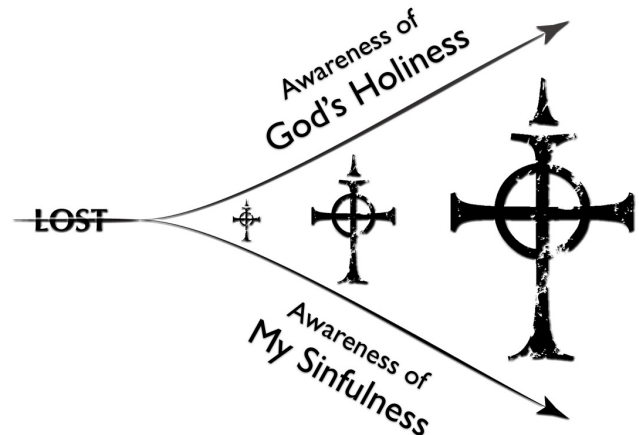


Since I look to my own pedigree or performance for acceptability, my heart manufactures idols. It may be my talents, moral record, personal discipline, social status, etc. I absolutely have to have them; they serve as my main hope, meaning, happiness, security, and significance – whatever I may say I believe about God.

I have many good things in my life – family, work, spiritual disciplines, etc. But none of these good things are ultimate things to me. None of them are things I absolutely have to have, so there is a limit to how much anxiety, bitterness, and despondency they can inflict on me when they are threatened or lost.

### 3. LIVING IN FULL VIEW OF THE CROSS

The starting point of the Christian life (conversion) comes when by God's grace I first become aware of the gap between God's holiness and my sinfulness. When I am converted, I trust and hope in Jesus, who has done what I could never do – He has bridged the gap between my sinfulness and God's holiness. He absorbed the wrath of God upon Himself so I could experience His mercy. He put Himself where only I deserved to be so I could be in a place that only He deserved to be.



### 4. THE CROSS LOOMS LARGE

At the point of conversion, however, I have a very limited view of God's holiness and of my sin. The more I grow in my Christian life, the more I grow in my awareness of God's holiness, and of my flesh and sinfulness. Through reading the Bible, experiencing the Holy Spirit's conviction, and living in community with other people, the extent of God's greatness and the extent of my sin become increasingly clear and vivid. It is not

that God is becoming more holy, or that I am becoming more sinful. But my awareness of both is increasing. I am increasingly seeing God as He actually is (Isaiah 55:8-9) and myself as I actually am (Jeremiah 17:9-10). As my understanding of my sin and of God's holiness grows, something else also grows: my appreciation and love for Jesus. His mediation, His sacrifice, His righteousness, and His gracious work on my behalf become increasingly sweeter and more powerful to me. The cross looms larger and more central in my life as I rejoice in the Savior who died upon it.

"All inadequate [teachings of the cross] are due to inadequate teachings of God and man. If we bring God down to our level and raise ourselves to His, then of course we see no need for a radical salvation, let alone for a radical [cross] to secure it. When, on the other hand, we have glimpsed the blinding glory of the holiness of God, and have been so convicted of our sin by the Holy Spirit that we tremble before God and acknowledge that we are, namely 'hell-deserving sinners,' then and only then does the necessity of the cross appear so obvious that we are astonished we never saw it before" (John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*).

When we come to know Christ, we become conscious of three basic truths:

1. God's holiness: "God is Holy."
2. The depth of our sin: "I am a sinner."
3. The complete sufficiency of Christ's atoning work to make us fully acceptable before the Father (gospel transformation): "Jesus is the Savior of sinners."

The gospel becomes a journey of living in full view of the cross. It is daily reminding ourselves of what Christ accomplished on our behalf on the cross and living every moment of our lives by that truth. It is daily learning more and more of God's holiness and seeing more of our sin in light of that holiness. We are continually faced with two options:





1. We can live daily in full view of the cross, seeing the cross as big enough to bridge the gap between God's holiness and my sinfulness. When we cling to the cross we cling to Christ's righteousness and perfection. We live daily in repentance of our sin and rejoicing in our true identity in Christ.
2. We can shrink the cross by inventing "another gospel" to justify ourselves and relieve our guilt. We will unpack this in the next section.

## 5. THE GOSPEL APPLIED – CONFESSION

We already stated that the starting point of the Christian life (conversion) comes when by God's grace I first become aware of the gap between God's holiness and my sinfulness. When I am converted, I trust and hope in Jesus, who has done what I could never do: He has bridged the gap between my sinfulness and God's holiness. He absorbed the wrath of God upon Himself so I could experience His mercy. He put Himself where only I deserved to be so I could be in a place that only He deserved to be.

**a. Conversion** takes place when you have that experience needed to have "eyes to see" and "ears to hear," as Scripture puts it, or a sort of sixth sense. That transforming spiritual sense is itself a gift of the Holy Spirit (regeneration). The goal is not simply to understand facts about Jesus, but to have your whole life captivated by Him – to know Jesus, to love Jesus, to worship Jesus. In conversion, your response to the gift of this "sixth sense" or the gospel is repentance, faith and obedience.

**b. Repentance** is simply recognizing you have been going in one direction and to now turn in a new direction. Repentance begs the question — Why do I need to repent? Repent for what? The direction in which all of us are heading, apart from Jesus, is to set something or someone other than God as ultimate in our lives.

*"Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel'" (Mark 1:14-15).*

*"Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified. Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:36-41).*

**c. Faith** is the declaration that you believe Jesus is who He says He is and lived a perfect life for you, went to the cross for you, and rose again to restore you to a right relationship with God. You believe and trust there is no other thing or person by which you can be saved. You recognize you are a sinner who deserves God's wrath, but trust that Jesus took that wrath upon Himself for you.

In making this declaration, you are inviting Jesus into your life as both your Savior and Lord. You now look to Him and His Word to guide your life. You also trust that God will forgive you as He promises to do, not because of anything you have done, but solely through the grace of God in sacrificing His Son on your behalf.

In short, you are trusting in the *gospel* (good news). However, contrary to much teaching out there, trusting in the gospel is not just how you are initially saved, but it is also the way you continue to grow as a Christian.

You don't just have faith in the finished work of Jesus one time; you continually have faith and rely on the finished work of Jesus alone. Again, the tendency is to fall back into religion and seek to earn your



acceptance before God through your accomplishments (faith in yourself), as opposed to living life continually trusting in the accomplishment of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

**d. Obedience** is living a life in full view of who Jesus is and what He accomplished for you on the cross. It is relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to trust fully in the gospel to inform and transform every moment of your life, every decision you make, and every relationship you have. It is a life that sings of the grace, goodness and glory of the Creator.

## 6. THE GOSPEL APPLIED – JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

When I am converted, I trust and hope in Jesus; I am *justified* before God because Jesus has bridged the gap between my sinfulness and God's holiness. He put Himself where only I deserved to be so that I could be in a place that only He deserves to be.

*"... the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:22-24).*

**a. Justification** is having a right legal standing before God. It is an instantaneous legal act of God in which He (1) sees our sin as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in His sight.

God's gift of *justification* is a one-time event that could be no more momentous. We are "born again" (John 3:3), "made alive" (Ephesians 2:5), transferred from the "domain of darkness" into "the kingdom of His beloved son" (Colossians 1:13), "forgiven our sins" (Ephesians 1:7), delivered from wrath (Romans 5:9), "reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:18), and we have "passed from death to life" (John 5:24).

But this is the beginning of the Christian life, not the only act. Jesus died in order that we may not only be *justified*, but also *sanctified* – made holy. It is important to distinguish the difference between justification and sanctification. In justification, the penalty of sin is removed as we are declared righteous in Christ. In sanctification, the pollution of sin is progressively removed as we are made holy in Christ. We must live out of and trust in our justification because our sanctification is progressive and change is often slow.

**b. Sanctification** is a progressive work of God in us that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.

*"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:23- 24).*

*"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13).*

The gospel is the way we are both justified and sanctified. As at conversion, to be sanctified we dwell on the difference between God's holiness and our sinfulness, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we put our faith and trust in Jesus. In *sanctification*, the Holy Spirit *works* in us, and we *work* through the power of the Holy Spirit. God transforms us by *causing* us to want His will and then giving us the power to do it. In sanctification, we work because God works in us.

At the point of conversion, we have a limited view of God's holiness and our sinfulness. The more we are sanctified, growing in the Christian life, the more we grow in our awareness of God's holiness and our sinfulness. Through reading the Bible, experiencing the Holy Spirit's conviction, preaching the gospel to



ourselves and living in community with other people, the extent of God's greatness and the extent of our sin become increasingly clear and vivid. It is not that God is becoming more holy, or we are becoming more sinful. It's our awareness of both that is increasing. The way to grow in our sanctification is to believe more deeply in our justification and live daily in the full reality of who Jesus Christ is and what He accomplished for us on the cross. In other words, live daily in full view of the cross.

We must know this gospel well! We must let it inform and transform every aspect of our lives so that in our everyday lives we can sing of the goodness, grace and glory of God. All of this remains in the realm of theory if it is not applied to our lives. It is imperative that our understanding of God and the gospel not be about information, but rather our transformation.

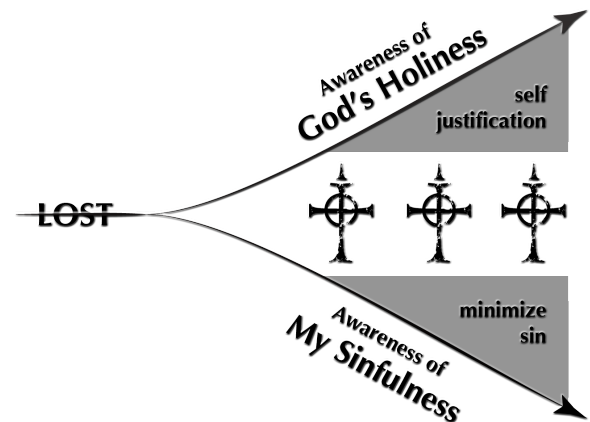
## 7. STORY-FORMED PEOPLE

Everyone has a story. You have a story, and I have a story. We all desire to tell our stories. We express our stories in many different ways. Some of us express our story in different mediums of art, music, written and spoken word. Social media has made it possible for us to tell our story through a Facebook status and in 140 characters or less with Twitter. Telling our stories is really about worship. We love to tell our stories because we are created to worship. When we tell our stories, we are revealing the deepest longings of our hearts: what is important to us, what we are passionate about, our values, what is crucial to our lives, and ultimately what it is we are living for. Whatever that is, it is our god – our functional savior. The truth is everyone is seeking a savior either in themselves or in some other created thing. What self-salvation projects have you embarked on?

## 8. SHRINKING THE CROSS

Unfortunately, sanctification (growth in holiness) doesn't work quite as neatly as we would like. Because of the indwelling sin which remains in our flesh, we consistently tend to minimize the gospel or "shrink the cross." We invent "another gospel" when we either minimize God's perfect holiness, thinking of Him as something less than His Word declares Him to be, and embark on a self-salvation projects (perform), or we invent "another gospel" when we minimize the depth of our sin and brokenness (pretend). The old hymn put it perfectly, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love."

When this happens the cross becomes smaller and Christ's importance in our lives is diminished. Adam and Eve first did this in Genesis 3 when they rebelled against their Creator. Shame entered their lives, and in verse 7, they sought to cover their own sin and shame, and in verse 8, they minimize their sin by hiding from God.



## 9. MINIMIZING SIN<sup>4</sup>

**a. Defending** – I find it difficult to receive feedback about weaknesses or sin. When confronted, my tendency is to explain things away, talk about my successes, or to justify my decisions. As a result, I rarely have conversations about difficult things in my life.

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from the Gospel Centered Life, Coram Deo Missional Communities



**b. Pretending** – I strive to keep up appearances and maintain a respectable image. My behavior, to some degree, is driven by what I think others think of me. I also do not like to think reflectively about my life. As a result, not very many people know the real me. (I may not even know the real me.)

**c. Hiding** – I tend to conceal as much as I can about my life, especially the “bad stuff.” This is different from pretending in that pretending is about impressing. Hiding is more about shame. I don’t think people will accept the real me.

**d. Blaming** – I am quick to blame others for sin or circumstances. I have a difficult time “owning” my contributions to sin or conflict. There is an element of pride that assumes it’s not my fault *and/or* an element of fear of rejection if it is my fault.

**e. Minimizing** – I tend to downplay sin or circumstances in my life, as if they are “normal” or “not that bad.” As a result, things often don’t get the attention they deserve and have a way of mounting up to being overwhelming.

**f. Exaggerating** – I tend to think (and talk) more highly of myself than I ought to. I make things (good and bad) out to be much bigger than they are (usually to get attention). As a result, things often get more attention than they deserve and have a way of making me stressed or anxious.

## 10. “SELF-SALVATION” PROJECTS

We embark on “self-salvation” projects when we fail to see Christ as our only hope of redemption. It’s not that we don’t think of Jesus as our savior, but we think we need Jesus plus “something else” in order to find validation and satisfaction. The danger is that “something else” tends to become our functional savior (either ourselves or an idol) and attempts to displace Jesus as our ultimate redeemer. That “something else” becomes our functional source of righteousness and satisfaction apart from Christ. Again it is adding to what Christ has done on the cross. In Romans 10:1-4, Paul’s desire and prayer is that the Jews would be saved not because of their own attempts at righteousness, but because of Christ’s righteousness. He writes, *“For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”*

When we do not rest in the righteousness that comes from God in the gospel, we will make something our functional source of righteousness. We will trust that thing, rather than Jesus, to build our reputation and give us a sense of worth and value. Here are some examples:

**a. Job Righteousness:** God helps those who help themselves. If I work hard, God will reward me.

**b. Family Righteousness:** If I just do things right as a parent, I will be accepted by God/others/myself.

**c. Theological Righteousness:** I have good theology. Of course God is pleased with me!

**d. Intellectual Righteousness:** I am better read, more articulate, and more culturally savvy than others, which obviously makes me superior.

**e. Schedule Righteousness:** I am self-disciplined and rigorous in my time management. God is pleased with my stewardship of time.

**f. Flexibility Righteousness:** In a world that’s busy, I’m flexible and relaxed. I always have time for others. God appreciates my laid-back demeanor.

**g. Mercy Righteousness:** I care more about the poor and disadvantaged than other people, and this makes me better in the eyes of God.



**h. Legalistic Righteousness:** I don't drink, smoke, or chew, or date girls who do. God is pleased by my moral convictions.

**i. Financial Righteousness:** I manage money wisely and stay out of debt, so God must think highly of me.

**j. Political Righteousness:** If you really love God, you'll vote for my candidate.

**k. Tolerance Righteousness:** I am open-minded and charitable toward those who don't agree with me. In fact, I'm a lot like Jesus that way!

These are just a few examples; perhaps we can think of many more. (Think of anything that gives a sense of being "good enough" or better than others.) These sources of functional righteousness disconnect us from the power of the gospel. They allow us to find righteousness in what we do instead of honestly confronting the depth of our sin and brokenness. Furthermore, each of these sources of righteousness is also a way of judging and excluding others! When we rely on them, we implicitly elevate ourselves and condemn those who aren't as "righteous" as us. In other words, finding righteousness in these things leads us into more sin, not less. truly repent. In the gospel, free grace is the thing that most assures us and most deeply convicts us.

## 11. PREACH THE GOSPEL TO YOURSELF

One of the most transforming disciplines you can develop is to preach the gospel to yourself daily. To live in full view of the cross and allow the truth of the gospel to define every moment of your life, you must know it well and remind yourself of it often.

"Reminding ourselves of the Gospel is the most important daily habit we can establish. If the Gospel is the most vital news in the world, and if salvation by grace is the defining truth of our existence, we should create ways to immerse ourselves in these truths every day. No days off allowed ... Your audience is your own heart. And the message is simple: Christ died for your sins. It's a matter of sitting down, grabbing your own attention, and telling yourself, 'Hey, listen up! This is what matters most: You're forgiven! You have hope! Your hope is based on the sacrifice of Jesus. So let's not view this day any other way. Let today be governed by this one defining truth'" (C.J. Mahaney, *Living the Cross Centered Life* pp. 132-133).

"You are loved and accepted by God through the merit of Jesus, and you are blessed by God through the merit of Jesus. Nothing you ever do will cause Him to love you any more or any less" (Jerry Bridges, *Transforming Grace* p. 73).

A biblically faithful gospel is not that of unconditional love. It's not "God accepts you as you are." To think in this way greatly diminishes the Cross. The gospel is far better than unconditional love. God has contra-conditional love for you. The gospel says, "God accepts you just as Christ is." Christ bears the wrath of God that we rightfully deserve because of our sin, and gives us His righteousness that makes us wholly acceptable to God. God never accepts me as I am. He accepts me "as I am in Christ Jesus."

In his essay, *The Idol Factory*, C.J. Mahaney writes, "The center of gravity is different. The true gospel does not allow God's love to be sucked into the vortex of the soul's lust for acceptability and worth in and of itself." Rather, a true gospel radically reorients you to look beyond yourself to the cross for your acceptability, value and worth.

"May the Lord bring us in contemplation to Calvary, then our position will no longer be that of the pompous man of pride, but we shall take the humble place of one who loves much because much has been forgiven him. Pride cannot live beneath the cross. Let us sit there



and learn our lesson, and then rise and carry it into practice” (C.H. Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, June 3).

There is no such thing as a God-less moment. He is unwaveringly working all things out for His glory. You must see every moment of your life in light of the ongoing work of the gospel in and through your life. Every relationship, every opportunity, every conflict, and every seeming coincidence is God working in you and me to transform every aspect of our lives by the power of the gospel. Cling to the cross, regardless of the circumstance.

## 12. PRACTICAL WAYS TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO YOURSELF

- **Meditate** upon the gospel (Isaiah 53:3-6, Romans 3:23-26; 5:6-11; 8:32-39, 1Cor. 15:3-4, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Galatians 2:21).
- **Pray** the gospel (Hebrews 4:16). The whole reason we can enter into the presence of a holy and righteous God is because of the work of Christ on the cross.
- **Sing** the gospel (*Amazing Grace* by John Newton and *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* by Isaac Watts).
- **Remember** how the gospel has transformed your life (1 Timothy 1:13).
- **Study** the gospel. To grow in your passion for what Jesus has done, you need to increase your understanding of what He has done (ordo salutis). David Prior said, “We never move on from the cross, only into a more profound understanding of the cross.”
- **Practice** incarnating the gospel. Be a friend to sinners and engage in incarnational ministries.

## 13. CAPTIVATED BY THE CROSS

To counteract our sinful tendency to shrink the gospel, we must constantly nourish our minds on biblical truth. We need to know, see and savor the holy, righteous character of God. We need to identify, admit and feel the depth of our brokenness and sinfulness. We don’t need to do these things because “that’s what Christians are supposed to do.” Rather, we make this our aim because it is the life God wants for us – a life marked by transforming joy, hope and love.

Growing in the gospel means seeing more of God’s holiness and more of our sinfulness. Because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, we need not fear seeing God as He really is or admitting how broken we really are. Our hope is not in our own goodness, nor in the vain expectation that God will compromise His standards and “grade on a curve.” Rather, we rest in Jesus as our perfect Redeemer – the one who is “our righteousness, holiness, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30).

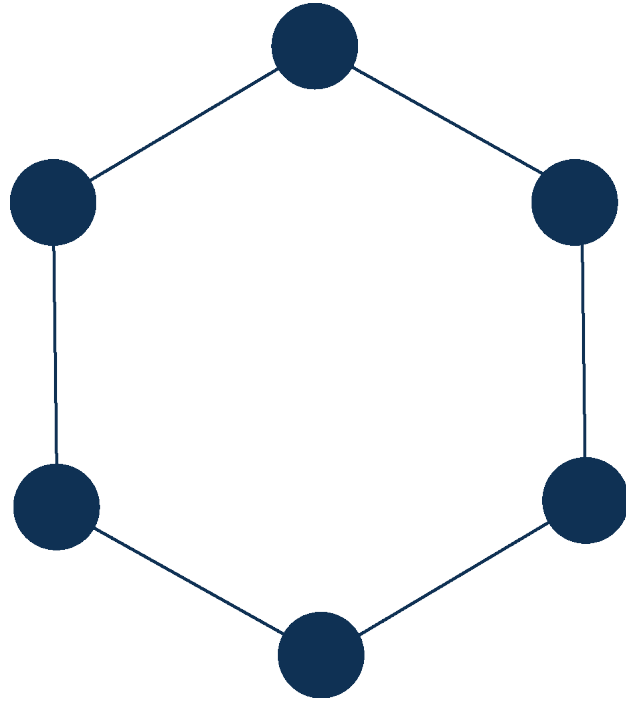
In Galatians 6:14, Paul gives us a fascinating glimpse into how his faith in the gospel transformed him when he writes, “*May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.*”

John Stott writes, “Paul’s whole world was in orbit around the cross. It filled his vision, illumined his life, warmed his spirit. He ‘gloried’ in it. It meant more to him than anything else ... This Greek word translated here as ‘boast’ has no exact equivalent in English. It means to glory in, trust in, revel in, live for. In a word, our glory is our obsession.”

This is what it means to live daily in full view of the cross. The gospel was never meant to be lived out in isolation but in the context of rich and deep gospel relationships. In the next session we look at what it means to Experience Belonging.



# EXPERIENCING BELONGING



*So we who are many are one body in Christ, and individually we are members who belong to one another.  
(Romans 12:5)*





## SESSION 3 | THE GOSPEL AND COMMUNITY

### 1. THE IDENTITY OF THE CHURCH – THE GOSPEL

The motivation for everything the church does must be based upon what God has accomplished for us in Jesus Christ and what He is accomplishing through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. The gospel is central to the motives and the methods of what the church does.

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:17-21).*

*“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10).*

While there is a people of God through space and time (universal church), Scripture also teaches of individual gatherings of God’s people in particular areas (local church). Although we enter into a relationship with God individually, by entering into that relationship with God we enter into a relationship with God’s people, the church.

### 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHURCH

The church community is both the end of the gospel and also the means of spreading the gospel. God’s promise in salvation is to create His “holy nation”, a people that dwell with Him forever. “I will be your God and you will be my people” (Leviticus 26:12, Jeremiah 30:22). So Christians, who are eternally united to Christ, are therefore eternally united to one another. We are all ministers of the gospel for the sake of one another. Since our culture knows very little about true community, we will have to work hard at following a biblical vision. In the biblical vision and in true community we are to be:

- an accepting community that reflects the grace we’ve been given from Christ
- a holy community that urges one another to live God-pleasing lives
- a truth-telling community that is free to repent and to allow others to repent, because of the gospel
- an encouraging community that builds one another up
- a sacrificially generous community that spends its life and wealth on the needs of others
- a suffering community that loves and forgives others even when it harms us<sup>5</sup>

While we live in an individualistic culture that values independence, the church is meant to be a counter-culture that brings in the Kingdom of God through loving and caring for one another and the surrounding culture. God’s commands for His community, the church, include teaching on how Christians are to interact with and serve one another.

*“So those who received His word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and 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*

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<sup>5</sup> adapted from Timothy Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church





*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 2:41-47).*

### **3. THE ONE ANOTHER TEACHINGS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

- Members of one another (Romans 12:5)
- Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10)
- Honor one another (Romans 12:10)
- Live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16)
- Loving one another (Romans 13:8, I Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, Hebrews 10:24, I Peter 1:22, I John 3:11, 23; 4:7; 11-12, 2 John 5)
- Edifying one another (Romans 14:9)
- Stop passing judgment on one another (Romans 14:13).
- Accept one another (Romans 15:7)
- Instruct one another (Romans 15:14)
- Greet one another with a holy kiss (Romans 16:16).
- Agree with one another (1 Corinthians 1:10)
- Waiting for one another (I Corinthians 11:33)
- Have equal concern for one another (1 Corinthians 12:25).
- Serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13)
- Carrying one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2)
- Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:32).
- Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19).
- Submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21)
- Esteeming one another (Philippians 2:3)
- Do not lie to each other (Colossians 3:9).
- Bear with each other (Colossians 3:13).
- Teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16)
- Encourage one another daily (Hebrews 3:13)
- Spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24).
- Do not slander one another (James 4:11)
- Don't grumble against each other (James 5:9)
- Confess your sins to each other (James 5:16)
- Pray for each other so that you may be healed (James 5:16).
- Love one another deeply, from the heart (I Peter 1:22).
- Offer hospitality to one another (I Peter 4:9)
- Fellowship with one another (I John 1:7)

### **4. NEGATIVE ONE ANOTHER TEACHINGS**

- Not lusting for one another (Romans 1:27)
- Not judging one another (Romans 14:13)
- Not depriving one another (I Corinthians 7:5)
- Not envying one another (Galatians 5:26)
- Not biting, devouring, destroying one another (Galatians 5:15)
- Not slandering one another (James 4:11)
- Not grumbling against one another (James 5:9)
- Not hating one another (Titus 3:3)
- Not provoking one another (Galatians 5:26)

The Scriptures are clear that each individual Christian is to be part of the church body and that body functions with certain characteristics. While the methods of applying these characteristics of the church can vary, the necessity of certain functions being present are what constitutes a church. For these characteristics



that constitute a church to take place, the Bible teaches that a particular local church has an order or structure. However, this structure can look vastly different in each particular local church.

## **5. INDICATORS OF A HEALTHY CHURCH**

- Preaching and teaching of all of God's Word (Acts 20:27, 2 Timothy 4:2)
- Worship of God (Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 1:12; 5:16-19)
- Evangelizing of lost people (Matthew 28:19)
- Helping those in need (Luke 6:35-36, Acts 11:29, 2 Corinthians 8:4, 1 John 3:17)
- Baptizing of new Christians (Matthew 28:19)
- Building up of God's people (Colossians 1:28, Ephesians 4:12-13)
- Unity and love among God's people (John 13:34-35)
- Service by God's people (1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Ephesians 4:12, 1 Peter 4:11)
- Partaking of communion (1 Corinthians 11:17-34)
- Church discipline (Matthew 18:15-17, Galatians 6:1-5)
- Effective prayer (Acts 2:24, Romans 12:12, Ephesians 6:18)
- Biblical church government (Philippians 1:1)
- Holiness among God's people (John 14:15; 17:23, Hebrews 12:14)
- Deep and sincere love for Jesus at all times (Luke 10:27)
- An unwavering commitment to the gospel of grace (1 Corinthians 15:1-8)
- Evidence of the power of God (Romans 1:16)

It is the role of the church to encourage one another to be mature in Christ (Ephesians 4:12-13). Scripture reveals that one becomes a Christian through faith in Jesus alone through grace alone. The Apostle Paul said the goal was not simply to bring people to initial saving faith, but to "present every man mature in Christ" (Colossians 1:28). This can only happen through the work of the Holy Spirit in someone's life through means of teaching, community, prayer etc.

## **6. GOSPEL LEADERSHIP**

We believe Jesus is the reason, foundation, and the purpose for why the church even exists. Therefore, it is absolutely vital that as a church – we love Jesus, obey Jesus, imitate Jesus, and follow Jesus at all times and in all ways, according to the teaching of His Word.

### **Jesus is the head of the church.**

- ➡ Jesus is the Apostle who plants the church (Hebrews 3:1).
- ➡ Jesus is the senior pastor who leads the church (1 Peter 5:4).
- ➡ Jesus is the head of the church (Colossians 1:4, 2:10, 2:19).
- ➡ Jesus grows and builds a church (Matthew 16:18).
- ➡ Jesus shuts a church down for becoming faithless and/or fruitless (Revelation 2:5).

### **Elders are the senior leaders under Jesus.**

- ➡ Elders serve the church (Mark 10:43-45, 1 Peter 5:2-3).
- ➡ Elders lead the church (1 Timothy 3:4-5; 5:17, 1 Peter 5:2, Romans 12:6,8).
- ➡ Elders nourish the church (1 Timothy 4:1-2; 4:6).
- ➡ Elders equip the church (Ephesians 4:11-12).
- ➡ Elders protect the church (Acts 20:28-31).

### **Deacons lead servants in the church.**

- ➡ Deacons are worthy of respect and have strong character (1 Timothy 3:8-13).
- ➡ Deacons are sincere, heartfelt, earnest, honest, and authentic (1 Timothy 3:8-13).
- ➡ Deacons are without addictions – self-controlled (1 Timothy 3:8-13).
- ➡ Deacons do not pursue dishonest gain; they are not greedy (1 Timothy 3:8-13).
- ➡ Deacons keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience and sound theology (1 Timothy 3:8-13).
- ➡ Deacons are tested and proven worthy over time (1 Timothy 3:8-13).



- ➡ Male deacons are additionally called a husband of one woman and to manage their children and household well (1 Timothy 3:8-13).
- ➡ Female deacons are additionally called to not be malicious talkers but to be temperate and trustworthy in everything (1 Timothy 3:8-13).

#### **Partners lead and serve under the elders and deacons.**

- ➡ Partners serve by working together like a family (1 Timothy 3:15; 5:1-2).
- ➡ Partners use their gifts to serve other parts of the body (Romans 12:4-5, 1 Corinthians 12:16-17).
- ➡ Partners are called to work together through partnership in the gospel (Philippians 1:5-7).

In relationship to God, the church's purpose is to worship Him. Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever (shorter catechism). Although this includes a large gathering of people in a worship service, it grows even larger as the church seeks to worship God in everything they do from work, to family, to relationships and even to rest (Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 1:12; 5:16-19).

## **7. COMMUNITY GROUPS**

Depending on our background, when we hear about *community groups*, there may be several things that come to mind. Is it just a trendy way of saying Bible study? Is it a place to meet new people and make friends? With no church background, we might wonder what kind of freaky gathering is this?

For CrossPointe, a community group is a primary way to *grow in gospel community, for the community*. Let us unpack that to shed some light on what a group is and is not.

### **a. Growing in the Gospel (Up)**

At the minimum, it is a weekly gathering where people **grow in the gospel together**. Since we believe the gospel is more than just how one gets saved, but it's the means by which we continue to grow as Christians, then we never move away from it. We are people with a huge problem – namely, we look to everything but Jesus for our identities. We need constant reminders of who we are in Jesus because of what He has done for us on the cross. We may cognitively know we are a new creation, but we don't always experience that. We need a community that will remind us of our true identity and help us experience this truth.

However, it is not enough to simply gather; we engage in gospel conversations when we delve into the mystery of the gospel and its implications for our lives. We need some guidance in this, and that is where our study materials come in. Though there is nothing magical about these studies, they do bring intentionality to our conversations. They invite us to look to the Bible, where the gospel message is revealed. They discipline us to ask the tough questions. Questions to get below the surface and allow us a few moments to pause and reflect on the goodness of God, despite how our circumstances sometimes feel.

### **b. Growing in Community (In)**

As we begin to grow in our new identities as followers of Jesus, we then have the spiritual resources to sacrifice for others while *growing in community*. At the heart of the gospel message is a sinless Man sacrificing for a people that are naturally His enemies. As we dwell on that reality, we can begin to love others genuinely and more fully. We can truly develop community with the people in our groups because we will begin sacrificing for one another. Gospel community is not always the people we naturally hang out with. We tend to hang out with people who are like us and share similar interests or passions. There is nothing wrong with that, but we shouldn't mistake a similar age and stage in life as the prerequisite for gospel community. Sometimes this happens, but it is not the goal. The goal is to be a people who are maturing in Christ together.



### **c. For the Community (Out)**

The last part of growing in gospel community is *for the community*. Maturing in the gospel can never be divorced from loving the community outside the church or outside our Community Groups. The love of Christ we experience together, as we dwell on the beauty of the gospel, should compel us to seek ways to serve and love others who have not experienced the love of Jesus. This does not mean to wait for the church leadership to organize a service project of some type (not that these are bad, or that we don't do them), but that we seek ways to show others the love of Christ in the everyday rhythms of life. We try to love people in the ordinary and the mundane with gospel intentionality. If we are truly growing in the gospel, we will be humbled by a message that tells us we were nobodies, and have only been made somebodies because of Jesus. So we have no reason to look down on anyone else. We have no reason to boast, except in the cross of Jesus. Yet if we are growing in the gospel, we will simultaneously grow in confidence as well. A confidence in who Jesus is and what He has accomplished will give us strength and power to actually love those who don't believe what we believe. At CrossPointe we believe true community happens when the gospel and everyday life are shared with one another.

## **8. SACRAMENTS**

Jesus gave the church two visible symbols (ordinances) as reminders of His life, death and resurrection. These two ordinances are: baptism and communion. Baptism and communion are both a means of grace or an outward means by which Christ communicates to His people the truths of redemption. In celebrating these two sacraments in community, we are reminding each other of who Christ is and what He accomplished for us on the cross so that we may live daily in full view of the Cross.

### **a. Baptism**

#### **What is water baptism?**

➡ Water baptism is an outward act, which denotes or symbolizes an inward experience that has already taken place in the life of a believer in Jesus. The word "baptism" means "to dip, to immerse, or to submerge." The act of immersing a new believer in water symbolizes two things: first, identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and second, identification with the Body of Christ, His church.

#### **Where is water baptism mentioned in the Bible?**

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit ..." (Matthew 28:19).*

*"What shall we say then? Are we to continue to sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin" (Romans 6:1-7).*

#### **What is the purpose of water baptism?**

- ➡ Water baptism symbolizes our death, burial, and resurrection with Jesus Christ. It is an outward action that denotes the past inward experience of being born again (Romans 6:3-6).
- ➡ Water baptism is a celebration of our union with Christ.
- ➡ Water baptism is an open declaration that we are now believers and identified with Christ and His Church.
- ➡ Water baptism is one of the first acts of obedience to Christ.



### **Who is baptism for?**

➡ Water baptism is for all who have truly accepted Jesus Christ into their hearts as Lord and Savior. “And Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 2:38).

➡ All who have repented and received Christ should take the next step of water baptism.

### **Is water baptism a requirement to be saved?**

➡ No. Ephesians 2:8-9 says that we are saved by grace and not by any of our own works. Titus 3:5 confirms this by saying that God saved us, not because of righteous things we have done, but because of His mercy.

### **b. Communion**

Jesus instructed His disciples to remember His life, death and resurrection. This is done through communion.

### **What is the Lord’s Supper?**

➡ Jesus instructed His disciples to remember His life, death and resurrection. This is done through communion which is a tangible means of grace whereby we see, taste, hold, smell and hear the promises of redemption in Christ. There is a real and special spiritual presence of the glorified Christ mediated by the Holy Spirit which strengthens the believer’s faith and points toward the future and full redemption of God’s people when Christ returns (Matthew 26:19-20, 26-28; Luke 22:14-20; Mark 14:23-25; Revelation 19:9).

*“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).*

#### **➡ It is a simple act.**

“... the Lord Jesus on the night He was betrayed took bread ...” (1 Corinthians 11:23)

#### **➡ It is a reminder.**

“... and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me’” (1 Corinthians 11:24).

#### **➡ It is a symbol.**

“In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me’” (1 Corinthians 11:25).

#### **➡ It is a statement of faith.**

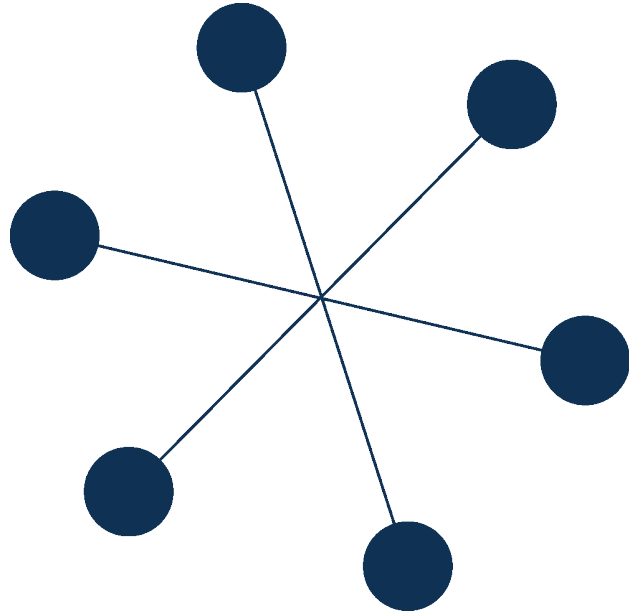
“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26)

However the church does not exist just for itself. God has a *mission* for the church. The church exists to spread the good news of Jesus through both word and deed, which includes both declaring the gospel and meeting the physical needs of those who are poor and needy – inside and outside the church (Matthew 28:19, Luke 6:35-36, Luke 4:40). Community cannot exist for itself. It must exist for a mission. When community exists for itself, it replaces the gospel with community. The next section will lay out how we can Live Generously.





# LIVE GENEROUSLY



*They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. (1 Timothy 6:18-19)*

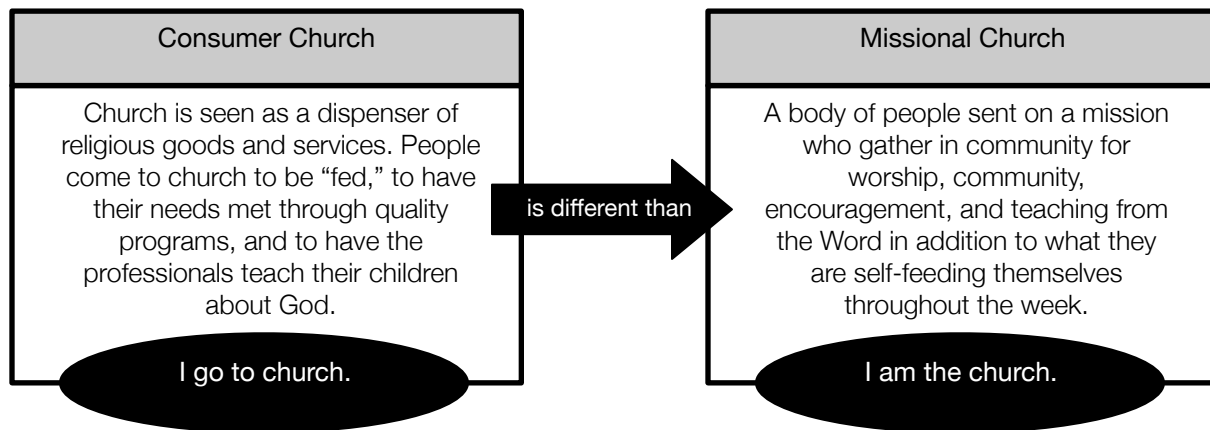


## SESSION 4 | THE GOSPEL AND MISSION

The reason for a church to be on mission necessitates a source of the mission, a reason for the mission. The source and reason for the mission of the church is God and His plan to redeem and renew all things through Jesus for His Glory and our joy. The Father is a sending Father who sent His Son who sends the church on His mission.

### 1. THE CHURCH EXISTS FOR MISSION

“This is the whole of Christianity. There is nothing else. It is easy to get muddled about that. It is easy to think that the Church has a lot of different objects – education, building, missions, holding services. The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs [Christ-like]. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose. It says in the Bible that the whole universe was made for Christ and that everything is to be gathered together in Him” (C.S. Lewis).



The New Testament does not view the church as a particular building where people go, although it includes that, but the church is a people on mission. It is common to view church as a place to “go” and take whatever you can from it while not becoming part of the church, not serving the church, not being in relationship with others in the church, not connecting other people to the church.

The people of the church are to come *together* to celebrate Jesus, learn about Jesus, remember Jesus, serve Jesus and then *go out* to serve Jesus, teach people about Jesus, and point people to Jesus in the particular context where they live, work and play.

*“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you’” (John 20:21).*

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:7-8).*

Jesus commands the church to be sent through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to be sent to the immediate culture where God has placed us, as well as, to all the earth if the opportunity arises. People are first and foremost missionaries in their homes, neighborhoods, workplaces, communities, cities and wherever else God may call them. The people of the church are always on mission.





The church is a people that is for the city, for the culture and for the people where God has placed them. There are different views churches have on how to interact with the surrounding culture. At CrossPointe, we desire to be “*for*” our culture.

Church “*of*” culture: The church so embraces the culture there is no difference (syncretism).

Church “*against*” culture: The church so opposes culture they lose their relevance (sectarianism).

Church “*for*” culture: The church engages culture in order to transform it for the glory of God.

## 2. THE MISSION OF CROSSPOINTE

The mission of CrossPointe is to point our community to Jesus Christ. This entails both our local church community, as well as, all the communities in which we have influence.

We believe that mankind was created with dignity and worth, but sin has marred and tainted us, and all of creation needs to be re-created through Jesus. As a re-created community, we believe we are to be sent out into our communities, cities and world to join God’s mission of redeeming and renewing all things.

This takes place in all spheres of life: relationships, workplaces, neighborhoods, families, cities, schools, etc. as the community is sent to bring the light of the gospel into the world around us. As a church, our hope is to encourage, train and equip people to do this so the hope of the gospel can take root and spread in our own lives, communities and cities.

It is important that our understanding of the mission of the God through the church does not remain cognitive and something we only talk about.

## 3. ELEMENTS OF A MISSIONAL CHURCH<sup>6</sup>

### ➔ uses language that is understandable to the culture

- A missional church does not shrink from historic, biblical terms but works to explain their meaning.
- A missional church avoids “we – them” language and mocking people of different beliefs.
- This language must come from a humble yet bold heart that has been changed by the gospel.

### ➔ applies the gospel to the core concerns of the culture

- A missional church seeks to understand the stories of culture in order to better understand the hopes, dreams and fears of people, so it can re-tell culture’s story in light of Jesus
- A missional church works to demonstrate that only in Jesus will people find true freedom.
- A missional church is “*for*” the culture and desires to see God’s best for the people of society.
- A missional church is filled with people who love their neighbors as themselves and work for the common good of the whole community.

### ➔ trains people for gospel living in all areas of life

- A missional church equips its people to view everything with a biblical worldview and work with Christian distinctiveness. They need to know:
  - a. what cultural practices are good and should be embraced
  - b. what cultural practices are adverse to the gospel and should be rejected
  - c. what cultural practices can be adapted/revised
- A missional church shows that people who are working to renew and transform culture through their vocations are doing important, real *Kingdom work* and ministry.
- A missional church demonstrates true, biblical love toward those with whom we deeply differ, because the heart of the gospel is a Man dying for His enemies and saving unworthy people by sheer grace.

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Timothy Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York



➔ **creates biblical community which is counter-cultural and counter-intuitive**

-A missional church is filled with people who love one another despite their differences of personality, social status, ethnicity, or vocation and support each other in authentic, nurturing, and supportive friendships.

-A missional church goes beyond basic “fellowship” to embody a *counterculture*, showing the world how radically different a Christian society is with regard to sex, money, and power.

-A missional church must be more deeply and practically committed to deeds of compassion and social justice than traditional liberal churches and more deeply and practically committed to evangelism and conversion than traditional fundamentalist churches. This kind of church is profoundly *counter-intuitive* to American observers. It breaks their ability to categorize (and dismiss) it as liberal or conservative.

➔ **practices Christian unity as much as possible on the local level**

-A missional church must not spend time bashing and criticizing other kinds of biblical churches. Such behavior simply plays into the common belief that Christians are intolerant and can't get along.

-A missional church should cooperate, reach out to and support the other congregations and churches in the local area.

#### **4. GOSPEL GENEROSITY**

The vertical response to the gospel is gratitude. The horizontal response to the gospel is generosity.

In his book *The Mission of God*, Chris Wright shows that the Bible story is “all about mission” – God’s mission is to save a people for Himself through Jesus Christ. Jesus is the focus of the story, but His identity has missionary implications (Luke 24:45-48). This radical, God-centered perspective, Wright suggests, “turns inside out and upside down some of the common ways in which we are accustomed to think about the Christian life. ... It constantly forces us to open our eyes to the big picture, rather than shelter in the cozy narcissism of our own small worlds.”

**Implication:** We begin to ask very different questions about our lives.

- We ask, “Where does God fit into the story of my life?” When the real question is, “Where does my little life fit into this great story of God’s mission?”
- We want to be driven by a purpose that has been tailored just right for our own individual lives, when we should be seeing the purpose of all life, including our own, wrapped up in the great mission of God for the whole of creation.
- We talk about “applying the Bible to our lives.” What would it mean to apply our lives to the Bible instead, assuming the Bible to be reality — the real story — to which we are called to conform ourselves?
- We wrestle with “making the gospel relevant to the world.” But in this story, God is about the business of transforming the world to fit the shape of the gospel.
- We argue about what can legitimately be included in the mission God expects from the church, when we should ask what kind of church God wants for the whole range of His mission.
- I may wonder what kind of mission God has for me, when I should be asking what kind of me God wants for His mission.

In his book *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, Timothy Keller gives this illustration: “Why is generosity the mark of being a Christian? Imagine a person who is deathly ill. The doctor announces to him that there is a medicine which can certainly cure him. Without it, he has no hope. ‘However,’ says the doctor,



'it is extremely expensive. You will have to sell your cars, even your home, to buy it. You may not wish to spend so much.' The man turns to his doctor and says, 'What do my cars mean to me now? What good will my house be? I must have that medicine; it is precious to me. These other things which were so important to me now look pale by comparison to the medicine. They are expendable now. Give me the medicine.' The apostle Peter says, 'To you who believe ... [He] is precious' (1 Peter 2:7). The grace of God makes Christ precious to us, so that our possessions, our money, our time have all become eternally and utterly expendable. They used to be crucial to our happiness. They are not so now."

"God takes great pleasure in manifesting His presence and pouring out His power on those who dare to align radically their purposes with His" (Dr. Steve Childers).

## 5. MISSIONAL LIVING

### Intercede

- Pray for three lost people (an older, lost son or a younger, lost son).
- Pray the Holy Spirit would begin to work in their hearts convicting them of their need for a true Savior.
- Pray for an opportunity to invest in their life.
- Pray that God would show you a way you can serve them.

### Invest

- Serve them in some simple way (i.e. mow their yard, bake them some cookies, or meet a small need they have).

### Invite

- Invite them to share a meal with you (you buy).
- Invite them to worship with you on Sunday or in your community group. Without an invitation, your family, friends and neighbors are unlikely to go to a church service. If you invite them they have an 80 percent-plus chance of attending a Sunday service.
- Invite them to receive the grace and salvation of Jesus Christ.

## 6. GOSPEL CONTRIBUTION

The Contribution Rhythm is designed to equip and train the church to live our lives on mission with God. At CrossPointe we are calling all of our partners to a life of contribution (stewardship). This fleshes itself out in three distinct, yet overlapping areas of our lives: time, talent and treasure. To steward something, is to realize that it is not yours, but has been given to you by God to use for the benefit of others. As the gospel works in us, we get the opportunity to have the gospel work *through* us and to experience the joy that comes from a lifestyle of contribution (stewardship).

**a. Time:** Every day we have 1440 minutes given to us. Time is just simply the measurement of our lives. What we decide to do with our time is shaped by what we value. Our values reveal our heart. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6.21). Our values reflect what our hearts worship. Whatever you worship you will give your life for. The gospel begins to radically reorient our values, which shape the decisions we make. Our life's direction is simply the sum of the decisions we make throughout our lives.

*"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).*

**b. Talent:** We were created with a unique personality and set of gifts to reflect the glory of our Creator God. "Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations'" (Jeremiah 1:4-5).



We need to ask ourselves, what has God appointed us to be and to do? When we begin to discover how we were uniquely created to serve, we begin to tap into how God intended things to be. We get a glimpse of the heavenly invading this earth. As we steward our talents, Jesus' prayer of *"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,"* begins to come true.

"From a spiritual viewpoint, when we deny our talents and instead focus on our weaknesses, on some level, we are telling God that we know best and that God somehow made a mistake in gracing us with our unique mix of talents" (Albert L. Winseman, *Living Your Strengths*).

**c. Treasure:** We all have been blessed with different treasures, including finances. We can seek to use these treasures to benefit others. In 2 Corinthians chapters eight and nine, Paul has much to say regarding financial generosity. Rather than appeal to guilt tactics, he simply reminds the Corinthians of the gospel. Regarding giving, he states:

*"I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich"* (2 Corinthians 8:8-9).

Paul continues later saying, *"Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Corinthians 9:7).

So the first thing you must do is dwell on the truth of the gospel. As you do this, your affections for Jesus and His church will be stirred. At this point, prayerfully consider how God is leading you to give. According to Paul, it's the disposition of your heart, rather than a certain amount or percentage of income that is of utmost importance. However, the act of giving is assumed here. So the question becomes how much? We should view 10 percent as a guideline. For some that would be a significant sacrifice, and will take much time to achieve. That is okay. If you have never given financially to a church, just start somewhere. The point is not the amount, but that you are giving sacrificially. What is the next step or "click on the dial" for you? This is figured out in prayer and in community dialogue (with a spouse, friend, community group leader, etc.). Don't ignore this opportunity for God to grow you in His grace.

## 7. CHURCH PLANTING

CrossPointe does not desire to be an end in and of itself, but to use our *time, talents and treasures* to start other churches. This will include supporting other churches and church plants financially, through equipping, through training, and through sending people who feel called to plant churches in a specific area. This has been part of the DNA of CrossPointe since its inception, and CrossPointe Winter Park along with dozens of other churches across Central Florida are the result of that vision.

CrossPointe Church (Orlando) was established in the Southeast Corridor of Orlando in 2002 with the vision to impact the city and the world through planting "church planting churches." Through partnerships with Vision 360 Church Planting Network and Acts 29 Church Planting Network, CrossPointe has helped start or re-establish dozens of churches in Central Florida since its inception. We desire to continue planting church-planting churches as we feel this is the best way to point our community to Jesus:

"The vigorous, continual planting of new congregations is the single most crucial strategy for 1) the numerical growth of the Body of Christ in any city, and 2) the continual corporate renewal and revival of the existing churches in a city. Nothing else – not crusades, outreach programs, para-church ministries, growing mega-churches, congregational consulting, nor church renewal processes – will have the consistent impact of dynamic, extensive church planting. This is an eyebrow raising statement. But to those who have done any study at all, it is not even controversial" (Timothy Keller, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York).



## Partnership Covenant

### [CrossPointe's Covenant to You]

With the enablement of the Holy Spirit, the CrossPointe church leadership covenants the following:

1. We commit ourselves to lovingly caring for you and seeking your growth in Christ (Hebrews 13:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:12).
1. We covenant to provide teaching and counsel from Scripture (Galatians 6:6, I Timothy 5:17-18).
2. We covenant that this teaching will span the whole counsel of God's Word (Acts 20:27-38).
3. We covenant to helping you in times of need (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-35, James 2:14-17).
4. We covenant that your elders and deacons will meet the criteria assigned to them in Scripture (I Timothy 3:1-13; 5:17-33, Titus 1:5-9, I Peter 5:1-4).
5. We covenant to pray for you regularly, particularly when you are sick (James 5:14).
6. We covenant to be on guard against false teachers (Acts 20:28-31).
7. We covenant to exercise church discipline when necessary (Matthew 18:15-20, I Corinthians 5, Galatians 6:1).
8. We covenant to help you become equipped to serve Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).
9. We covenant to seek God's will for our church community to the best of our ability as we study Scripture and follow the Spirit (Acts 20:28, I Peter 5:1-5).
10. We covenant to set an example and join you in fulfilling the duties of church members (I Corinthians 11:1, Philippians 3:17, I Timothy 4:12).

### [Your Covenant to CrossPointe]

- ☐ Do you sense God has called you to be part of CrossPointe and to come under the care of the leadership?
- ☐ Are you willing to serve, pray for and support the mission of CrossPointe, even in the messiness, ambiguity and adventure of a church planting movement?
- ☐ Will you endeavor to maintain a close relationship with the Lord through regular personal Bible reading, prayer, fellowship and practice of the other spiritual disciplines?
- ☐ Are you willing to embrace and strive to live out the values of CrossPointe (Know God, Find Freedom, Experience Belonging, Live Generously)
- ☐ Are you willing to participate actively in both our Celebration Service and engage in Community?
- ☐ Are you willing to give financially to CrossPointe?
- ☐ Are you willing to *intercede, invest and invite* those God has placed around you?



## Appendix 1 | CROSSPOINTE DOCTRINE

### **We believe...**

The Scriptures are true, authoritative and sufficient (Psalm 19:7-11; 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

There is only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 46:9-10; John 17:3, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 1 Timothy 2:5).

The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. The Father is neither the Son nor the Holy Spirit. The Son is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 45:6-7; Psalm 110:1; Matthew 3: 13-17; Matthew 28: 17-20; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6).

I am, along with all humanity (Christ excluded), by birth and action a sinner (Genesis 6:5; Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:23; 5:8, 12-21, 7:18; Ephesians 2:1-3).

The deserved penalty for sin is death, both physical and spiritual (Genesis 2:15-17; Genesis 3:19, Romans 5:12; 6:23, James 1:14-15).

Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, was born of a virgin and is both fully God and fully human (Matthew 1:20; Luke 2:52; John 1:1-4, 14; Colossians 1:15-20; Hebrews 1:1-3).

Jesus Christ died as my substitute to pay the penalty for my sin (John 1:29; 10:1-18, Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 1:4; 1 Peter 3:18).

Jesus Christ physically rose from the dead (Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-53; John 1:20-21:25; 1 Corinthians 15:12-34).

Jesus Christ physically ascended into heaven and will one day physically return (John 14:3; Acts 1:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:16; Hebrews 9:28; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 1:7).

There will be a future physical resurrection of the dead. Those who trust in Jesus Christ alone will be raised to eternal reward. Those who have not trusted in Jesus Christ will be raised to eternal punishment (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Acts 24-15).

Only by trusting in the person and work of Jesus Christ alone can I be reconciled to God and experience true life and joy (John 3:18, 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 3:21-26; 1 Timothy 2: 5-6).

### **Additional Beliefs and Confessional Statement\***

The theological doctrines within the CrossPointe Church Statement of Faith reflect what distinguishes CrossPointe Church from other churches who would affirm the basic doctrines. These doctrines indelibly shape the way that CrossPointe Church is led and the direction the church is headed. We do not expect all partners to embrace all aspects of these doctrines, but partners should expect that the doctrines will be maintained in all ministry environments at CrossPointe Church, and partners may not teach contrary to them.

**The Tri-une God:** We believe in one God, eternally existing in three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, who know, love, and glorify one another. This one true and living God is infinitely perfect both in his love and in his holiness. He is the Creator of all things, visible and invisible, and is therefore worthy to receive all glory and adoration. Immortal and eternal, he perfectly and exhaustively knows the end from the beginning, sustains and sovereignly rules over all things, and providentially brings about his eternal



good purposes to redeem a people for himself and restore his fallen creation, to the praise of his glorious grace.

**Revelation:** God has graciously disclosed his existence and power in the created order, and has supremely revealed himself to fallen human beings in the person of his Son, the incarnate Word. Moreover, this God is a speaking God who by his Spirit has graciously disclosed himself in human words: we believe that God has inspired the words preserved in the Scriptures, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, which are both record and means of his saving work in the world. These writings alone constitute the verbally inspired Word of God, which is utterly authoritative and without error in the original writings, complete in its revelation of his will for salvation, sufficient for all that God requires us to believe and do, and final in its authority over every domain of knowledge to which it speaks. We confess that both our finitude and our sinfulness preclude the possibility of knowing God's truth exhaustively, but we affirm that, enlightened by the Spirit of God, we can know God's revealed truth truly. The Bible is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it teaches; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; and trusted, as God's pledge, in all that it promises. As God's people hear, believe, and do the Word, they are equipped as disciples of Christ and witnesses to the gospel.

**Creation of Humanity:** We believe that God created human beings, male and female, in his own image. Adam and Eve belonged to the created order that God himself declared to be very good, serving as God's agents to care for, manage, and govern creation, living in holy and devoted fellowship with their Maker. Men and women, equally made in the image of God, enjoy equal access to God by faith in Christ Jesus and are both called to move beyond passive self-indulgence to significant private and public engagement in family, church, and civic life. Adam and Eve were made to complement each other in a one-flesh union that establishes the only normative pattern of sexual relations for men and women, such that marriage ultimately serves as a type of the union between Christ and his church. In God's wise purposes, men and women are not simply interchangeable, but rather they complement each other in mutually enriching ways. God ordains that they assume distinctive roles which reflect the loving relationship between Christ and the church, the husband exercising headship in a way that displays the caring, sacrificial love of Christ, and the wife submitting to her husband in a way that models the love of the church for her Lord. In the ministry of the church, both men and women are encouraged to serve Christ and to be developed to their full potential in the manifold ministries of the people of God. The distinctive leadership role within the church given to qualified men is grounded in creation, fall, and redemption and must not be sidelined by appeals to cultural developments.

**The Fall:** We believe that Adam, made in the image of God, distorted that image and forfeited his original blessedness—for himself and all his progeny—by falling into sin through Satan's temptation. As a result, all human beings are alienated from God, corrupted in every aspect of their being (e.g., physically, mentally, volitionally, emotionally, spiritually) and condemned finally and irrevocably to death—apart from God's own gracious intervention. The supreme need of all human beings is to be reconciled to the God under whose just and holy wrath we stand; the only hope of all human beings is the undeserved love of this same God, who alone can rescue us and restore us to himself.

**The Plan of God:** We believe that from all eternity God determined in grace to save a great multitude of guilty sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation, and to this end foreknew them and chose them. We believe that God justifies and sanctifies those who by grace have faith in Jesus, and that he will one day glorify them—all to the praise of his glorious grace. In love God commands and implores all people to repent and believe, having set his saving love on those he has chosen and having ordained Christ to be their Redeemer.

**The Gospel:** We believe that the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ—God's very wisdom. Utter folly to the world, even though it is the power of God to those who are being saved, this good news is christological, centering on the cross and resurrection: the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if his death and resurrection are not central (the message is: "Christ died for our sins . . . [and] was raised"). This good news is biblical (his death and resurrection are according





to the Scriptures), theological and salvific (Christ died for our sins, to reconcile us to God), historical (if the saving events did not happen, our faith is worthless, we are still in our sins, and we are to be pitied more than all others), apostolic (the message was entrusted to and transmitted by the apostles, who were witnesses of these saving events), and intensely personal (where it is received, believed, and held firmly, individual persons are saved).

**The Redemption of Christ:** We believe that, moved by love and in obedience to his Father, the eternal Son became human: the Word became flesh, fully God and fully human being, one Person in two natures. The man Jesus, the promised Messiah of Israel, was conceived through the miraculous agency of the Holy Spirit, and was born of the virgin Mary. He perfectly obeyed his heavenly Father, lived a sinless life, performed miraculous signs, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead on the third day, and ascended into heaven. As the mediatorial King, he is seated at the right hand of God the Father, exercising in heaven and on earth all of God's sovereignty, and is our High Priest and righteous Advocate. We believe that by his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus Christ acted as our representative and substitute. He did this so that in him we might become the righteousness of God: on the cross he canceled sin, propitiated God, and, by bearing the full penalty of our sins, reconciled to God all those who believe. By his resurrection Christ Jesus was vindicated by his Father, broke the power of death and defeated Satan who once had power over it, and brought everlasting life to all his people; by his ascension he has been forever exalted as Lord and has prepared a place for us to be with him. We believe that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved. Because God chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things, the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, no human being can ever boast before him—Christ Jesus has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

**The Justification of Sinners:** We believe that Christ, by his obedience and death, fully discharged the debt of all those who are justified. By his sacrifice, he bore in our stead the punishment due us for our sins, making a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice on our behalf. By his perfect obedience he satisfied the just demands of God on our behalf, since by faith alone that perfect obedience is credited to all who trust in Christ alone for their acceptance with God. Inasmuch as Christ was given by the Father for us, and his obedience and punishment were accepted in place of our own, freely and not for anything in us, this justification is solely of free grace, in order that both the exact justice and the rich grace of God might be glorified in the justification of sinners. We believe that a zeal for personal and public obedience flows from this free justification.

**The Power of the Holy Spirit:** We believe that this salvation, attested in all Scripture and secured by Jesus Christ, is applied to his people by the Holy Spirit. Sent by the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as the other Paraclete, is present with and in believers. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, and by his powerful and mysterious work regenerates spiritually dead sinners, awakening them to repentance and faith, and in him they are baptized into union with the Lord Jesus, such that they are justified before God by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. By the Spirit's agency, believers are renewed, sanctified, and adopted into God's family; they participate in the divine nature and receive his sovereignly distributed gifts. The Holy Spirit is himself the down payment of the promised inheritance, and in this age indwells, guides, instructs, equips, revives, and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

**The Kingdom of God:** We believe that those who have been saved by the grace of God through union with Christ by faith and through regeneration by the Holy Spirit enter the kingdom of God and delight in the blessings of the new covenant: the forgiveness of sins, the inward transformation that awakens a desire to glorify, trust, and obey God, and the prospect of the glory yet to be revealed. Good works constitute indispensable evidence of saving grace. Living as salt in a world that is decaying and light in a world that is dark, believers should neither withdraw into seclusion from the world, nor become indistinguishable from it: rather, we are to do good to the city, for all the glory and honor of the nations is to be offered up to the living God. Recognizing whose created order this is, and because we are citizens of God's kingdom, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves, doing good to all, especially to those who belong to the household of God.





The kingdom of God, already present but not fully realized, is the exercise of God's sovereignty in the world toward the eventual redemption of all creation. The kingdom of God is an invasive power that plunders Satan's dark kingdom and regenerates and renovates through repentance and faith the lives of individuals rescued from that kingdom. It therefore inevitably establishes a new community of human life together under God.

**God's New People:** We believe that God's new covenant people have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem; they are already seated with Christ in the heavenlies. This universal church is manifest in local churches of which Christ is the only Head; thus each "local church" is, in fact, the church, the household of God, the assembly of the living God, and the pillar and foundation of the truth. The church is the body of Christ, the apple of his eye, graven on his hands, and he has pledged himself to her forever. The church is distinguished by her gospel message, her sacred ordinances, her discipline, her great mission, and, above all, by her love for God, and by her members' love for one another and for the world. Crucially, this gospel we cherish has both personal and corporate dimensions, neither of which may properly be overlooked. Christ Jesus is our peace: he has not only brought about peace with God, but also peace between alienated peoples. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both Jew and Gentile to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. The church serves as a sign of God's future new world when its members live for the service of one another and their neighbors, rather than for self-focus. The church is the corporate dwelling place of God's Spirit, and the continuing witness to God in the world.

**Baptism and the Lord's Supper:** We believe that baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordained by the Lord Jesus himself. The former is connected with entrance into the new covenant community, the latter with ongoing covenant renewal. Together they are simultaneously God's pledge to us, divinely ordained means of grace, our public vows of submission to the once crucified and now resurrected Christ, and anticipations of his return and of the consummation of all things.

**The Restoration of All Things:** We believe in the personal, glorious, and bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ with his holy angels, when he will exercise his role as final Judge, and his kingdom will be consummated. We believe in the bodily resurrection of both the just and the unjust—the unjust to judgment and eternal conscious punishment in hell, as our Lord himself taught, and the just to eternal blessedness in the presence of him who sits on the throne and of the Lamb, in the new heaven and the new earth, the home of righteousness. On that day the church will be presented faultless before God by the obedience, suffering and triumph of Christ, all sin purged and its wretched effects forever banished. God will be all in all and his people will be enthralled by the immediacy of his ineffable holiness, and everything will be to the praise of his glorious grace.



## Appendix 2 | Understanding Idolatry

### 5. WARRING AGAINST IDOLS

Another way of embarking on “self-salvation” projects is to pursue after idols for satisfaction and validation.

**Idolatry is a major theme for “what ails” us.** In the beginning, we were created in the *imago dei* (image of God) to worship and serve God (Genesis 1:26-27). We were given the *Cultural Mandate* to rule over all created things in God’s name (Genesis 1:28-31, Psalm 8:5-8).

Instead we rebelled against our divine origins (Genesis 3) and “fell into sin.” Paul describes this “fall” of humanity in terms of idolatry. We refused to give God glory (i.e. to make Him ultimate), and instead began to worship and serve the created instead of the Creator. “*They exchanged the glory of the immortal God ... and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator*” (Romans 1:21-25). The result is the created things began to rule over human beings (Genesis 3:17-19).

**We were created to worship.** We will either worship the uncreated God or we will worship some created thing (idols). Either way, we will “worship and serve” something (Romans 1:25), and whatever we worship, we will serve, for worship and service are always, inextricably bound together.

### 6. UNDERSTANDING IDOLS

**a. Idolatry is at the root of all sin and is a great way to understand sin.** Romans 1:18-25 and Galatians 4:8-9 expose what sin is and how it works.

- ➡ Verse 21 tells us that the reason we make idols is because we want to control our lives, though we know we owe God everything. “*Though they knew God, they neither glorified God nor gave thanks to Him.*”
- ➡ Verse 25 tells us the *strategy* for control – taking created things, setting our hearts on them, and building our lives around them. Since we need to worship something – because of how we are created – we cannot eliminate God without creating God-substitutes.
- ➡ Verses 21 and 25 tell us the two *results* of idolatry: (1) deception – “*their thinking became futile and their hearts were darkened*” and (2) slavery – “*they worshipped and served*” created things. Whatever you worship, you will serve.

**Summary:** The Bible does not consider idolatry to be one sin among many (and thus now a very rare sin only among primitive people). Rather, *the only alternative to true, complete faith in the living God is idolatry.* All our failures to wholly trust God or to live rightly are rooted in idolatry – something we make more important than God. There is always a reason for a sin, and under our sins are idolatrous desires.

**b. Idolatry is at the root of every heart, and it is the only way to understand motivation.**

Unless we believe the gospel, we will be driven in all we do – whether obeying or disobeying – by pride (self-love) or fear (of damnation). We may be obeying God, but we will only be seeking to manipulate Him (get blessings from Him) through our good works. We will not be obeying Him out of delight in who He is in Himself. So, apart from *living in full view of the Cross*, all good works are done for sinful motives. Mere moral effort may restrain the heart, but does not truly *change* the heart into Christ-like character. Moral effort merely “jury rigs” the evil of the heart to produce moral behavior out of self-interest. It is only a matter of time before such a thin tissue collapses.

**Summary:** This means that idolatry is always the reason we ever do anything wrong. Why do we ever lie? Why do we fail to love, keep promises, or to live unselfishly? Of course, the general answer is “because we are weak and sinful,” but the specific answer is always that there is something besides Jesus Christ we feel we must have to be happy. There is something more important to our



hearts than God; something that is spinning out a delusional field and enslaving the heart through inordinate desires. Therefore, the secret to change (and even to self-understanding) is to always identify the idols of the heart.

## 8. THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDOLS

**How are idols formed?** "The idol begins as a means of power, enabling us to control, but then overpowers, controlling us" (Richard Keyes, "The Idol Factory" in *No God but God*).

**Idols have a "surface" and "root" dimension.**

- a. "Root idols" such as power, approval, comfort, and control are more subtle and basic. They are at the roots of our lives, farther from the surface of things. They are motivational drives. They can work through many "near idols." They are mainly dealt with by a process of repenting and rejoicing.
- b. "Surface idols" are more concrete and specific objects and subjects such as a spouse or a career. Now these things – your business, your ministry, your music – are extremely good things that need to be detached from the far (deeper) idols which are using them. That means they often (even ordinarily) may remain in our lives, if they are "put in their place." This is what Augustine meant when he spoke of the "right ordering of our loves."

## 9. IDENTIFYING OUR IDOLS

**a. Recognize** the "far" and "near" idols in our hearts. "That most basic question which God poses to each human heart: Has something or someone besides Jesus Christ taken title to your heart's functional trust, preoccupation, loyalty, service, fear and delight?" (Dick Keyes). To get to the bottom of what the Bible calls idols, and what Keyes calls our "heart title," ask these diagnostic questions:

- If you are angry, ask, "Is there something too important to me? Is there something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am angry – because I am being blocked from having something I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be:
- If you are fearful or badly worried, ask, "Is there something too important to me? Is there something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am so scared – because something is being threatened, which I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be:
- If you are despondent or hating yourself, ask, "Is there something too important to me? Is there something I am telling myself I have to have? Is that why I am so "down" – because I have lost or failed at something I think is a necessity when it is not?" Write down what that might be:

### **Additional diagnostic questions:**

- What is my greatest nightmare? What do I worry about most?
- What, if I failed at it or lost it, would cause me to feel as though I do not want to live anymore? What keeps me going?
- What do I rely upon or comfort myself with when things go bad or get difficult?
- What do I think most easily about? What does my mind go to when I am free? What preoccupies me?
- What prayer, if unanswered, would make me seriously think about turning away from God?
- What makes me feel the most self-worth? Of what am I most proud?
- What do I really want and expect out of life? What would really make me happy?



**Summarize:** What are common themes? What are the "functional" masters? What things tend to be too important?

**b. Distinguish Root Idols:** (Circle the thoughts that are lodge in your heart.)

**Power Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – I have power and influence over others."

**Approval Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – I am loved and respected by \_\_\_\_\_."

**Comfort Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – I have this kind of pleasure experience or a particular quality of life."

**Control Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – I am able to get mastery over my life in the area of \_\_\_\_\_."

**c. Distinguish Surface Idols:**

**Helping Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – people are dependent on me and need me."

**Dependence Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – someone is there to protect me and keep me safe."

**Independence Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – I am completely free from obligations or responsibilities to take care of someone."

**Work Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning /I only have worth if – I am highly productive, getting a lot done."

**Achievement Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – I am recognized for my accomplishments or if I am excelling in my career."

**Materialism Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – I have a certain level of wealth, financial freedom, and very nice possessions."

**Religion Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – I am adhering to my religion's moral codes, and I'm accomplished in its activities."

**Individual Person Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – this one person is in my life and is happy there and/or happy with me."

**Irreligion Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – I feel I am totally independent of organized religion with a self-made morality."

**Racial/Cultural Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – my race and culture is ascendant and recognized as superior."

**Inner Ring Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – a particular social grouping, professional grouping or other group lets me in."

**Family Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – my children and/or my parents are happy and happy with me."



**Relationship Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – Mr. or Ms. "Right" is in love with me."

**Suffering Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – I am hurting or in a problem, because only then do I feel noble or worthy of love or am able to deal with guilt."

**Ideology Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – my political or social cause or party is making progress and ascending in influence or power."

**Image Idolatry:** "Life only has meaning/I only have worth if – I have a particular kind of look or body image."

## 10. DECONSTRUCTING IDOLS

Idols create delusions: Idols appear more wonderful or all powerful than they really are. They lead us to deny their hold on us. We need to stand back and get them into perspective. In what ways are our idols distorting our thinking or hiding themselves from us? (For example: "My idol of status and money has made me deny how much I hate my job and how much happier I would be in another, but lower-paying, career.")

### a. Repent of your idols.

- **Recognize how weak and poor your idols are (in themselves). In prayer, confess that these things are good, but finite and weak, and praise God for being the only source of what you need. Pray:** *"Lord, this is a good thing. Why have I made it to be so absolute? Why do I feel so pointless without it? What is this compared to You? If I have You, I don't have to have this! This cannot bless me, love me and help me like You! This is not my life – Jesus is my life! This is not my righteousness and worthiness. It cannot give me that. But You can and have!"* Write out such a prayer in your own words.
- **Recognize how dangerous your idols are (to you).** Idols enslave, and they will never be satisfied. Realize how they increasingly destroy you. **In prayer, confess that these things are absolutely lethal, and ask a strong God for His help. Pray:** *"Lord, why am I giving this so much power over me? If I keep doing it, it will strangle me. I don't have to do so – I will not do so any longer. I will not let this jerk me around on a leash any longer. This will not be my Master – You are my only King."* Write out such a prayer in your own words.
- **Recognize how grievous your idols are (to Christ).** Idols ultimately are cruel to the heart of the One who offers you so much, and at such an infinite cost. Realize that when you pine after idols (in your anger, fear, and despondency) you are saying: *"Lord, You are not enough. This is more beautiful, fulfilling, and sweet to my taste than You. You are negotiable, but this is not. Despite all You have done for me, I will only use You as long as You help me get this. You are negotiable, but this is not. You haven't done enough for me – if You don't help me have this, I will discard You."* **In prayer, admit how deeply you have grieved and de-valued Jesus, and ask forgiveness. Pray:** *"Lord, I see how repulsive this idol is. In yearning after this, I trampled on Your love for me. I realize now that the greatest sin in my life is a lack of thankfulness, a lack of grateful joy for what You have done for me."* Write such a prayer in your own words.

### b. Rejoice in the freedom of grace. It is only as we rejoice in the absolute certainty of God's love for us that we can

