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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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J.D. completed his Ph.D. in Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary where he is also a faculty member, writing on the correlations between early church presentations of the gospel and Islamic theology. Having lived and served among Muslims, he has a burden to see them, as well as every nation on earth, come to know and love the salvation of God in Christ.

ROB TURNER is teaching pastor and team lead over Gathering Ministries at Apex Community Church in Kettering, Ohio. He holds a MDiv in Missions, Evangelism, and Church Growth and a PhD in Leadership from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Rob is also an associate professor at Cedarville University.

The mission of his life is to delight in Jesus so much that he would be compelled to love, equip, and send people for the fame of Christ’s name. In addition to preaching, Rob is part of one of Apex Community’s missional communities that are networked throughout the Miami Valley of Ohio. These communities meet each week to make much of Jesus through the Scriptures, intentional relationships, and reaching unbelievers in the geographical context. Rob and his wife Angela live in Dayton, Ohio, with their four children. You can find him on Facebook and on Twitter @ApexPastorBoy.
DERWIN GRAY is the founding and lead pastor of Transformation Church, a multi-ethnic, multi-generational, mission-shaped community in Indian Land, South Carolina, just south of Charlotte, North Carolina. Transformation Church was named the 2nd fastest growing church by percentage and the 14th fastest growing church by number of participants in America in 2010, according to Outreach magazine. Derwin and his wife Vicki have been married for 20 years and have two children, Presley and Jeremiah.

After graduating from Brigham Young University, Derwin played in the NFL for five years with the Indianapolis Colts (1993-1997) and one year with the Carolina Panthers (1998). During that time, he and Vicki experienced God’s faithfulness and direction as He moved their hearts to know Him and make Him known. Derwin went on to graduate from Southern Evangelical Seminary with a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) in apologetics. Lovingly known as the “Evangelism Linebacker,” learn more about Derwin on his blog, Just Marinating.

BEN REED is the small groups pastor at Long Hollow, a multi-site church in the Nashville, Tennessee, area. Ben and his wife have been married for 9 years and have a 4-year-old son. Ben completed his MDiv in Biblical Counseling from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Before he graduated, though, he stepped into small groups ministry and has never looked back. He’s helped launch hundreds of small groups, releasing people to jump into healthy, authentic community.

Ben serves as an editorial advisor to Christianity Today’s smallgroups.com, an editorial advisor to Right Now Media, and has written for Outreach magazine and Collegiate magazine. He’s a regular contributor at pastors.com and churchleaders.com, and has been featured in The Christian Post. In addition to pastoring, preaching, and writing, Ben has a great passion for coffee. Good coffee, that is. And CrossFit. But not at the same time. You can journey along with Ben at BenReed.net
Engage.
Preparing to make disciples
Unbelievers are looking for real answers not easy ones. They're wanting to see that men and women of faith struggle with questions, too. They're looking for a belief system that actually has something to say. That also means, however, that people are looking for a belief system that demands something. They're looking for something challenging, something that will engage their whole person—body, mind, and spirit. They don't want Christians to try and “back-door” the gospel to them; say what it is, and be up-front about it. It's a complete life commitment, and something worth giving your whole life toward.

That means that evangelism and discipleship go hand in hand. It's not minimizing the need for the moment of truth—when a person steps from being an unbeliever to believer—because there's still the profound need for that. But it does mean that perhaps the best evangelism plan is to show people the gospel lived out, engaging in worship and study.

In this resource, you're not going to simply get tools that will help you share your faith. We don't believe that tools are the only thing you need. Sharing our faith requires reminders of the beauty and depth of the gospel, how to defend that gospel, and why we need to share it. And since sharing with others is personal and unique, we've asked four different authors with varying backgrounds and personalities to help guide us through that framework of healthy relationships.

How to Use This Book
What better way to learn about sharing the gospel than in community with others? That's why we've designed Engage as a small group Bible study. Geared for a no-prep small group experience, this study is intended to be facilitator led with a strong discussion focus. In each session you'll find:

- **Questions** to help you and/or your group process the Scriptures and content of each session
- **Facilitator tips (*)** to help effectively lead the gathering
- A “This Week...” section at the close of each session to allow you to reflect on what was learned and put the session into practice in your personal life.

The Roman Road. F.A.I.T.H. Four Spiritual Laws.
These are all names of good, useful tools for evangelism—some that we'll even walk through in this study. Yet the goal of each tool is to introduce someone to a relationship with Jesus Christ in a simple, straight-forward way. And these tools have worked really well. But in today's times, evangelism is directly connected to relationships. We crave depth in all aspects of life, whether in interactions with others, our daily experiences, or in our faith.

INTRODUCTION

The Roman Road. F.A.I.T.H. Four Spiritual Laws. These are all names of good, useful tools for evangelism—some that we'll even walk through in this study. Yet the goal of each tool is to introduce someone to a relationship with Jesus Christ in a simple, straight-forward way. And these tools have worked really well. But in today's times, evangelism is directly connected to relationships. We crave depth in all aspects of life, whether in interactions with others, our daily experiences, or in our faith.
What exactly is “the gospel”?

by J.D. Greear
“I want you to see the gospel not only as the means by which you get into heaven, but as the driving force behind every single moment of your life. . . . I want you to see how the gospel, and it alone, can make you genuinely passionate for God, free you from captivity to sin, and move you outward to joyful sacrifice on behalf of others.”

—J.D. Greear, *Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary*
It sounds simple. You’ve probably heard “the gospel” many times, but what does it really mean? Before we dive in, take a moment to ponder that this single question may be the most important one you’ll ever consider.

Paul said the gospel was the power of God for salvation, the only means by which we can have peace with God.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16).

Paul thought it was worth giving his life for, something he would eventually do. He believed its contents were so essential that he said anyone who taught contrary to it would be cursed (see Galatians 1:8). Before we can share the gospel with others, understanding its meaning is something we must get right. Our eternities, and the eternities of all our loved ones, depend on us getting it right.²

THE GOSPEL IS AN ANNOUNCEMENT

The word gospel—euangelion—was used in ancient Greece to signify an announcement of good news. Say, for example, a Greek general had defeated an invading army. He would send out a “gospel,” declaring to all the citizens of the region that he had won the battle. He wasn’t asking them to come and help but declaring to them his victory. No longer did they need to fear; they were free from danger.*

The gospel of Jesus is the announcement that Jesus is Lord and has won a great victory on our behalf. The gospel is not a command that we should do better so that God will accept us, but the announcement that Jesus has paid the full penalty for our sin. No longer do we need to live in fear. The battle has been won on our behalf—we need only to believe and receive it.

The gospel, as Tim Keller says, is not “good advice,” but “good news.” It’s not primarily about what we must “do” but what Jesus has “done.”³

* Facilitator: How do you define the gospel? On what is your definition based?
Understanding the “do/done” distinctive is perhaps the most important and counter-intuitive aspect of the gospel. While we’ll dive into that a little more, first, let’s consider why we need the gospel.

**BAD NEWS AND THEN GOOD NEWS**

An announcement of victory only makes sense in the context of battle; but far too many people are unaware that a battle even needed to be fought. It may be a nice gesture that Jesus did something for us, but why is it that Jesus had to do anything at all? We understand why we should believe in God, but why do we need Jesus and the cross?

The answer, distasteful as we often find it, is our sin.

The gospel is bad news before it is good news: Our sin had left us under a curse, death. We tend to think of our sin as not that bad—just mistakes, white lies, or indiscretions. The Bible says the opposite: Our sin makes us worthy of eternal condemnation. The apostle Paul says that we’re “children under wrath,” sons and daughter of disobedience (Ephesians 2:3). We’ve committed cosmic treason against our Creator, telling Him we’d rather be in charge of our own lives than let Him rule. Sin is the great “I” problem, when we focus more on ourselves and our desires than on God’s perfect plan. *n

The just punishment for our sin is death. God is a holy God, and sin is an offense and a corruption. Imagine how you might react to a blood transfusion that you learned had two to three molecules of the AIDS virus in it. It wouldn’t matter that the amount was microscopic; even a little pollutes the entire vial. God is so holy and good that sin can’t endure in His presence. To stand before God with sin on your record would be like a tissue paper touching the surface of the sun. It must be removed.

“Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, and You cannot tolerate wrongdoing. So why do You tolerate those who are treacherous? Why are You silent while one who is wicked swallows up one who is more righteous than himself” (Habakkuk 1:13).

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*Facilitator: Do you find it difficult to talk about sin with your peers? Why? Why is it important in light of the gospel to talk about sin?
Habakkuk explained God’s pure goodness. How do you reconcile the fact that we all need Christ’s reconciliation—no matter how righteous or wicked we think we are?

So the gospel begins as bad news, but thank God it doesn’t end there. The gospel is the good news that Jesus put away our sin forever by His death on the cross. As Tim Keller says, even though we were so bad that Jesus had to die for our sin, He was so loving that He was glad to die for it.

**THE GOSPEL IS GIFT-RIGHTEOUSNESS**

Just about every religion in the world teaches us that God’s approval of us is based upon how well we obey His laws. If we do enough, we can overcome the penalty of our sin and earn our place in heaven. The gospel turns that thinking on its head. Acceptance before God, which the Bible calls “righteousness,” is given to us as a gift, purchased for us by Christ.

How do you think God feels about you right now? How do you determine that?

Did you base your answer on what kind of week you’ve had? How consistent your quiet times have been? Whether you’ve been nice to your family or friends? Whether you kicked the dog? For many years qualifications like these drove my own response.*

If I had a good week—a real “Christian” week—I felt close to God. When Sunday came around, I would feel like lifting my head and hands in worship, almost as if to say, “God, here I am! I just know that You’re excited about seeing me this week.” If I had a stellar week, I loved being in God’s presence and was sure God was pretty stoked about having me there, too.

* Facilitator: Jewish tradition upholds that there are 613 commandments in the Torah, or the first five books of the Bible. Is it humanly possible to follow all of those every day? Do you believe that’s what God expects of us? Explain why or why not.
But the opposite was also true. If I had done a poor job at being a real Christian, I felt pretty distant from God. If I had fallen to some temptations, been a jerk to my wife, dodged some easy opportunities to share Christ, was stingy with my money, had forgotten to recycle—on those weeks I felt like God wanted nothing to do with me. When I came to church, I had no desire to lift my soul up to God. I was pretty sure He wasn’t thrilled to see me either. I could feel His displeasure—His lack of approval.

Why? Because in that moment I wasn’t believing the gospel. Or, at least, I had forgotten it.

Think of a time when you offered grace to someone who wronged you or someone you cared for. How does that experience affect your view of God’s gift of grace to you?

The gospel is the news that Christ has suffered the full wrath of God for my sin. Jesus Christ traded places with me, living the perfect life I should have lived, and dying the death I had been condemned to die. In fact, 2 Corinthians 5 says that He actually became my sin so that I could literally become His righteousness:

“He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (v. 21).

* Facilitator: In what ways do you feel you have to prove yourself to God?

THE RESURRECTION (LUKE 24:5)

Resurrection is the central fact on which Christianity and the church are built and unique from all that went before it. Some Old Testament heroes of the faith were taken to heaven without enduring death—Enoch (Genesis 5:24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11). Jesus raised people from the dead (such as the son of the widow of Nain as well as Lazarus). These would die again. Jesus died. He was buried and stayed in the tomb three days. Then He came out of the empty tomb alive, never to enter a tomb again. The resurrected Christ was then taken to heaven to rule with God forever.

Other religions and people without religion may claim to believe in a life after death. Without Jesus, however, they have no evidence for their belief, no reason for their hope. The historical example of Jesus Christ proves that the God and Father of Jesus Christ has power over sin, death, and the grave. The historical promise of Jesus means that each of His followers can expect to participate in the resurrection of the dead and the rewards of Christ. A person who doesn’t believe in Christ, who doesn’t take up his cross, deny himself, and follow Jesus has not received Christ’s promises and cannot expect to join Him in the rewards of eternal life after death.
Theologians call this “the great exchange.” He took my record, died for it, and offers me His perfect record in return. He took my shameful nakedness and offers to clothe me with His righteousness. When I receive Him in repentance and faith, full acceptance becomes mine. Jesus Christ lived in my place, and died in my place, and then offered righteousness to me as a gift. Theologians call that “gift-righteousness.”

To me, this means that God couldn’t love me any more than He does right now, because God couldn’t love and accept Christ any more than He does right now—and I am in Christ. God’s righteousness has been given to me as a gift. He now sees me according to how Christ lived, not on the basis of what kind of week I have lived. Christ’s salvation is 100 percent complete, and 100 percent the possession of those who have received it in repentance and faith.

Just let that sink in for a moment. Right now, if we’re in Christ, when God looks at us—regardless of our situations—He sees the righteousness of Christ. If we really believed that, not only with our heads but also with our hearts, it would change everything in our lives.

Have you ever had the sense there was always just one more thing to do to get the “spiritual life thing” right? What’s that one thing for you?

Do you ever feel He is judging your performance—that He’ll love you more if you do better? Explain.

Imagine if you could say this to God: God, here is why I think You should hear my prayer: This week, I concluded a 40-day fast, and during that time I met Satan in the flesh, stared him down, and resisted all his temptations. And then I suffered unjustly at the hand of sinners, but did so without complaint or the first flash of selfish anger. The only time I opened my mouth was to forgive those who were doing that to me. Also, I walked on water, raised a few dead people, and fed 5,000 hungry men with a Hebrew Happy Meal.

* Facilitator: Do you maintain other relationships in your life in which you feel like you always have to justify that you deserve to be in the relationship? How would you describe God’s perspective on that kind of relationship?
According to the gospel, that’s exactly what you can, and should, say.

Jesus’ death has paid for every ounce of your sin; His perfect life has now been credited to you. In light of that, do you really feel like you could make God more favorable to you by doing your quiet time every day? Christ’s obedience is so spectacular that there’s nothing we could do to add to it, His death so final that nothing could take away from it.

Scripture says that we’re not to come into the presence of God timidly or apprehensively but boldly:

“Therefore let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us at the proper time” (Hebrews 4:16).

We can only approach God with boldness when we know that He sees us according to the accomplishments of Christ.

For most of us, this is completely counter-intuitive.

Martin Luther said that our hearts are hard-wired for “works-righteousness”—that is, the idea that our worth and approval by God fluctuate based on our performance. (See “Grace vs. Works” sidebar.) Unless we’re actively preaching the gospel to ourselves daily, we’ve probably fallen back into “works-righteousness.” We come by it naturally.*

In your theology, what’s the relationship between what you believe and what you do?

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* Facilitator: In what areas of your life are you timidly considering God’s input?
**“IT IS FINISHED!”**
Just before His death on the cross, Jesus uttered a single word of victory: *tetelestai*, meaning “It is finished!” The verb *teleo* is related to several other Greek words that refer to something being finished, accomplished, completed, or coming to an end. The perfect tense of the Greek verb Jesus used indicates that He understood His death at this point in time to have abiding or lasting results. Jesus’ death on the cross on our behalf was His purpose for coming into the world.5

The idea of gift-righteousness can be summarized in just four words: *Jesus in my place*. Jesus took our sin, suffering the full weight of its penalty. In return He offers us His righteousness. When we’re united to Christ, what is ours becomes His and what is His becomes ours. Because Jesus, who deserved commendation, received condemnation instead, we who deserve condemnation can receive His commendation.

In Jesus’ final moments on the cross, He said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). He was talking about the work of our salvation—He had done everything necessary to save us from our sin. There was nothing more that needed to be done. We need only to receive it.*

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What makes a gift special?

Jesus’ death was a gift to humanity. Why do we so often struggle to see His death as our gift?

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* Facilitator: Do you know someone who seems to always be seeking others’ approval? How does that affect your relationship with them? Do you know someone who you sense is always seeking God’s approval? How does that seem to affect their relationship with God?
HOW DO WE RECEIVE THE GIFT OF THE GOSPEL?
The gospel is a gift, and like any other gift, it must be received. So how do you receive the gospel? A terrified jailor once asked the apostle Paul a similar question:

“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

Paul’s answer was simple:

“Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household” (Acts 16:31).

Believe means more than giving cognitive assent to a set of facts. Believe means “to rest your whole weight upon.” We must not only believe that Jesus is the Lord; we must submit our lives to Him. We must not only believe that He has finished the work of our salvation; we must rest all our hopes for heaven on Him. This is what the Bible means by “believe on the Lord Jesus.”

Think of it like sitting down in a chair. You might believe that a chair can hold the weight of your body, but you’re not “believing in” the chair until you transfer your weight from your legs onto the chair. You can talk all you like about the power of the chair to support you, but until your weight is actually resting on the chair, your “belief” is just bluster.

Conversion to Christ is just like that. It’s not merely accepting a set of facts and declaring them to be true. It’s assuming a posture of repentance and faith toward the finished work of Christ.

What does a posture of repentance and faith look like on a daily basis?

BIBLICAL POSTURES OF WORSHIP AND PRAYER

- Standing (Mark 11:25)
- Kneeling (Daniel 6:10)
- Prostrate on one’s face (Joshua 5:14)
- Praying aloud (Psalm 55:17)
- Bowed heads (Exodus 4:31)
- Eyes looking heavenward (Acts 7:55)
Conversion isn’t a ceremony you go through or a prayer you pray. Conversion is simply believing that Jesus is Lord and submitting to Him, believing that He has finished the work of your salvation and resting your hopes for heaven on it. It’s “sitting down” in “the chair” of His Lordship and His finished work.

We call the act of submitting to Jesus as Lord “repentance.” Repentance literally means “changing your mind” about something, so to repent of your sin means to “change your mind” about who is in charge of your life. Repentance is not resolving to do a little better—to go to church more, to feel worse for your sins, to be more moral. When you repent, you surrender every part of your life to His control.

While repentance may lead God to forgive, it’s not our repentance that restores the relationship. It’s because we’re forgiven that He starts this relationship with us anew. Like C.S. Lewis used to say, “We do not come to God as bad people trying to become good people; we come as rebels to lay down our arms.”

We call the act of resting your hopes for heaven on the cross “faith.” Faith in Jesus isn’t trying to do better or turning over a new leaf. Faith is believing that He has done everything necessary to save you and resting all your hopes on His finished work.

When I say to someone, “Are you a Christian?” the most common answer I get back is something like, “Well, I’m trying. I’m doing my best. Better now than I used to be. I’m going to church more now and trying to obey the commandments better.” Sadly, that shows they still don’t get the gospel at all. They still think “Christian” is a title that they earn.

A true Christian is one who recognizes that they could never earn that title; Jesus earned it in our place and gave it to us as a gift. We’re accepted before God not because of what we do but because of what He has done.

When someone asks me if I know for sure if I will go to heaven when I die, I say, Absolutely. Jesus was my substitute, which means I no longer depend on how “righteous” I am to gain entrance into heaven. I rest in what He
accomplished for me. We traded places. I am as sure of heaven as He is. He has become my salvation.

Does that sound too good to be true? If so, then you’re probably getting it. The sign that you’ve understood the gospel is that you’re filled with humility because of how little you deserve eternal life, and filled with wonder at how good God is to give it to you.

What’s the difference between humility and confidence in the Lord? How do you determine the right balance?

THE CLEAREST GOSPEL VERSE IN THE BIBLE
Perhaps the clearest, most concise explanation of this is given in Paul’s gospel summary in Romans 4:

“But to the one who does not work, but believes on Him who declares the ungodly to be righteous, his faith is credited for righteousness” (v. 5).

That verse has three very important phrases:

“But to the one who does not work…”
That is, to the one who realizes that there’s nothing they could ever do to earn eternal life

“… but believes on Him who declares the ungodly to be righteous…”
The one who believes that God did the work necessary to save Him, just like God said He did.

“… his faith is credited for righteousness.”
God counts that belief, that faith, as righteousness to us. Paul compares our belief in Christ to Abraham’s belief in God’s promise to give him a son. Though he was nearly 100 years old, Abraham chose to believe God could bring a child from a dead womb, and God “credited to him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3).
In what area of your life do you need to take a lesson from Abraham and focus not on “working” but on “believing”?

The moment we repentantly believe God brought back the lifeless body of Jesus from the deadness of the tomb, after His offering as a payment for our sin, we are declared similarly righteous.

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

Righteousness is a free gift to all who believe that God is gracious enough to give it to them in Christ.

Have you ever personally received that gift? If not, what’s stopping you from doing so right now?

Understanding the gospel leads to a profound life change—not just of your behavior but of your heart. As you see the glory of the God who has forgiven you, and experience the beauties of His grace, you’ll find that your heart begins to desire Him more than sin.

THE GOSPEL ISN’T JUST THE DIVING BOARD

The gospel isn’t just the “beginning point” of Christianity, a prayer you pray to begin your Christian life, or the diving board off of which you jump into the pool of Christianity. The gospel is the pool in which you swim, day by day. Once you’ve believe the gospel, the way you grow in Christ is by going deeper into the gospel. You become more aware of how gracious He is and how incredible is the gift He has given you in Christ.

Jesus told us to “abide” in Him daily.
“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:4-10, NASB).

Abiding in Christ means reminding ourselves constantly there’s nothing we could ever do that would make God love us more, and nothing we’ve done that makes Him love us less.

Literally, nothing at all.

What about if you gave away all your money, would He not love you just a little bit more? Nope.

What if you sold everything and went to live on the foreign mission field? No again.

What if you finally began to treat the people you love with grace? Nada.

What if you took out the trash for your mom like she asked? She might love you more, but God wouldn’t.

JESUS LIVES IN US

No matter our circumstances, we’re not alone in life. How is this possible? Because as believers in Christ, we have a personal relationship with Him, and He promises to be with us always. John 15:1-5 helps us understand our relationship with Jesus more clearly.

Florists know the importance of staying connected to the vine. Freshly cut flowers stay fresh and beautiful for only a few days. Once the flowers are cut off from their roots in the ground, they begin to droop. Apart from the vine, they’ll die. No profit can be had from detached, wilted flowers.

This is the symbolism Jesus used in John 15 to describe our (the branches) connection to Him (the vine). According to this passage, we’re incapable of living a life that glorifies God and embraces His grace apart from a growing relationship with Jesus.

Investing in our relationship with Jesus should be of primary importance. We’re to glorify Him, yield to Him, and love and serve others in His name. Strengthening this relationship has a direct effect on the quality of the rest of our relationships. We don’t produce fruit by being high-achieving, motivated, super-productive makers of fruit, but by yielding to God, the vinedresser. When we submit and lean into God—abide in Him—He enables us to bear fruit.8
What if you went one full week without a single, lustful thought? God’s acceptance of you is based on the fact that Christ went a lifetime without sinning against Him in even the slightest way. Now you are in Him and He is in you. Thus, God could not love you more than He does right now because He loves Christ perfectly.

You must dwell on this great truth daily. Sometimes hourly. Sometimes every minute. It’s the only way to drive out fear, unbelief, and temptation.

Why so often? Remember, you’re hard-wired for works-righteousness. When you’re not deliberately thinking about the gospel, you have probably slid back into self-justification. It’s a lot like the plastic rodents in that “whack-a-mole” game you play at the fair. Just when you knock one down, another appears from a different place. The moment we take our eyes off of the gospel, those rodents of self-righteousness and self-condemnation spring back up. So we must pound them with the counter-intuitive truth of the gospel: God’s acceptance is given to us in its entirety as a gift we receive by faith, to the praise and glory of God.

List the things you’ve done today—the good and the bad. Why isn’t God’s love for us dependent on what we do?

Do you believe Jesus loves you even before you follow Him? Explain.

At our church, I encourage people to pray this phrase back to God every day as a reminder that there’s nothing they need to do to gain God’s approval, but that it’s theirs as a gift in Christ:

“In Christ, there is nothing I can do that would make You love me more; nothing I have done that makes You love me less.”

* Facilitator: What would change if we saw ourselves, first and foremost, as those sent by God on His mission?
I encourage you to pray this back to God every day for at least a month, until it gets into your bloodstream and so saturates your thinking that you see everything with gospel-vision. Nothing in your life will ever be the same.

THE DAILY WALK
Once you’ve decided to follow Christ and claim His love and grace over your life, you have eternal life in Him:

“A thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come so that they may have life and have it in abundance” (John 10:10).

God wants us to have life “in abundance” in Him. That’s exactly why He’s given us the indwelling Holy Spirit. Through Him, we have God’s power living inside of us.

“I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of truth. The world is unable to receive Him because it doesn’t see Him or know Him. But you do know Him, because He remains with you and will be in you” (John 14:16-17).

What evidence shows that you have received the Holy Spirit’s power?*

YOUR SPIRITUAL TRAINING ROOM
One way to stay spiritually healthy is to spend time in daily Bible reading and prayer. Just like in physical training, getting started is the hardest part. Here are some steps toward a daily training regimen:

• Find a place to serve as your spiritual training room.
• Establish a regular time, as best you can. Most of us do better in a routine. But rotating the time is better than no time.
• Gather your training equipment (Bible, a notebook to record thoughts and impressions, and even some of your favorite Christian music).
• Consider adding a devotional guide for structure to your Bible reading.
• Read and meditate on the Scripture and journal your thoughts.
• Pray for insight while reading, offer praise to God, confess sins, and make requests to the Lord. Conclude by listening for the Lord to speak to you.

This is only one step to growing in godliness. Participation in corporate worship, small group Bible study, discipleship groups, and church or community service opportunities also enhance your spiritual growth.

* Facilitator: How might we work together to move from an emphasis on once-a-week worship to focusing on a supernatural, daily walk with Christ? How might this affect our ability to share the gospel with others?
God puts His Spirit within the hearts of believers to mark them as His own. Paul used the imagery of the seal, which would’ve brought to his readers’ mind Caesar’s ring, as a sign of a royal covenant (see Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). Being sealed was a mark of security, ownership, and authentication. It’s a teaser and a taste of the incredible inheritance all Christians have coming. And that’s not an inheritance anyone wants to miss out on. In short, once we trust in Christ and become Christians, we’re in the grasp of God—and no one can change that.

Does knowing that you’re “in Christ” make any practical difference in the way you make decisions about your future?

As a Christian, what responsibilities do you have to Christ? What duties might need more of your attention?

As Christians, we have a massive task—sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ with the world. This is quite an impossible task without the help of God’s power, His Holy Spirit, dwelling in us. Yet we are not alone. In Acts 1:8, Jesus promised the power of the Holy Spirit to carry out the mission. God doesn’t need us for this mission, but He wants us to experience the overwhelming joy that comes through partnering with Him. As the body working together, we will accomplish the mission of God when the love of Christ so fully engulfs our hearts that sharing the gospel and loving others as Christ loved us become the natural expressions of our relationship with God. Only by the Holy Spirit’s power will we do this.

In what areas of your life do you want to experience more of the Holy Spirit’s power? What do you think is your part in having that happen?
How is the Holy Spirit changing how you think, what you value, and the way you live?

THIS WEEK REFLECT ON . . .

> GROWING WITH GOD
- Spend some time re-examining exactly what you would call “the gospel.”
- Take an opportunity to thank those in your life who have modeled God’s standard and what daily living out the gospel looks like. Write them a quick message letting them know how much you appreciate their dedication to sharing the message of Christ with others.
- Make a list of what you’ve repented from. Then, shred or destroy the list, remembering that it’s been offered to God. He’s able and willing to forgive.

> MAKING A CHANGE
- Practice abiding in Christ this week. Dwell in God’s Word. Meditate on Scripture, chewing on it and savoring it. This doesn’t come easily at first, but the more we do it, the more natural it feels. After a while, we will feel Scripture shaping us and we will naturally begin to live its message.
- Make a genuine effort to grow closer to God. He desires to be close to you. As you implement these three shifts in your approach, you’ll find your time with Jesus sweeter, enduring, and fruitful.

> FURTHER STUDY
- For an in-depth look at Paul and Timothy’s emphasis on being loyal to the gospel and teaching it to others, check out Mentor by Chuck Lawless (available at threadsmedia.com).
- For an interesting perspective on how the story of the gospel can be seen even from the beginning of Scripture, check out Creation Unraveled: The Gospel According to Genesis by Matt Carter and Halim Suh (also available at threadsmedia.com).