

WEEK 1

This week as we meet for the first time we will discuss *Discover*, *Nurture*, and *Act* (see 1 page handout you can give to participants)

Take the time to look at the handout together and see if there are any questions.

Discuss the structure for each week:

1. Discover - Look at a passage together and study it using the four questions.
2. Nurture - Listen for one another's heart as they are answering question and engaging the scripture during the *discover* time. Use handout as a guide.
3. Act - In this step we will, as a community, seek to be "doers" of the word and not hearers only.

Begin with prayer before opening scripture. Ask these questions to prepare people.

- * What keeps you from digging into the Bible to discover God's character?
- * When you read the Bible do you have a method you use to study it?
- * What would most encourage your heart tonight as you open the Bible?

1. **Discover** - Read Ephesians 1:1-2:10 (Consider using handout for all three steps)
 - A. Jot down your observations here:

If there's still time...

2. **Nurture** - As you read the passage and discussed it, what stuck out? How did it connect to your life this week? Focus in on a smaller piece of the passage like Ephesians 1:3-8 or 2:8-10.

- A. Does this passage bring to mind any sin you've committed? Or any lie you've been believing?

3. **Act** - Which part of the passage did you *most* need to hear? How might the Spirit of God be encouraging you to respond to His words tonight?

WEEK 2

Discuss the structure for each week:

1. Discover - Look at a passage together and study it using the four questions.
2. Nurture - Listen for one another's heart as they are answering question and engaging the scripture during the *discover* time. Use handout as a guide.
3. Act - In this step we will, as a community, seek to be "doers" of the word and not hearers only.

Begin with prayer before opening scripture. Maybe ask - "What is the gospel? How would you describe it to someone who has no context or background?" Good dialogue like this will enhance one's engagement for the time.

1. **Discover** - Read Luke 15:11-32 (Consider using handout for all three steps)

A. Jot down your observations here:

2. **Nurture** - As you read the passage and discussed it, what stuck out? How did it connect to your life this week? Focus on either the younger or older son. What do both of their actions say about their father? Here are some questions to guide the heart focused time:

A. What do you think the younger son really wants in life?

B. Think about the older son's conversation with the father. He says, "I've been slaving for you all these years. Where's my party?!" If he considered his work to be like slavery, why do you think he kept at it? What do you think he wanted in life?

C. Do you think either son truly loved the father and wanted to be with him?

D. Their actions look very different, but explain how both sons' hearts are very similar.

E. After this story return to what the Gospel is. How would you answer that now?

3. **Act** -

A. Which son do you identify with? How is God inviting you to respond?

B. What is a specific way you can "enter the feast" of the Father's grace this week?

WEEK 3

Discuss the structure for each week:

1. Discover - Look at a passage together and study it using the four questions.
2. Nurture - Listen for one another's heart as they are answering question and engaging the scripture during the *discover* time. Use handout as a guide.
3. Act - In this step we will, as a community, seek to be "doers" of the word and not hearers only.

Take a few moments to simply check in. "How has your week been? Has God been speaking to you from the word last gathering? How?" Don't use all your time here though.

1. **Discover** - Read I Corinthians 15:1-11 (Consider using handout for all three steps)

- A. Jot down your observations here: (read attached article "What is the Gospel?")

2. **Nurture** -

- A. How do you understand (or have you understood) *how* you are saved?
Furthermore, *why* does God save?
- B. Partnership with God in restorative work is our call in making disciples. What do you think when you hear that phrase, "making disciples?" Is this you?
- C. Can you think of other people you would like to help experience the Gospel in this way as well? Write down their names here: _____

- D. How is community important for your understanding of the Gospel?

3. **Act** -

- A. Considering the last two gatherings, how would you describe the Gospel to a family member, friend, or neighbor if they asked you? (Maybe write it down in a journal or note in your phone).
- B. Take the names you listed above and spend just 1 minute each day this week praying for those people.

What is the Gospel: Understanding Two Perspectives

The gospel is called the “good news,” and it is particularly good news about our sin problem. In a nutshell, we can sum it up this way:

The gospel is that God Himself has come to rescue and restore creation in and through the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

Why does creation (which includes me) need rescuing? Because of sin.

Sin is living for my fame and glory instead of God's. Sin is living life my way, for me, instead of living life, God's way, for God. We have all sinned and really need the gospel we desperately need Jesus to rescue us from the penalty and effects of sin, which the Bible teaches is ultimate and eternal separation from God. When we repent (change our mind about who is really God in our lives) and by faith we believe that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection has secured our rescue and restored us to a right relationship with God the Father, then this good news is true for us! We also have been sent out to proclaim this same gospel of restoration to the entire world.

Understanding Two Gospel Perspectives

We can read the Bible across the grain (thematically), and we can read it with the grain (as a story). Both are necessary, and each one leads to a different way of seeing the gospel. It takes both perspectives to understand and engage the gospel fully.

1. Thematically

The gospel power. We understand the means of salvation.

God—eternal, all-powerful, creator of everything.

Sin—humanity has all chosen self-rule over submission in relationship to God; the penalty for sin is death

Jesus—God incarnate came to die as a substitute for the penalty of humanity's sins

Faith—by faith in what Jesus did, not by any effort of our own, we are saved from our sins.

In this case, the good news is that God is completely aware of our sin problem and in and through the work of Jesus Christ accepts us AND changes us by the power of His Spirit. We have been saved from the penalty of sin (*justification*), are being saved from the power of sin (*sanctification*), and will be saved from the presence of sin. This means the same power that saved us from the penalty for sin also helps us obey God now.

This results in my understanding that . . . I am more broken and sinful than I ever dared believe, and at the same time I am *more loved* and *accepted* than I ever dared hope because of Jesus.

2. As a Story

The gospel purpose. Here we come to know the reason for salvation. We can look at the gospel through the lens of a story.

Creation > Fall > Redemption > Restoration

In this case, the good news is that God sent His Son to redeem the world from the effects of sin and create a new humanity. Eventually the whole world will be renewed to the way God originally created it. Rebellion, death, decay, injustice, and suffering will all be removed. When everything is restored, God will be seen by all for who He truly is—He will be glorified.

How does this happen? Jesus helped clarify how we accomplish the purpose of the gospel by giving us His mission: “Go and make disciples” (Matthew 28:19). A disciple of Jesus is someone who is learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life. As the arts, industry, politics, families—all areas of culture—are being filled with Jesus’ disciples bringing about His gospel restoration, the earth is being filled with His glory! That is the point of the restoration of all things—that God would be glorified!

The gospel is not just about my individual happiness or God’s plan for my life. The gospel is about God’s plan for the world.

Good News!

When we repent of our sin (view it as God does) and receive the forgiveness and new life that Jesus has offered us, we begin a journey of restoration inside and out as disciples of Jesus. Being a disciple is not primarily learning a bunch of information or maintaining certain spiritual disciplines. Discipleship is not a class or a program you go through. Becoming like Jesus is all about the gospel. A disciple of Jesus is someone who is learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life. The life of a disciple requires allowing the truth of the gospel to sink deep into our hearts, transforming our passions and motivations that in turn radically rearranges how we live. Although we have a role to play, the Holy Spirit is the one who does this transforming work. This gospel restoration happens in us in the context of a community on Jesus’ mission, and it’s not just for us—but for the entire world!

WEEK 4

Discuss the structure for each week:

1. Discover - Look at a passage together and study it using the four questions.
2. Nurture - Listen for one another's heart as they are answering question and engaging the scripture during the *discover* time. Use handout as a guide.
3. Act - In this step we will, as a community, seek to be "doers" of the word and not hearers only.

Take some time to consider that the purpose God has for us is that we become more like Jesus. To that end, think/pray about a specific area of your life you'd like the Gospel to have a greater influence over.

1. **Discover** - Read Matt. 6:6-13 & attached article "What would you like to change?"

B. Jot down your observations here:

2. **Nurture** - As you read the passage and article, what stuck out? How did it connect to your life this week? Is finding something to focus on in your heart a hard question? Here are some questions to guide the heart focused time:

A. How does Jesus reflect the glory of God?

B. Rom. 8:28 says God works things for good. What do you think Paul means by *good*?

C. If I am a "new creation" and God "predestined" me to be more like Jesus, what might that mean *this week*?

D. Do you really want to be like Jesus... Why or why not?

3. **Act** - (Your gospel-change project: "GCP")

A. What specific area of your life, actions, and attitudes do you want to change?

B. Is your GCP about changing your behavior or emotions? (We cannot control others. Think: "Being patient with my spouse" vs. "Have a better marriage.")

C. Is your GCP specific? Can you remember when you last time you felt, committed, or experienced it?

ARTICLE: What Would You Like To Change

We learned from the Story of God that humans were made in God's image. We reflected His image or His glory like a mirror. But when we rebelled against God, that image was broken. The Bible tells us, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The mirror has been shattered. We reflect a distorted image. Ephesians 4:22 calls this our "old self" or our flesh: "*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires.*"

We can't be the people we want to be, let alone the people we were made to be.

We also learned in the Story that Jesus reflected God's image perfectly. Colossians 1:15 says, "*He is the image of the invisible God.*" Hebrews 1:3 says He is "*the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being.*" Jesus said, "*Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father*" (John 14:9).

Just as humans were designed to do in the beginning, Jesus shows the world what God is like. He does it perfectly, and John eloquently highlights the reality of Jesus's fullness in the opening lines of his gospel in John 1:14:

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Jesus is the glory of the Father. He makes God known in the world. He is God in human form. He shows us what it means to be the image of God and to reflect God's glory. That's why the New Testament sometimes says we should be like God and sometimes says we should be like Christ. It's because Christ is the true image of God.

Jesus shows us God's agenda for change. God isn't interested in making us religious. Think of Jesus, who was hated by religious people. God isn't interested in making us "spiritual," if by spiritual we mean detached: Jesus was God getting stuck in. God isn't interested in making us self-absorbed: Jesus was self-giving personified. God isn't

interested in serenity: Jesus was passionate for God, was angry at sin, and wept for the city. The word “holy” means set apart from or different from our sinful ways. It didn’t mean being set apart from the world but being consecrated to God in the world. He was God’s glory in and for the world.

The word “glory” means “weight,” as in “a person of importance, a weighty person.” So Jesus shows us the full weight, the full significance, of the character and nature of God. Jesus shows us God as He really is. God, in all of His majesty, splendor, wisdom, beauty, power, compassion, grace, patience, and love, was put on display in the person of Jesus Christ.

Through Jesus’ life, He demonstrated power over death and demons. His compassionate heart led Him to preach the good news to the poor and to heal the sick. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, we see God’s glory even more clearly. Jesus willingly took all of the sins of humanity and piled them on His shoulders, becoming sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He endured the wrath of God against the sin of humanity and prayed, *“Father, forgive them.”* But death couldn’t hold Him, and He overcame the sentence that all humanity had faced since the garden. Jesus is the image of the invisible God!

Because of our connection to Jesus, we are now being restored to our original Image, the Image of Christ. Colossians 3:9–10 says, *“Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self [There’s that same idea again.] with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”*

Our original identity as image-bearers of God has been completely restored through the work of Jesus on our behalf. We reflect His image with greater and greater clarity as we live the life Jesus modeled for us and produces in us through His Spirit. It’s as if the broken mirror is being healed and is slowly reflecting an accurate image again.

This process—us becoming more like Jesus so we reflect more accurately what God is like—is the number-one thing God is always up to in our lives.

For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness (or image) of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers (Romans 8:29).

What this means is that God had a plan before time began to mold and shape you into the image of His Son Jesus. He uses both blessings and trials to do that shaping work. Therefore, we should submit to His perfect work in us. The Story is about Him!

From God's perspective, becoming like Jesus is the goal of the entire Christian life. The purpose of our lives is to bring glory to God, to show the world what He's like as His image-bearers. To do that, we must be conformed into the image of His Son, which brings Him glory! As we become like Christ, we will bring glory to God.

Again, a disciple is someone who is learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life. Discipleship is all about letting God bring about change in our lives from the inside out so we look more like Jesus.

WEEK 5

Discuss the structure for each week:

1. Discover - Look at a passage together and study it using the four questions.
2. Nurture - Listen for one another's heart as they are answering question and engaging the scripture during the *discover* time. Use handout as a guide.
3. Act - In this step we will, as a community, seek to be "doers" of the word and not hearers only.

Do you have in mind what it is you want to be "working on" for change we discussed last week? For right now, when you hear the word "motive" what comes to mind?

1. **Discover** - Read Luke 6:43-45 & attached article "Why would you like to change? Part 1"

A. Jot down your observations here:

a. Consider your potential reasons for wanting to change:

1. *Prove yourself to God* - God didn't waste His grace on me and I'll be sure He sees that.
2. *Prove yourself to other people* - I like it when others are impressed with me.
3. *Prove yourself to yourself* - I am my own worst enemy and beat myself up until I can get it right.
4. *Justified by Grace* - I realize I am not the one to deliver myself, it is Jesus' blood on the cross and glorious resurrection!

2. **Nurture** - Think back to the passage and some of your motives for change:

A. Why do you want to change?

B. Do you think giving up a particular sin will make you more acceptable?

C. What evidence is there you may be trying to prove yourself to God?

D. What evidence is there you may be trying to prove yourself others?

E. What evidence is there you may be trying to prove yourself to yourself?

3. **Act** (See below - certain passages are reworded to fit our actions. See if you can tell)

“When we prove ourselves by living a good life, we have peace with God through what we do. It is what we do that gives us access to God's blessing, and a good standing in people's eyes. This means we can worry a bit less about whether we will share God's glory in heaven.” See **Romans 5:1-2** for the TRUE version.

“It is by changing that our problems will be sorted out, through working hard. It's up to us. This is what we can do for God. We are saved by what we do, so we can prove ourselves. If we do the good works God plans for us, then we can become God's masterpiece, new people in Christ Jesus.” See **Ephesians 2:8-10** for the TRUE version.

ARTICLE: **Why would you like to change? Part 1** - While our motives are complex and hard to discern, they can often be boiled down into one of three categories:

1. To Prove Ourselves to God

I don't want God to have to work too hard to accept me. I want to help Him out. I want to be acceptable to God on the basis of my own merit. I want to put Him in a place of obligation, where He must bless me for my hard work.

Deep down, we all want to change so we can justify ourselves, to prove our worth. We are all natural-born legalists, laboring and toiling under the weight of guilt and insecurity. This instinct comes from our pride-filled flesh (also called our sinful nature).

God's grace is an insult to our flesh. We want to be seen by God and others as successful and worthy. We want to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We want to take credit. The reality is that we can do nothing to earn or lose God's love.

All the time God is saying, “In my love I gave my Son for you. He's done everything needed to secure my blessing. I love you as you are and accept you in Him.” God cannot love a Christian more than He does now—no matter how much we change our lives. God will not love a Christian less than He does now—no matter what mess we make of our lives.

God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. —Romans 5:8

2. To Prove Ourselves to Other People

This is often the reason why I want to change: I want other people to be impressed by me. We may want to fit in or get other people's approval. We certainly don't want other people finding out what we're like inside. We wear masks to hide our real selves from people. Wearing the mask can be a great strain; it's like acting a role all the time. However we dare not let other people see us as we really are.

One of the problems with trying to prove yourself to other people is that it means they set the standard. Their standards may be ungodly, but you adopt their behavior to fit in. Their standards may be ungodly, but you're living in obedience to other people rather than obedience to God. Often what happens is that you settle for living like other people even when that falls short of living like Jesus. Sometimes you measure yourself against other people and decide you are more righteous. Indeed often we point the finger at other people's faults so we can feel better about ourselves. Instead we should be comparing ourselves to Jesus, finding we fall a long way short of God's standards and discovering we desperately need a Savior.

Here's the bottom line: I want other people to be impressed by me. For my entire marriage, I have wanted the approval of my wife. Her opinion has been more weighty in my life than God's. When I know I've hurt her and I know I've not measured up in her eyes as a husband, it's a struggle.

But this doesn't just affect marriage. This desire to prove ourselves to other people affects our work relationships, our friendships, the people we're serving, our parenting, even our relationships with total strangers ("I want these people who I've never met to think well of me.").

We perform to hide our real selves from people. Another way to think about performing is that it's like wearing a mask. We can often be like actors, putting on a false front to

impress people or vigorously defending ourselves so we're not seen for who we really are. Many of us know how draining it can be to feel like we're putting on an act all day long! This is a huge cause of stress in our lives.

This desire to prove ourselves to others hinders our growth as disciples because our primary objective is to be like other people—whatever will gain their approval—instead of being like Jesus.

3. To Prove Yourself to Yourself

When we mess up, we might hear things such as “Idiot” or “stupid” or “failure” go through our minds. In the past, I realized that one of my biggest fears in life was letting myself down, failing to live up to my own expectations for myself. I couldn't bear the thought of being labeled, even in my own mind, as a failure.

My ego still takes a serious hit when I mess up. Often the biggest sense of a letdown is having to face myself in the mirror. This means I am viewing my sin as primarily an offense against me.

4. Justified by Grace

What's wrong with wanting to change so we can prove ourselves to God or other people or ourselves? It does not work. We might fool other people for a while. We might even fool ourselves. But we can never change enough to impress God. Here is the reason. Trying to impress God, others, or ourselves puts us at the center of the change project. It makes change all about me.

It's all about making me look good. It is done for my glory. That is sin. In fact that's pretty much the definition of sin. Sin is living for my glory instead of God's glory. Sin is living life my way for me instead of living life God's way for God. Much of the time that means rejecting God as Lord and wanting to be our own lord, but it can also involve rejecting God as Savior and wanting to be our own savior. Pharisees do good works and repent of bad works. But gospel repentance includes repenting of good works

done for wrong reasons. John Gerstner says: “The thing that really separates us from God is not so much our sin, but our damnable good works.”

Another word for proving ourselves is justify. We want to justify ourselves to God, to show Him we are good enough. We want to justify ourselves to other people or ourselves, to show we are respectable. However we are justified through faith in what Christ has done. When you feel the desire to prove yourself, remember you are justified by Christ. You are accepted by God already because of what Christ has done. You cannot do anything to make yourself more acceptable to God than you already are. You do not need to worry whether other people are impressed by you because you are justified by God. What makes you feel good is not what you have done but what Christ has done for you. Your identity is not dependent on your change. You are a child of the heavenly king.

Deep down in all of us is a tendency to base our acceptance and worth on what we do. In theological terms this is basing justification on sanctification. Religious people do this, but so do most non-religious people. They do a secular version in which their identity is based on their performance. Christians, too, constantly slip back into a religious motivation. We are all trying to be our own savior. We want to make a contribution to our salvation that we can claim at least a little credit for it, but justification is not based on sanctification. We are made right with God entirely at God’s initiative and entirely through His grace.

The truth is that it is the other way round: Our sanctification is based on our justification. If we do not grasp the reality of grace, our good works will be done for wrong reasons. Without grace, we view life as a contract between us and God; we do good works, and in return He blesses us. When things go well we are filled with pride. When things go badly we either blame ourselves (which leads to crushing guilt) or we blame God (which leads to anger and bitterness). Only when we grasp God’s great love displayed on the cross are we free to serve Him for His own sake.

Here is the real problem with changing to impress. God has given His Son for us so we can be justified. Jesus died on the cross, separated from His Father, bearing the full

weight of God's wrath so we can be accepted by God. When we try to impress by our good works we are saying, in effect, that the cross wasn't enough. "What Jesus did on the cross was all well and good, but I need to finish the job. Jesus didn't quite do enough for me to be accepted by God. I need to do a bit more. I need to atone for myself." "It is finished," Jesus cried. "Not quite," we answer back. "I still need to do this to get God's blessing." Imagine you owed a huge debt that left you languishing in poverty. Then a relative pays off your debt and sets you free. They have given you thousands of dollars—everything that was needed. But then you try to give them some loose change in your pocket as repayment. You want everyone to know you helped pay off the debt, that it was joint effort. It would be pointless and insulting.

You will not cleanse a single sin from your life that you have not first recognized to be pardoned through the cross. If you fail to realize that Jesus has completely paid the penalty for the sin, then you will still work hard on your own to atone for it. You will never be free of the sin if you think it's up to you to pay for it. If you do not see your sin completely pardoned, then your affections, desires, and motives will be wrong. Your will aim to prove yourself. Your focus will be the consequences of your sin rather than hating the sin itself and desiring God in its place.

WEEK 6

Discuss the structure for each week:

1. Discover - Look at a passage together and study it using the four questions.
2. Nurture - Listen for one another's heart as they are answering question and engaging the scripture during the *discover* time. Use handout as a guide.
3. Act - In this step we will, as a community, seek to be "doers" of the word and not hearers only.

Have you ever asked, "Who am I?" & "Why am I here?" The NT says that we *are* a new creation in Christ (II Cor. 5:17). Change is about living out what we now *are* in Christ.

1. **Discover** - Read Galatians 4:4-7; 5:1; 5:13 & attached article "Why would you like to change Part 2"
 - A. Jot down your observations here:
 - a. Whether your father was good, absent, or abusive think back to the Father in the parable of the lost sons (Luke 15:11-32). He is the perfect Father.
 - b. What are some implications of being a part of God's family?
2. **Nurture**
 - A. Imagine two homes side by side. In one God is hosting His feast. In the other sin is hosting its feast. Compare the two feasts.
 - B. What satisfaction do they offer? How lasting and real is that satisfaction? What price must you pay?
 - C. Do you suspect you don't really want to change? If so, what do you think might increase your desire?
3. **Act**
 - A. Compare slavery to sin to being a child in God's family.
 - B. On the cross Jesus cried out, "It is finished." Imagine yourself answering back, "Not quite—there are still some things I need to do to finish the job." Think about how ridiculous and insulting this is.
 - C. What could you use prayer for to increase your desire to change?

ARTICLE: Why would you like to change? Part 2

We were slaves of sin, and now we are children of God. It would be crazy to go on living as slaves and not to live as children. Freedom does not mean we can sin. That is not freedom. That is going back into slavery. Imagine an alcoholic whose addiction has wrecked his life. Someone kindly puts him through rehab, and after several months he leaves, free from his addiction. He is not going to say, "I'm free at last so I'm going to get plastered." That is not freedom. That is returning to his old slavery.

When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. What was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. Now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:20–23 NLT).

It was Sophie's first day with her adoptive parents. She stalked nervously around her new home, fearing one of the beatings she used to get if something was broken. The toys in her room went untouched. She could not quite believe they were hers. At dinner she secretly stuffed food in her pocket; you never knew where your next meal would come from when you were on the streets.

That night she felt alone in her big room. She would have cried if she had not long since learned to suppress emotion. Now listen to her new mother one year on: "She crawled into bed with me last night because she was having a bad dream. She curled up next to me, put her head on my chest, told me she loved me, smiled, and went to sleep. I nearly cried with contentment."

Sophie had a new identity on day one. She had become a child in a new family, but she still lived like a child of the street. Her actions and attitudes were shaped by her old identity. Christians too have been adopted into a new family and given a new identity.

We are to live out our new identity—to be who we are. Do not live like a slave when you can live like a child of the King of heaven.

Our identity as God's children is the foundation of who we are now because of Jesus. As God's children, we bear His name everywhere we go. We are His family, His church. Church then is not a place or event. It's who we are. Some implications of being family are that we care for one another and live like God is our Father—we are like Him, do what He says, love Him, and know He loves us.

As God's children, we, like Jesus, are sent to the world so others may experience what God is like. We are ministers of reconciliation bearing God's message of reconciliation. As we obey Jesus's command to make disciples, God is using us to reconcile people to Himself. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21 NIV). We are missionaries.

So what's the motivation to change and live in this new identity? The reason Christians should want to change is to enjoy the freedom from sin and delight in God that God gives to us through Jesus. I want to highlight four things from this definition.

First, growing in holiness is not a sad, dutiful drudge. It is about joy. It is discovering true joy—the joy of knowing and serving God. There is self-denial— sometimes hard and painful self-denial—but true self-denial leads to gaining your life (Mark 8:34–37).

Second, gospel change is about living in freedom. We stop living as slaves to sin. We refuse to go back to our chains and to our filth. We live in the wonderful freedom God gives us. We are free to be the people we should be.

Third, gospel change is about discovering the delight of knowing and serving God. We give up on our sin and in return we get God Himself! Our job is to stop grubbing around in the dirt and instead to enjoy knowing God. We give up our cheap imitations and enjoy the real thing. We often think of holiness as a means to an end—the end being

the approval of God or the admiration of others. Holiness is the end, and the means is God's grace giving Christ for us and the Spirit in us. Our problem is we think of holiness as giving up the pleasures that sin offers for some worthy but drab life. But holiness is recognizing that the pleasures of sin are empty and temporary while all the time God is inviting us to magnificent, true, full, and rich pleasures that last forever.

Fourth, becoming like Jesus is something God gives to us. It is not an achievement we offer to God. It is enjoying the new identity He has given us in Christ. It begins with His work for us. He has set us free from sin and offers a relationship with Himself.

There are two feasts. There is the feast of God, and there is the feast of sin. We are invited to both. God invites us to find satisfaction in Him. Sin entices us with its lies to look for satisfaction in sin. So we are double-booked. All the time we have to choose which feast we attend. We cannot attend both; we cannot feast with God and feast with sin at the same time. This is God's invitation to us:

*Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.
Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of
fare. — Isaiah 55:1–2*

Sin promises much, but it doesn't satisfy; it charges a high price. That price is broken lives, broken relationships, broken hopes. Ultimately the wages of sin is death. God offers us a feast that satisfies. He offers us delight for our souls.

The motivation for change and holiness is this: God's feast is so much better! The price tag reads "No cost." There's no charge. It's His gift. Whose feast are you going to attend today? How can you strengthen your resolve?

WEEK 7

Discuss the structure for each week:

1. Discover - Look at a passage together and study it using the four questions.
2. Nurture - Listen for one another's heart as they are answering question and engaging the scripture during the *discover* time. Use handout as a guide.
3. Act - In this step we will, as a community, seek to be "doers" of the word and not hearers only.

1. **Discover** - Read Colossians 2:20-23 & attached article "How are you going to change?"

B. Jot down your observations here:

- a. Why is it that lists of religious things (to-do's and rules) appear to have wisdom?
- b. Can you think of a time in your life when a rule changed your attitude or motivation? (likely not) If not, why do you think that might be?

2. **Nurture**

- A. What are some things you have tried to do to change? How are they working for you?
- B. What are some areas where legalistic ("If I follow this or that rule _____ will change") thinking present in your life?
- C. Keller says we need to repent of our "damnable" good works. What would it look like for you to repent of those works in your own life?

3. **Act**

- A. Re-read Keller's quote (below) together. How does it connect with your own personal change?
 - A. Pray specifically for one another.
- B. Write out at least 3-5 ways the Gospel speaks to the area of change you are focused on right now.

ARTICLE: How are you going to change:

It seems our first instinct when we want to change is to do something. We think activity will change us. We want a list of dos and don'ts. In Jesus's day people thought they could be pure through ceremonial washing. Today it can be spiritual disciplines or a set of laws. Many of these things are good in themselves, but they cannot change us inside.

“Are you so dull?” [Jesus] asked. “Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body.” (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods “clean.”) He went on: “What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.’” (Mark 7:18–23 NIV)

External activities cannot change us, says Jesus, because sin comes from within, from our hearts. Our rituals might change our behavior for a while, but they cannot change our hearts. Therefore they cannot bring true and lasting holiness. We need heart change.

What Law Can and Cannot Do

According to John Piper, there are at least three reasons why trying to “do” things or keep the law won't help us be transformed into Christ's image:

1. The Law Cannot Remove Our Condemnation.

The whole basis for transformation is the removal of condemnation; the law cannot remove it, and so the law cannot provide the basis for our transformation. If we want to be changed into the image of Jesus, we must first have the verdict of guilty reversed, and the law cannot do that—only God can because of Christ. We receive it by faith alone.

2. The Law Cannot Conquer the Flesh.

There is a second reason why the law cannot sanctify or transform: It cannot conquer the flesh. That is, it cannot change us at the root of our nature: our fallenness and rebellion against God. It cannot take away our reluctance to love God and our treasonous preference for God's gifts above God (Romans 1:23). On the contrary, Paul teaches us that the law aggravates our sin and stirs up our rebellion.

In other words the law is not the remedy for our condemnation or our rebellion. In fact, it is given to turn our inner rebellion into more blatant and visible transgressions. We see this again in Romans 7:5, "*While we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.*" In other words, the law does not conquer the flesh; it rouses the flesh. The law plays into the hands of our own sinful passions and stirs them up. We see the same thing in Romans 7:8, "*But sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, produced in me coveting of every kind.*" The law does not conquer the flesh; on the contrary, it gives the flesh another base of operation, another place to show its rebellion.

3. The Law Couldn't Give the Son the Glory for Justification and Sanctification.

The last reason the law cannot sanctify is seen at the end of Romans 5: God's purpose is to sanctify us in a way that the credit and the glory for our liberation and transformation go to Jesus Christ, not to ourselves and not to the law.

Therefore God calls us not to turn to the law for transformation—for love and holiness and Christ-likeness—but to turn to the living Christ, who worked for us in history and works in us now by His Spirit.

The law cannot magnify the Son of God as more glorious and more valuable and more desirable than the pleasures of sin. Only when Christ Himself wins our affections over all contestants will He get the glory God means for Him to have. Even if you did turn to the law and experience some measure of success in becoming a law-abiding person

(as the Pharisees certainly did, including Saul of Tarsus) Christ would get no honor from that. God's whole purpose in the plan of redemption is that His Son get the glory not only for our justification (made right with God by Christ) but also for our sanctification (growth in Christlikeness). This the law could not do.

Trying to change through our own efforts to follow the rules (keep the law) is called legalism. We are all born legalists. We are convinced that our righteousness, our acceptability, is based on our performance, on what we know and what we do. The gospel says we have been forgiven by God and fully accepted by Him purely on the basis of what Jesus has done. If that's true, then any efforts of our own to add to the work of Jesus must be an offense to God! Isaiah 64:6 says, *"All our righteous acts are like filthy rags."*

As Tim Keller likes to say, we need to repent of our damnable good works. Tim Keller expands on the nature of the gospel and the law:

"We never 'get beyond the gospel' in our Christian life to something more 'advanced.' The gospel is not the first 'step' in a 'stairway' of truths, rather, it is more like the 'hub' in a 'wheel' of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C's of Christianity, but it is the A to Z of Christianity. We are not justified by the gospel and then sanctified by obedience but the gospel is the way we grow (Galatians 3:1-3) and are renewed (Colossians 1:6). It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier (Romans 1:16-17).

"All our problems come from a failure to apply the gospel... The main problem, then, in the Christian life is that we have not thought out the deep implications of the gospel, we have not 'used' the gospel in and on all parts of our life... The key to continual and deeper spiritual renewal and revival is the continual rediscovery of the gospel."

WEEK 8

Discuss the structure for each week:

1. Discover - Look at a passage together and study it using the four questions.
2. Nurture - Listen for one another's heart as they are answering question and engaging the scripture during the *discover* time. Use handout as a guide.
3. Act - In this step we will, as a community, seek to be "doers" of the word and not hearers only.

Change is not something we can manufacture by sheer force of will. We partner with the Spirit of God by recalling the wonder of our salvation and joy of His love for us.

1. **Discover** - Read Phil. 2:12-13 (note the context of 2:1-11) AND attached article, Change is God's Work.

A. Jot down your observations here:

- a. What do you think Paul means when he says "work out your salvation with fear and trembling?"

2. **Nurture** -

A. How is God at work in you? What evidences have you seen that God is transforming you throughout the last year or two?

B. What evidence is there that He has changed (circumcised) your heart and given you a new heart?

C. How can you partner with Him in this change?

3. **Act** -

A. Write a summary of how you are praying God will change you and a summary of how God has changed you.

B. Write down what it was from the article that most encouraged you and gave you confidence in God.

ARTICLE: **Change is God's Work**

Realizing that change is something that has to take place in the heart is just the first step in the battle for change. Once we understand this, it moves the battle for change from trying to modify our behaviors to trying to transform the deepest motivations of our hearts. However, this actually makes change harder, doesn't it? It is relatively easy to adjust our outward behavior for a little while, but this adjustment will never change who we are internally. In fact, the same old patterns of behavior always seem to pop up again and again because our hearts remain unchanged. We still naturally desire to seek our righteousness and our identity in things other than God Himself. The problem really is that we can't seem to change our own hearts!

We are not the first people to have experienced this problem. If we think back in God's Story to Deuteronomy we find Moses restating the Law that Israel was to keep because they had entered into a covenant relationship with God at Mt. Sinai. In the midst of urging Israel to "fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord, which I am commanding you today for your good" (Deut 10:12-13), He tells Israel in Deuteronomy 10:16 to "circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn." Circumcision was the outward sign that Israel was called by God to reflect His image to the world. However, Moses tells Israel that outward circumcision is not enough. Rather their hearts needed to be circumcised if they were going to be faithful to God.

The amazing thing is that later in Deuteronomy, Moses later tells Israel they would fall into unfaithfulness; rather than leaving them in their failure, God Himself would come and circumcise their hearts so they could live faithfully as God's people. This promise of God was echoed later in the Old Testament in places such as Ezekiel 36 (read Ezekiel 36:25-27). So change—both in our hearts and the actions that flow from our hearts—must come from God Himself! The Apostle Paul describes this amazing transformation in his letter to the Ephesians (read Eph. 1:3-14).

Notice here how the full power and energy of God are at work to liberate us from our oppressive sinful nature and desires! The Father desired to set us free from the sinful desires that enslave us and restore our status as sons and daughters. He set in motion a plan carried out by His Son Jesus and the Spirit to deliver us from both the penalty and power of sin.

Jesus does what legalism can never do: He gives us a new heart and a new spirit. Without that inner transformation we can never please God. People are not changed by therapy or analysis—not even biblical analysis. They are changed by God (You Can Change, p. 53). The Father renews, liberates, and sanctifies through the Son by the Spirit.

Sanctified by Faith in the Gospel

Even though Jesus reconciles us to the Father through the Spirit entirely by His work, this doesn't mean we get to put our feet up and relax as though we had nothing to do. Even though the Spirit's power accomplishes both our reconciliation to the Father and our transformation into the Son's image, every day we are faced with the choice to submit to His leadership or to go our own way. We must enter into a process of daily repentance and faith in the truth of the gospel as we choose to entrust ourselves entirely to God. Understanding what Jesus has done for us and worshipping God in response is the only thing that will bring lasting change.

Tim Keller describes it this way:

Paul says to Christians, 'your life is hid with Christ in God' (Col 3:3), and in numerous places he says that we are now 'in him.' This means, on the one hand, that the Father accepts us in Christ and treats us as if we had done all that Jesus has done (cf. Col 3:2a). But this also means Christ's life comes into us by the Spirit and shapes us into a new kind of person. The gospel is not just a truth about us that we affirm with our minds, it is also a reality we must experience in our hearts and souls. For example, In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 Paul wants the people to give an offering to the poor. He says, "I

don't want to order you. I don't want this offering to simply be the response to my demand." He doesn't put pressure directly on the will (saying 'I'm an apostle and this is your duty to me!') nor pressure directly on the emotions (telling them stories about how much the poor are suffering and how much more they have than the sufferers). Instead, Paul vividly and unforgettably says, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9). When he says 'you know the grace'—he uses a powerful image, bringing Jesus' salvation into the realm of money and wealth and poverty. He moves them by a 'spiritual recollection' of the gospel. Paul is saying, 'Think on his costly grace. Think on that grace until you are changed into generous people by the gospel in your hearts.' So the solution to stinginess is a re-orientation to the generosity of Christ in the gospel, where he poured out his wealth for you. Now you don't have to worry about money—the cross proves God's care for you and gives you security. Now you don't have to envy any one else's money. Jesus' love and salvation confers on you a remarkable status— one that money cannot give you.

Paul does the same thing in Ephesians 5:25ff, where he urges husbands to be faithful to their wives. What is the point? What makes you a sexually faithful spouse, a generous person, or a good parent is not just redoubled effort to follow the example of Christ. Rather, it is deepening your understanding of the salvation of Christ and living out of the changes that understanding makes in your heart—the seat of your mind, will, and emotions. Faith in the gospel re-structures our motivations, our self-understanding and identity, and our view of the world. Behavioral compliance to rules without heart-change will be superficial and fleeting. The gospel changes your heart.

WEEK 9

Discuss the structure for each week:

1. Discover - Look at a passage together and study it using the four questions.
2. Nurture - Listen for one another's heart as they are answering question and engaging the scripture during the *discover* time. Use handout as a guide.
3. Act - In this step we will, as a community, seek to be "doers" of the word and not hearers only.

God uses everything to make us more like Jesus. My behavior come from the heart and my circumstances trigger my heart. Sin, therefore, is a problem of worship.

1. **Discover** - Read Mark 7:18-23 AND attached article All of Life is Worship.

A. Jot down your observations here:

- a. What does the scripture reveal about God's character, Christ's work, my identity, and how I live?
- b. How does the article challenge you or encourage you?

2. **Nurture** -

- A. No neutral gear in our lives regarding worship. What position is your heart in?
- B. What do you want, desire or wish for? What do you want or fear right now?
- C. What have you sought to help you in those areas? How did it work for you?
- D. When are you typically tempted? What circumstances lead to that temptations?

3. **Act** -

- A. Begin writing a summary of when you sin and what is going on in your heart. We'll consider these in the upcoming weeks.
- B. What do your struggles reveal about your heart and how can we pray for you?

ARTICLE: All of Life of Worship

From the Story we can see that humans were made to worship. We were made to adore, to long for, to delight in, to desire. We were made to have the deepest longings of our hearts met by someone or something outside of ourselves.

When we look to something for significance, acceptance, approval, satisfaction, fulfillment, joy, security, etc., that very act is worship. We are ascribing worth to something. We are saying, "That thing is what will make me significant! That person will make me acceptable. That person will give me security. That thing will save me!"

You see, all of life is worship. We are ALWAYS worshiping. Everything we do is an affirmation of who or what we are looking to for significance, security, approval, etc. Your life is a billboard; you are advertising the thing that is most important to you. "This is what I value! This is what saves me!" That constant advertisement, "Here's what I'm all about!" is worship. All of life is worship.

Your life is a garden hose that is always on. Worship always flows out of us like water out of that hose. Where are we going to point the hose? Something is going to get wet with our worship. Who or what is it?

There is no neutral on the worship gearshift of your life. You are always in gear, and you are always in drive or reverse. Romans 1:25 says, "We've ex-changed the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator."

Every sin is a finger-wagging accusation against God! Every time we sin, we are saying to God, “You are not great! You are not in control! You are not good! THIS THING OVER HERE WILL SAVE ME!” Do you hear how offensive that is!?

We all worship false gods. We all look to created things instead of the Creator for acceptance, approval, satisfaction, etc. This false worship produces all kinds of negative behaviors and emotions in our lives, which we call sin. These sin issues are not merely behavior problems. They are heart issues.

What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person. —Mark 7:20–23

According to the Bible, the heart is far more than a muscle in your chest pumping blood throughout your body.

The word “heart” occurs more 850 times in the Bible. If you looked up all of those uses of the word, you’d find that our heart makes decisions, it feels emotion, can be deceived, desires things, lusts, thinks, and reasons.

The word “heart” is the word the Bible uses to describe the real you, the very center of your being. The heart includes your mind, your will, and your emotions. It is not less than any one of those things; it is more.

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. —Proverbs 4:23

A wellspring is a naturally occurring water source that continually produces. The water continues to flow outward from the source. If you want to know whether or not the fruit

of the source is suitable for drinking, you've got to go to the source and sample the water.

Our hearts are like a wellspring, continually producing fruit. Everything in our lives flows outward from this source we call our hearts. The fruit of our lives is an indicator of the state of our hearts. Our behavior comes from our hearts.

How would most people you know answer the question, "What needs to change?"

They might say:

- › Their circumstances (better job, lose weight, get married)
- › Their behavior (I just need to be more patient, I need to worry less)
- › Their self-concept (I just need to believe in myself or have more self-confidence)

But what really needs to change? Their heart!

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. —James 4:1–3

Typically people want to blame their sin on their circumstances. I got angry because the guy cut me off in traffic. I started to worry all of the time because my husband lost his job. I yelled at the kids because they weren't obeying me.

But the reality is that our circumstances merely reveal what is already in our hearts! Our struggles reveal our hearts. That means they are a great opportunity to tackle the heart causes of our sinful behavior and negative emotions.

So what is it that is going on in our hearts? The Bible says two things are happening in our hearts. Hebrews 4:12 speaks of “the thoughts and desires of the heart”:

- › We think, interpret, make sense, trust
- › We desire, worship, want, treasure

Human beings are always interpreting or making sense of our environment and our circumstances. Humans are always worshipping. We were created to worship. It’s what we’re designed to do, and our worship never stops.

So there are two potential ways sin can take root in our hearts: We can think or believe wrong things about God, or we can worship and desire wrong things other than God. Sin happens when we believe lies about God instead of God’s Word and when we worship idols instead of worshipping God. When it comes to sinful patterns in our lives, efforts to modify our behavior will never be effective. We worshipped our way into the problem, and we will worship our way out.

Destructive or sinful behaviors such as lying, manipulation, violence, theft, adultery, addictions, and eating disorders, and negative or sinful emotions such as anxiety, depression, envy, guilt, bitterness, and pride all arise when our hearts do not trust God and do not worship God. The solution is faith and repentance. The gospel invites us to faith and repentance. The key is to make the link between our specific sins and the lies and idols in our hearts.

Trust God instead of believing lies = faith

Worship God instead of worshipping idols = repentance

