

## WEEK 1 - The four questions

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 - The two sons

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 - The Gospel

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 - Change

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 - Motivation

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 - Identity

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 - Rules

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 - Freedom

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 - Worship

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 is 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



## WEEK 10 - Truth

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.

The truth shall set you free. All sin comes from lies we believe about God. God is great, so I don't have to be in control. God is glorious, so we don't have to fear others. God is good, so we do not have to look elsewhere. God is gracious, so we do not need to prove ourselves. Life and freedom are found by trusting and delighting in the truth about God!

1. **Discover** - Read Genesis 3:1-13 & **Article**: What truths do you need to turn to

A. Jot down your observations here:

- a. What was the real temptation the serpent presented to Adam & Eve?
- b. What do you think was going on in their hearts?

2. **Nurture** -

- A. What's the difference between "knowing" something in your head and believing it in your heart? Is there a gap of these two evident in your life?
- B. What does John mean in John 8:32 "You shall *know* the truth and the truth shall set you free."?
- C. Are there areas of your life you are tempted to control and what lie do you believe when you "take control?"
- D. What do you sometimes fear more than God?
- E. What might you look to for satisfaction ("If I have\_\_\_\_\_ then everything will be ok")?
- F. Do you ever try to prove yourself? How?

3. **Act** -

- A. Share the truths you need to run to with the group. Pray!

## **ARTICLE: What truths do you need to turn to?**

The root of all our behavior and emotions is the heart: what it trusts and what it treasures. We sin because we believe the lie that we should be God: that His rule is oppressive, that we will be free without Him, that living for self offers more than what God provides. We might never be so bold as to voice this kind of thinking, but this unbelief is at the root of every sin and every negative emotion.

Therefore, the problem is that we are all unbelievers—all of us! Not many Christians think of themselves as unbelievers! After all we normally use the term to describe people who are not yet disciples of Jesus at all. There are many things about God we actually do not believe. Often there is a large difference, or a large gap, between what we know in our head and what we truly believe in our heart.

It is what we truly believe in the core of our being, in our heart, that affects our actions. The heart is “the wellspring of life” and “with the heart a person believes” (Romans 10:10).

We may know (and even say we believe) that God is in control of all things, that He is sovereign . . .but then we are filled with worry and anxiety about many of the details of our lives! It’s as if we are saying, “I know God is in control, but I don’t really believe God is in control. Therefore I must work to control certain parts of my life.”

The process of closing the gap between what we know in our head and what we believe in our heart is called sanctification. Sanctification is about becoming more like Jesus, but we will only become more like Jesus when our actions are consistent with what we say we believe.

### **The Truth Shall Set You Free**

Last week we talked about believing the truth about God (faith) and desiring God above all other things (worship).

When we ask what truths you need to turn to, we’re not talking about knowing the right mantra about God to chant when you are faced with temptation. Saying “God is in control” over and over and over again will usually not stem the tide of worry and anxiety in our hearts. We must exercise faith in the greatness of God, and we must worship Him as the Great One to win the battle against sin.

Imagine you have never tasted honey. You might possess the knowledge of its sweetness because people you trust have told you it is sweet, but that is very different from possessing a belief in its sweetness that can only come from the mouth watering experience of honey on your tongue.<sup>14</sup> When we truly believe God and experience the reality of who He is (by tasting and seeing He is good), our desire for God will grow exponentially.

Whether we've already sinned or we're being tempted to sin, we need to speak truth to ourselves and worship God by telling Him the truth about Himself. You cannot worship God and sin at the same time.

We will summarize four life-changing truths about God:

1. God is great, so we do not have to be in control.
2. God is glorious, so we do not have to fear others.
3. God is good, so we do not have to look elsewhere.
4. God is gracious, so we do not have to prove ourselves.

For many, these four truths have become an extremely helpful tool that allows us see our sin at a heart-level.

### **1. God is great, so we do not have to be in control. Psalm 145:3**

A fathom is a unit of measurement used to determine the depth of large bodies of water. When David says no one can fathom God's greatness, he's not just saying we can't understand it. He's saying if we had a fathom-stick and tried to measure the greatness of God, we would not be able to do it!

God is great. He has all power. There is nothing He cannot do. He is in control of the entire universe. A word we sometimes use to describe the greatness of God is sovereignty.

"God is sovereign" means He is in control of all things, that nothing escapes His notice, that nothing happens He doesn't know about, that HE is the one who keeps the earth spinning on its axis and rotating around the sun. God is great!

Our knowledge of God's greatness seems to go out the window as soon as things don't go our way. We get stuck in traffic. Our kids don't obey. There's too much

month left at the end of the paycheck. How do we respond? By trying to be in control! We see this in nearly every area of our lives: time, career, money, relationships, other people's actions, people's impressions of us.

What do these efforts to control produce in us? Worry, busyness, frustration, stress, controlling or manipulating others, lack of gentleness, pride (when things go well), guilt (when things do not go well).

Nowhere in God's Story is His power more clearly on display than in the story of Jesus.

He was born of a virgin. He lived a perfect sinless life, submitted fully to the Father, something no human had ever done. On the cross the countless sins of billions of humans were piled on Him, and His death was sufficient to pay the penalty for all of them. Jesus overcame death by raising from the dead, undoing the curse of sin that had reigned since the garden of Eden. He sent His Spirit to live inside of humans, empowering them to do the same works He accomplished on earth. (see 1 Corinthians 1:22-24).

Jesus is the wisdom and the power of God! Repent of your desire to be in control. Believe that God, through His Son Jesus, has clearly demonstrated His greatness. Worship Him as the One True Sovereign. The truth will set you free.

## **2. God is glorious, so we do not have to fear others.**

One common reason we sin is that we crave the approval of other people or we fear their rejection and disapproval. We "need" the acceptance of others, so we are controlled by them. The Bible's term for this is "fear of man." "Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe" (Proverbs 29:25). Ed Welch in his book *When People are Big and God is Small* says fear of man has many symptoms: susceptibility to peer pressure; "needing" something from a spouse; a concern with self-esteem; being over-committed because we can't say no; fear of being exposed; small lies to make yourself look good; people making you jealous, angry, depressed or anxious; avoiding people; comparing yourself to others; and fear of talking about Jesus.

Our culture tries to overcome this problem by finding ways to bolster self-esteem, but this actually compounds the problem. We become dependent on whatever

or whoever will boost our self-esteem. *In reality low self-esteem is thwarted pride*—we do not have the status we think we deserve.

We use the language of “need.” We elevate often-good desires (love, affirmation, respect) to needs without which we think we cannot be whole. We talk about “needing” the approval or acceptance of other people, but our true need is to glorify God and love other people.

The answer to fear of man is fear of God. We need a big view of God. “He will be the sure foundation for your times,” says Isaiah, “a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure” (Isaiah 33:6). The key to God’s treasure is to fear Him. To fear God is to respect, worship, trust, and submit to God. It is the proper response to His glory, holiness, power, love, goodness, and wrath. Jesus is the glory of the Father. “Glory” means “weight,” as in “a person of importance, a weighty person.” 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.

Now imagine Jesus the glorious One and the person you fear standing side by side. Who is the most glorious, beautiful, holy, awesome, and majestic?

### **3. God is good, so we do not have to look elsewhere.**

From the very beginning, God created humans with needs. They needed food, water, rest, work to accomplish, relationship, and intimacy. God would meet these needs abundantly. Because God is good, He gives us good things to satisfy these basic needs. God doesn’t exist for us; we exist for Him, to live in dependent and submitted relationship with Him. This pattern of our need and His provision (over and over and over again every single day) show us this.

These things all point to deeper spiritual realities in our lives, too. Every physical need you have is a picture of your spiritual need! Your body *needs* rest, and your soul needs rest. Your body is thirsty, and your soul is thirsty. Your body is hungry, and your soul is hungry. Your body needs love and intimacy, and your soul needs love and intimacy. *God in His goodness meets the needs of your body, and God in His goodness is the only one who can meet the needs of your soul!*

There is a pattern: *God creates the need, and He fills it.* God is the source of all life and the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17). God meets our physical needs with good things, and He meets our deeper needs with the ultimate good thing: Himself. Yet we often look to the created gifts for satisfaction and fulfillment instead of looking to the One who gives the gifts. We want God's provision, but we don't want God. What do you look to for satisfaction? What are you saying when you say, "When I have THIS, then everything will be okay"?

Knowing our tendency to look to created things instead of the Creator, Jesus came, saying, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry" (John 6:35). He said, "Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst" (John 4:14). He's not talking about cannibalism as the way to fill your hungry stomach forever or some magic water that will quench your thirst forever. He's talking about feeding on Him in a spiritual sense, having your hungry and thirsty soul filled by the very giver of life itself. "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8).

It is easy to think that following Jesus is somehow a lesser existence, that living for our own pleasures and pursuing fulfillment through everything created is somehow the "good life." But a life lived in obedience to the Father through His Spirit is the true good life! Obedience is a blessing, and God has given us Himself so we don't have to look elsewhere.

#### **4. God is gracious, so we do not have to prove ourselves.**

Christians love to talk about the grace of God. We often say, "I know God is gracious. He forgave my sins so I will not go to hell when I die." Still we work really hard to prove ourselves. When it comes to grace, there is a large gap between what we know and what we believe.

What does it mean when we say that God is gracious? Webster's defines grace as "the freely given, unmerited favor and love of God." Grace is unmerited favor; undeserved favor; being given something that you did not deserve.

God is gracious. Because of our sin, the only thing we deserve from God is death. Through the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, He offers us life. The only thing we have to do to receive God's grace is accept it. When we do, we are made

right with Him. We are fully accepted and loved by God. There's nothing we have done to earn it, and there's nothing we can do to lose it. There's nothing left to prove.

Much of the time, we live as though we do deserve things, that we've proven something to someone. We live with a sense of entitlement. We feel as though our own hard work and performance has merited us something, either from God or from other people. This is the same as looking God in the eye and saying, "You are not gracious. All I have is not a free gift from you. I've worked hard to earn it. I have proven myself to you, and now you are obligated to bless me."

This heart posture manifests itself through pride, self-righteousness toward people who are not as "good," extreme guilt when we fail to perform, and anger when we don't get what we feel we deserve. Fundamentally what we are saying is that we are not defined by the work of Jesus on our behalf, but rather we are defined by our own work.

Jesus lived the life we could never live and died the death we should have died. When we place our faith and trust in Him, we are freed from pride and guilt. We know our efforts to prove ourselves did not make us right with God (no pride), and we know when our efforts to prove ourselves come up short, we are forgiven (no guilt).

Pride and guilt are replaced with *confidence* and *humility*: confidence because the performance of Jesus makes me acceptable to God (in spite of my failures), and humility because I constantly need the grace of God (because of my ongoing failures). I do not have to prove myself.

We will be tempted over and over to stop believing that God is great, glorious, good, and gracious. When we face temptation we need to say not only I should not do this, but also I need not do this. When we're tempted to over-eat, we shouldn't just say, "I should not be a glutton," but we can also say, "I need not overeat because God is good." When we're tempted to freak out about an uncertain situation, we shouldn't just say, "I should not be afraid," but we can also say, "I need not fear because God is great." Whatever sin offers, God is bigger and better. To say to temptation "I must not do this" is legalism. To say "I need not do this" is gospel!

## WEEK 11 - Idolatry

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.

We said to ourselves last week, "God is all I need." Influenced by lies about God instead of God's Word, our desires (they usually feel like needs) are often for things other than God and His glory.

1. **Discover** - Read I Peter 1:13-15 & **Article**: What idols do you need to turn from

**A.** Jot down your observations here:

- a. What comes to mind about Jesus as you read I Peter 1:13-15?
- b. How does the article challenge you?

2. **Nurture** -

- A.** Is there any evidence you have an idol (or two)? What might those be? (share with the group)
- B.** Explain how idolizing a person or a thing is setting oneself up for failure.
- C.** Based on the article and passage above how would you explain I John 2:1-2

3. **Act** -

- A.** Pray and ask the Spirit to reveal specific idols
- B.** Thinking about the area you want to change, what idol may be behind it? Write this out.
- C.** Identify the lie ("What am I saying about God when I worship this idol?")
- D.** Write down the truth about God you need to believe when tempted in this area.



## ARTICLE: **What idols do you need to turn from**

*For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. —Romans 1:25*

Often this verse can conjure up images of tribal people bowing down to a small piece of wood, carved to resemble a person or an animal, and offering bits of food to appease the false deity. But “the exchange of truth for lie is the essence of idolatry, and idolatry, in turn, underlies all sin.”

Idolatry may sound primitive, but it is alive and well. It pervades not only our culture but our own lives. All of us worship and serve created things rather than the Creator.

Tim Keller defines an idol in several different ways:

- Anything more important to you than God
- Anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God
- Anything you seek to give you what only God can give
- Whatever you look at and say in your heart of hearts, “If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure”
- Anything that becomes more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life, and identity
  
- On the surface, idolatry can manifest itself in many different ways:
  - Greed and materialism
  - Lust for achievement/success
  - Approval of man/fear of man
  - Codependent relationship with a child or spouse
  - Porn/sexual addiction
  - Desire for power and control
  - Anger
  - Addiction to drugs, alcohol, food, or entertainment

Idolatry sounds like this:

*“I will give something up to have it. I will sacrifice to get it. I will compromise, and I will beg, borrow, or steal to possess it. I will lie, cheat, or steal. It is the chief pursuit of my life. I am restless until it is mine.”*

The manifestation of idolatry is merely an indicator of a deeper heart issue. Remember what we've said about worship: that we are created to worship, that we are always worshipping? Idolatry in our lives is merely another indicator of the worship direction of our hearts.

For example, people can idolize their spouse. They can connect all of their sense of security and significance and acceptance to what their spouse thinks of them.

What is that person really saying about who God is? What are they saying about the work of God?

Idolatry is always twin idolatry. It's never just about the false god. There's always a second idol involved.

If a mother sets her children up as an idol, she may pin all of her hope for significance on their performance. What she believes about herself—her worth and value—is completely based on how well she performs as a mother. If her kids behave and end up becoming successful adults, then she will feel smug and proud about all of her hard work as mom. If they misbehave and don't turn out so well, she will be embarrassed and feel like a failure. Her kids are the key to her happiness and sense of worth. They are her idol.

*It takes an idol to make an idol.* The day that mother set those children up as an idol, effectively saying, *“They are god, and God is not,”* she was also saying, *“I am god, and God is not.”* Who else but God can determine what is worthy of worship!

The number-one created thing I worship is the created thing I see looking back at me in the mirror every morning. Any establishment of an idol is an act of selfish rebellion and is essentially saying, *“I am god. I am the most important being in the whole universe. I will pursue my own agenda, and I will call the shots. I am god. The Creator is not.”*

Shortly after God delivered his people from Egypt, He descended on Mt. Sinai in the form of a terrible storm and gave them the Ten Commandments. (see Exodus 20:2–5)

The people responded by saying repeatedly, *“Everything the Lord has said we will do!”* (Exodus 19:8; 24:3, 7). A few weeks later, after Moses had spent nearly forty days on the mountain with God, the people asked Moses’ brother Aaron to *“make us a god who will go before us”* (Exodus 32:2). They constructed a calf out of gold and bowed down to it, declaring it was the god who had brought them out of Egypt (Exodus 32:4). Their *desire for a god they could see* and their inability to trust the God who had saved them led them to worship an idol. They broke the second commandment because they had already broken the first. *It takes an idol to make an idol.* The stunning departure of God’s people filled Him with righteous wrath. He basically told Moses to step back so He could wipe them all out and start over with Moses (Exodus 32:10).

Moses stepped forward. He interceded on behalf of the people, begging God to change His mind. God withheld judgment on the whole group. God still poured out His wrath; at least 3,000 people ended up dying, but the death of some saved the lives of the many.

Now imagine the Creator, our Father, and His grief over our idolatry. Every commandment we break is preceded by our breaking of the first commandment. *It takes an idol to make an idol.* God could rightly say of humanity, *“I’m going to wipe them all out!”* But Jesus steps forward and intercedes. God withholds His judgment on the whole group. God still pours out His wrath, and the death of one saves the lives of countless.

Jesus is our better Moses. He takes the wrath of God we deserve as idol worshippers, and He lives to make intercession for us continually as we mess up over and over again. (See 1 John 2:1–2)

To propitiate means to satisfy. God's righteous wrath against humanity has been satisfied through Jesus. He will still pour out His wrath on those who reject the sacrificial offering Jesus made, but Jesus' death was sufficient to satisfy all of God's wrath against sinful humans.

## WEEK 11 - Repentance & Faith

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.

When we worship idols, we offend God. Repentance and faith are the right responses when the Holy Spirit convicts us of idolatry.

1. **Discover** - Read James 1:13-15, Hebrews 4:15 & **Article**: God is the most offended party
  - A. Jot down your observations here:
    - a. What comes to mind about Jesus as you read James 1:13-15 & Hebrews 4:15
    - b. How does the article challenge you?
2. **Nurture** -
  - A. Explain this sentence in your own words: "Unless we see God as the most offended party, we will not hate our sin."
  - B. How is your sin an offense against God?
  - C. What are you saying to God when you are sinning? Do you believe He is the most offended party? What would right worship sound like in the moment of temptation?
3. **Act** -
  - A. Pray... What does true repentance sound like? What does right worship sound like? Begin writing this out.

## ARTICLE: **God is the most offended party**

Consider again the idea that every sin is a finger-wagging accusation against God. This false worship is occurring at the heart level, where we are either believing lies about God or desiring something other than God. *“With the heart a person believes”* (Romans 10:10).

This heart-level perspective is a radical view of sin and repentance. It helps make sense of what David said in Psalm 51:4 after he committed the sins of adultery and murder: *“Against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight.”*

David stole another man’s wife and then had that man killed. But he says he sinned against God? How can that be? David believed things in his heart that were not true about God, and believing those lies is what led him to commit adultery and murder. So it is as if David was looking at God and saying, *“I believe I am more important than you. Therefore, I can lust after whatever my heart desires, regardless of what you have to say about it.”*

Can you see how this is a sin against God?

Unless we see God as the most offended party, we will not hate our sin.

When we repent, we cannot simply repent of our sinful actions, we must repent of our distorted worship!

This heart-level perspective is also a very helpful view of sin and transformation because it very clearly shows us the way out! Most of us think the way to stop sinning is to change our behavior. However if behind every sin is a lie about God, then what really needs to change is what I am believing in my heart! What really needs to change is my worship!

By now we probably all realize that we need to be transformed. We want to be the image of God the way we were intended to be His image, but transformation won't come by trying harder or gritting your teeth or clenching your fists. We call that "white-knuckling it." Many books and recovery programs are about behavior modification, *but Jesus is about heart transformation*. Jesus is about rightly directed worship.

Whatever sin pattern you find yourself struggling with right now, here's the reality: *You worshipped your way into this situation*, and by God's grace, you'll worship your way out.

## **Repentance and Faith**

There are two major outcomes we hope to see in this DNA guide:

1. We want to see how the sinful behaviors in our lives are really a result of distorted worship. We want to see how all of our sin is really a sin against a holy God, how God is the most offended party. This is the only thing that will lead to true repentance, which is the first step in transformation.
2. We want to learn how to express true faith in God. We want to know what right worship sounds like, both as a means of restoring fellowship with the Father and as a way of gaining victory in the moment of temptation.

Repentance means to change your mind. Specifically we're talking about changing what we believe about God. We've believed a lie—we must repent and exercise faith in the truth.

So what does repentance sound like? Since God is the most offended party, we must address Him with our repentance. We have looked at the Creator of the universe in the eye and made accusations against Him that are not true. We have set ourselves up as god. Because of this, we must acknowledge the grievous nature of our offense. Since we have believed lies about Him and desired things more than Him, we must go to the

root of our rebellion. Repentance cannot merely skim the surface of behavior (“*God, I’m sorry I lied!*”); true repentance plumbs the depths of the heart to discern the false worship that drove the behavior (“*God, I repent of believing that your acceptance is not enough, and for lying to try and impress that girl. I desired her more than you.*”).

In the moment of temptation when you are tempted to worship something else than God, the right response is also worship. Don’t just say to yourself, “*God is good.*” Say it to Him. “*Father, you are good. You are much better than what I was tempted to worship instead of you.*”

*Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. —Hebrews 11:6*

Faith in the character and nature of God is worship. If worship is ascribing worth to something, delighting in something, then exercising faith in God’s character certainly qualifies.

Whether we’ve already sinned or we’re being tempted to sin, faith sounds the same. It is an upward, God-directed affirmation of what we believe to be true about Him in the moment. So for the guy who lied to impress the girl, faith would sound like this: “*God, you are the most glorious one! Your opinion of me is the only opinion that matters! You are good! You are enough! You satisfy every longing of my soul. In faith I affirm these things to be true of you.*”

Martin Luther is famous for saying that “all of life is repentance.” May God give us the grace to walk out repentance and faith as often as needed, every single day.