

# THE GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE — PARTICIPANT’S GUIDE

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## LESSON 1 — THE GOSPEL GRID

### BIG IDEA

If the gospel is constantly “bearing fruit and growing” (Col. 1:6), then everything has to do with the gospel—God, humanity, salvation, worship, relationships, shopping, recreation, work, personality...everything! The objective in this lesson is to establish a framework for talking about the gospel. This framework will get worked out in greater detail over the next two sessions, so this lesson is designed to help us understand the concepts and begin exploring how they relate to actual life.

### NOTES:

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## LESSON 1 ARTICLE — THE GOSPEL GRID

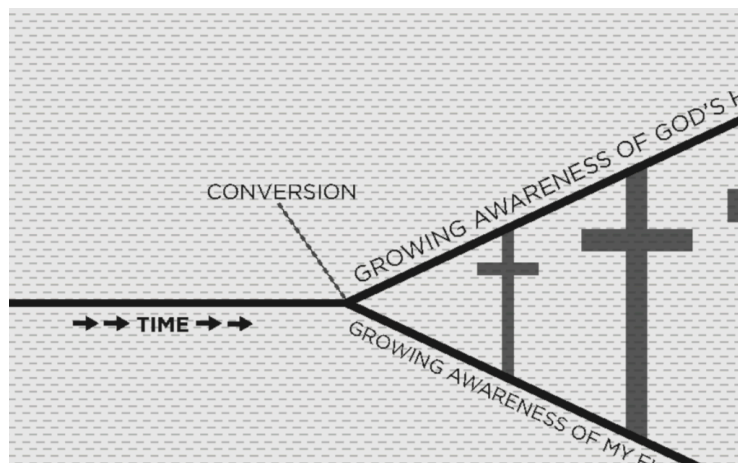
“The gospel” is a phrase that Christians often use without fully understanding its significance. We speak the language of the gospel, but we rarely apply the gospel to every aspect of our lives. Yet this is exactly what God wants for us. The gospel is nothing less than “the power of God” (Rom. 1:16). In Colossians 1:6, the apostle Paul commends the Colossian church because the gospel has been “bearing fruit and growing... among [them] since the day [they] heard it.” The apostle Peter teaches that a lack of ongoing transformation in our lives comes from forgetting what God has done for us in the gospel (2 Peter 1:3–9). If we are to grow into maturity in Christ, we must deepen and enlarge our understanding of the gospel as God’s appointed means for personal and communal transformation.

Many Christians live with a truncated view of the gospel. We see the gospel as the “door,” the way in, the entrance point into God’s kingdom. But the gospel is so much more! It is not just the door, but the path we are to walk every day of the Christian life. It is not just the means of our salvation, but the means of our transformation. It is not simply deliverance from sin’s penalty, but release from sin’s power. The gospel is what makes us right with God (justification) and it is also what frees us to delight in God (sanctification). The gospel changes everything!

The following model has been helpful to many people in thinking about the gospel and its implications. This diagram does not say everything that could be said about the gospel, but it does serve as a helpful visual illustration of how the gospel works.

The starting point of the Christian life (conversion) comes when I first become aware of the gap between God’s holiness and my sinfulness. When I am converted, I trust and hope in Jesus, who has done what I could never do: he has bridged the gap between my sinfulness and God’s holiness. He has taken God’s holy wrath toward my sin upon himself.

### THE CROSS CHART



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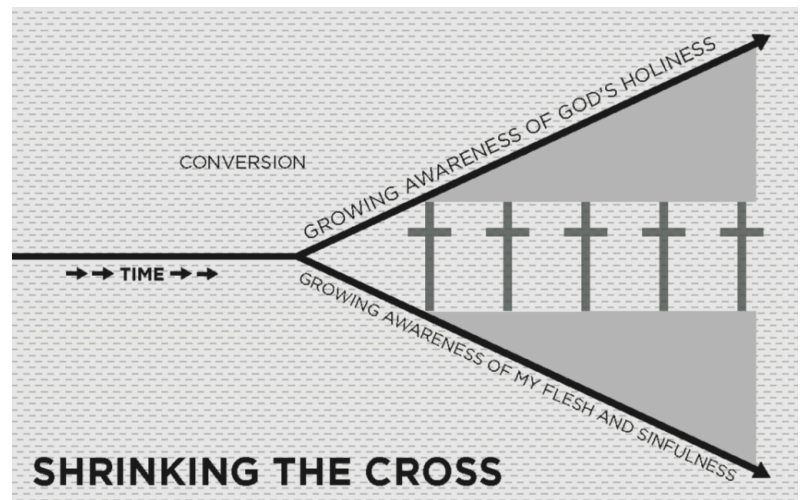
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At the point of conversion, however, I have a very limited view of God’s holiness and of my sin. The more I grow in my Christian life, the more I grow in my awareness of God’s holiness and of my flesh and sinfulness. As I read the Bible, experience the Holy Spirit’s conviction, and live in community with other people, the extent of God’s greatness and the extent of my sin become increasingly clear and vivid. It is not that God is becoming more holy or that I am becoming more sinful. But my awareness of both is growing. I am increasingly seeing God as he actually is (Isa. 55:8–9) and myself as I actually am (Jer. 17:9–10).

As my understanding of my sin and of God’s holiness grows, something else also grows: my appreciation and love for Jesus. His mediation, his sacrifice, his righteousness, and his gracious work on my behalf become increasingly sweet and powerful to me. The cross looms larger and more central in my life as I rejoice in the Savior who died upon it.

Unfortunately, sanctification (growth in holiness) doesn’t work quite as neatly as we’d like. Because of the indwelling sin that remains in me, I have an ongoing tendency to minimize the gospel or “shrink the cross.” This happens when I either (a) minimize God’s perfect holiness, thinking of him as something less than his Word declares him to be, or (b) elevate my own righteousness, thinking of myself as someone better than I actually am. The cross becomes smaller and Christ’s importance in my life is diminished.

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



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

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## LESSON 1 SUPPLEMENT — SIX WAYS OF MINIMIZING SIN

### DEFENDING

I find it difficult to receive feedback about weaknesses or sin. When confronted, my tendency is to explain things away, talk about my successes, or justify my decisions. As a result, people are hesitant to approach me and I rarely have conversations about difficult things in my life.

### FAKING

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

### HIDING

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

### EXAGGERATING

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

### BLAMING

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

### DOWNPLAYING

I tend to give little weight to sin or circumstances in my life, as if they are “normal” or “not that bad.” As a result, things often don’t get the attention they deserve. They have a way of mounting to the point of being overwhelming.

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## LESSON 1 EXERCISE — JUDGING OTHERS

One way to see the value of the Cross Chart is to apply it to a specific area where people commonly struggle. Judging others is something we all do in big and small ways. As a group, brainstorm about some of the specific ways we judge people. The questions below will help you see the connection between judging others and your view of the gospel.

1. What are the specific ways we judge others?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Why do we judge others? What reasons do we give for doing this?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How do these reasons reflect a small view of God's holiness?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. How do these reasons reflect a small view of our own sin?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Think of a specific person in your life that you are often judgmental toward.
  - a. How would a bigger view of God's holiness affect that relationship?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. How would a bigger view of your sin affect that relationship?