

THE GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE — PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

LESSON 7 — MISSION

BIG IDEA

The gospel is simultaneously at work in us and through us. Inwardly, our desires and motives are being changed as we repent and believe the gospel. As we experience Christ's love in this way, we are compelled to engage those around us with the same kind of redemptive love. God's grace brings renewal everywhere, in us and through us.

NOTES:

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LESSON 7 ARTICLE — THE GOSPEL PROPELS US OUTWARD

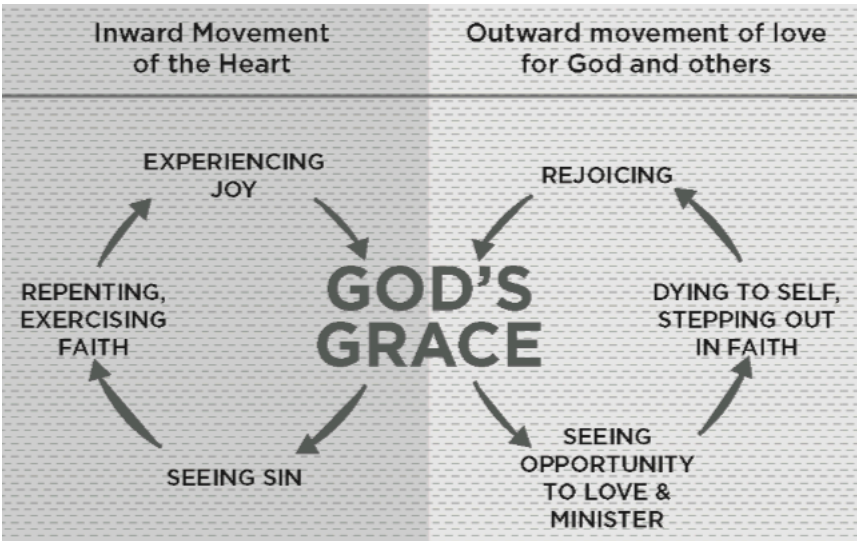
For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Gal. 5:13 ESV)

When we truly understand the depth and richness of the gospel, we naturally feel joy, delight, and freedom because of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. But as this verse teaches, it’s possible to use even our freedom as “an opportunity for the flesh.” Our sinful hearts can take the good benefits of the gospel and use them for selfish purposes.

Nowhere is this more evident than in our tendency to make the gospel a private reality. When we hear words like transformation, renewal, or *growth*, we conceive of those benefits as being primarily personal and internal—*my* transformation, *my* growth, the gospel’s renewal of *my* heart. And the gospel is personal and internal. But it’s also much more than that. When God’s grace is working *on* us and *in* us, it will also work itself out *through* us. The internal renewal of our minds and hearts creates an external propulsion that moves us out in love and service to others. The following diagram is helpful in illustrating this concept.

God’s grace is the driving force of all change. The chart reminds us that God’s grace has both an inward and an outward movement that mirror each other. Internally, the grace of God moves me to see my sin, respond in repentance and faith, and then experience the joy of transformation. Externally, the grace of God moves me to see opportunities for love and service, respond in repentance and faith, and experience joy as I see God work through me.

GOD’S GRACE CHART



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In other words, the gospel is not just the answer to your internal sins, struggles, and heart idols. It is also the answer to your failure to love others, engage the culture, and live missionally. If the gospel is renewing you internally, it will also be propelling you externally. It must do so, for it is “the good news of the kingdom” (Matt. 9:35), and the kingdom of God is not personal and private! Jesus taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). When we pray for the coming of God’s kingdom, we are praying both that Jesus would reign in the hearts of people (internal) and that his will would be done everywhere just as it is in heaven (external).

What does this external movement of the gospel look like in practice? Let me give an example. I know that I should love my neighbors. Jesus commanded it. In fact, he said it was the fulfillment of the law (Gal. 5:14). But my next-door neighbor and I just don’t have a lot in common. He is much older and has different tastes in everything—music, movies, food, cars, lifestyle. While I enjoy talking about a new musician I’ve discovered or a good book I’ve read recently, he’d rather reminisce about the old days when he served with the Marines in Vietnam.

For months I labored under guilt in my relationship with my neighbor. I knew I should reach out and befriend him. But that sense of “should” had no motivational power. It was law, not gospel. It could show me what I ought to be doing, but it could not change my heart so that I actually wanted to do it. I was faced with a dilemma: either force myself to love and serve my neighbor even though I didn’t *want* to, or ignore him and do nothing at all. I knew that ignoring him was sin, but the first option didn’t feel much better. Was joyless, mechanical obedience really honoring to Jesus? Did God intend his commands to feel like drudgery?

When faced with this dilemma, most people settle for either legalism (obey even though you don’t feel like it) or license (don’t obey at all). But neither of these is the gospel! The gospel of God’s grace is the fuel for mission, and when we run low on that fuel, our love and service to others grinds to a halt.

The answer to my dilemma with my neighbor came through the gospel. As God’s grace began to renew my heart, I saw that the root problem was my own selfishness and lack of love. My love for my neighbor was conditional—if he were younger, or smarter, or had more in common with me, I would have appreciated him more. I began to repent of this sin and renew my mind by the promises of the gospel—especially the fact that God loved *me* while I was still a sinner (Rom. 5:8). God had graciously moved toward me when I had nothing in common with him. Certainly, by God’s grace, I could love my neighbor in the same way! As the gospel renewed my heart, a strange thing happened. My attitude toward my neighbor began to change. I began to feel a true love and appreciation for him. And it wasn’t a feeling I had mustered up, but one that came naturally. The internal renewal of the gospel propelled me outward in love and service toward my neighbor. Mission became a joy, not a burden.

Grasping the external propulsion of God’s grace is crucial to our understanding of mission. It means that mission is not a duty (something we “should do”) but a natural overflow of the gospel’s work inside us. If you aren’t motivated to love, serve, and speak the gospel to people, the answer isn’t to “just do it.” The answer is

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to examine your heart, repent of sin, and discern where your unbelief is short-circuiting the natural outward movement of the gospel. As the gospel renews your heart, it will also renew your desire to move out in faith into the relationships and opportunities God places in your path.

To put it simply, the grace of God is always going somewhere—moving forward, extending his kingdom, propelling his people toward love and service to others. As we learn to live in light of the gospel, mission should be the natural overflow. God's grace brings renewal internally (in us) so that it might bring renewal externally (through us).

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LESSON 7 EXERCISE — GETTING TO THE HEART OF MISSION

EXAMINING YOUR HEART FOR MISSION

1. Identify a missional opportunity in your life in which you are not motivated to do what you “should” do. Here are some categories to jump-start your thinking: showing hospitality to neighbors; actively praying for and engaging with co-workers; sharing the gospel with a family member; serving someone in poverty; giving generously; leading spiritually as a spouse or parent; defending the biblical worldview on a particular issue.

2. What heart issues hinder you from rightly motivated action in this situation? As you pray and reflect on the root of your inactivity, what do you discern? Be as specific and thorough as you can about the things that keep you from expressing gospel-centered love toward others.

3. Repentance: What sin do you see in yourself that you need to repent of? **Faith:** What specific gospel promises or truths are you not really believing?