

GOSPEL BASICS

A 4-WEEK COMMUNITY GROUP PRIMER



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HOW TO USE THIS PRIMER

This primer has been designed to guide you and a group of people through the initial stages of forming a Community Group with Northlake Church. This resource will help lay the groundwork for your group to build from.

Whether you have a new Community Group or are working to form one with a group of people, we encourage you to go through this material with your group. Before you begin we would suggest:

- *Choose a meeting location, and a group leader/facilitator.*
- *Start each meeting with a meal: sharing food, drink, and stories.*
- *Get to know one another relationally. Have two or three people tell their story each week (about 10-15 minutes each).*

A few more encouragements: **1) Prioritize honesty** as you work to create a culture of freedom in your group. **2) Remember love** as you give and receive both encouragement and correction to one another. **3) Show up** and commit to being present for every week of this study. **4) Pray continually** for yourself and your group in the coming weeks. Now, let's dive in!

GOSPEL THEOLOGY

SESSION 1



SESSION 1: GOSPEL THEOLOGY¹

In order for your Community Group to grow and flourish, it is necessary that we start at a foundational, theological level to establish what we believe. Once we do, we will be able to see with clarity what it means for us (Sessions 2-3) and our mission (Session 4).

THE GOSPEL IN FOUR QUESTIONS

Take some time to read through these passages together as a group. Spend some time discussing each question and its accompanying Scripture and truth.

QUESTION	SCRIPTURE	TRUTHS
Where did we come from?	Genesis 1:26-28 Psalm 8:4-6 John 1:1-4	GOD: the One and the relational
Why did things go so wrong?	Ephesians 2:1-3 Romans 1:18-23 Romans 3:10-12	SIN: bondage and condemnation
What will put things right?	Ephesians 2:4-9 Philippians 2:5-8 2 Corinthians 5:17	CHRIST: incarnation, substitution, restoration
How can I be put right?	Romans 8:15-17 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 Revelation 21:1-7	FAITH: grace and trust

WHAT THE GOSPEL IS...

The announcement that we have been rescued by the person and work of Jesus Christ, who has put us back in right relationship with God.

WHAT THE GOSPEL IS NOT...

Good Advice.

Sometimes we think about the gospel as an abstract way of life, a collection of principles set before us that spurs us on to live a certain way. But this is not the gospel's primary function. The word "gospel" is derived from the Greek *euangelion*, which means "good news." So the gospel is at its core *news* to be proclaimed. It is something that *has happened*.

¹ Material from this section adapted from Tim Keller, "Shaped By The Gospel," pp. 27-65.

Good Effort.

If the gospel is “news” of something that has happened, then the gospel cannot be what we must do. The gospel’s message is not, “Do this...” but “This has been done!” Any notion of our earning right standing with God, or being “good enough” to merit eternal life, falls apart here. Because the gospel is an announcement.

Moralism (Religion).

Some have taken the gospel news and sought to add to it, making its content more complex than originally intended. This is a “Gospel-plus” mentality that tries to convince us that the gospel itself is insufficient to save, and that we must do more or obey more in order to arrive at salvation.

Relativism (Irreligion).

Others have take the gospel news to mean that on the basis of the gospel, what we do with our lives no longer really matters. It is a dismissal of all binding requirement to live a holy life before God, treating the truth of the gospel as relative and free to be applied however we see fit.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what way(s) is the news of the gospel offensive both to ourselves and to our surrounding culture?
2. How has your personal understanding of the gospel shifted over the years? Were you susceptible to one of the distortions of the gospel mentioned above (see “What the Gospel is Not...” section)?
3. Pastor Tim Keller once wrote that “the gospel is not just the ABCs but the A to Z of the Christian life.” He is arguing that the gospel does not change just one piece of our life, but rather, it changes *everything*. How have you seen this truth come alive in your own life? How does the gospel, for example, affect your perspectives in self-image, work, marriage, family, etc.?

GOSPEL RENEWAL

SESSION 2



SESSION 2: GOSPEL RENEWAL

This session helps us see how we take what we learned from Scripture last week and how to grow in applying gospel truth to our lives.

MORE THAN BASICS

As we saw last week, the gospel is more than the “ABC’s” of the Christian life; it is the essence of the Christian life. It is news that never becomes outdated or irrelevant for our lives; rather, it is news that should continually inform how we now live in light of it.

We are all aware of our need for renewal. We have all lived long enough to know that not everything is right with the world, or with us. This is why it is so important that when we find ourselves in moments or seasons of brokenness, pain, loss, fear, sin, doubt, that our response is to turn to the gospel:

“Most of our problems in life come from a lack of proper orientation to the gospel. Pathologies in the church and sinful patterns in our individual lives ultimately stem from a failure to think through the deep implications of the gospel and to grasp and believe the gospel through and through. Put positively, the gospel transforms our hearts and our thinking and changes our approaches to absolutely everything.”²

FRUIT TO ROOT

Read and discuss the following passages together:

Psalm 1

Matthew 7:17-20

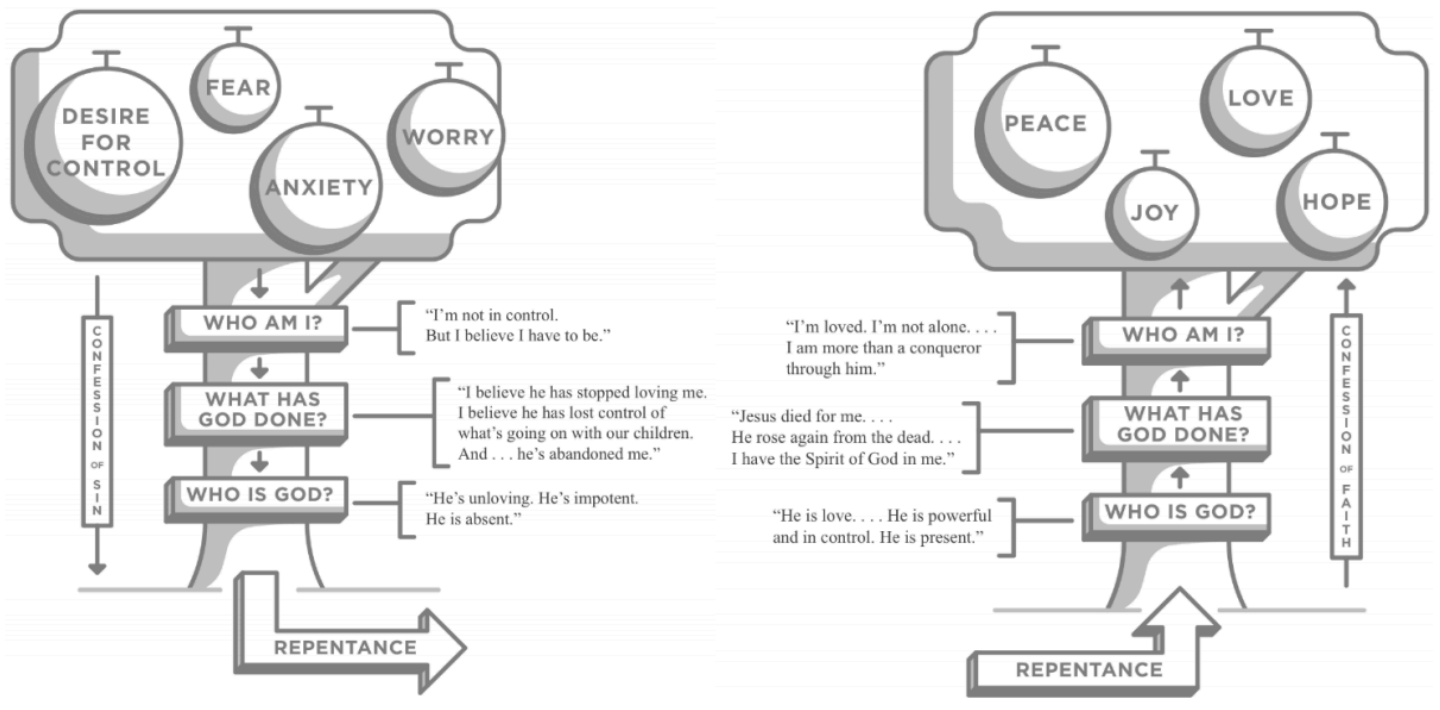
John 15:1-11

Galatians 5:22-25

What do we learn from these passages about our “fruit” as Christians?

Good fruit is an indicator that we are being rooted in the gospel (Ephesians 3:17-19). The opposite then, is also true. Bad fruit, or an absence of fruit, can indicate that we need to revisit our gospel “roots” and identify where we need renewal.

² Tim Keller, “Shaped By The Gospel,” pp. 27-74.



In the example above,³ we see two kinds of trees. The tree on the left bears fruit of the flesh. How do we, for example, address an anxiety in our lives? By taking our anxieties to the gospel, we can repent and grow and begin to bear good fruit. The example above shows how we work *down* the tree and determine how our flesh answers these questions: “Who am I?” “What has God done?” “Who is God?” This helps us identify what specifically we need to repent of.

Repentance involves not only identifying anti-gospel beliefs, but also correcting them with gospel truths. Answering these same questions truthfully helps us confess faith, cling to the gospel, and grow in the fruit of the Spirit.

Growing in sanctification learning to practice gospel renewal in our lives is a discipline that takes time. This is one of the reasons why it is so valuable to live in community with one another. John tells us, “if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

³ Jeff Vanderstelt, *Gospel Fluency*, 122-123.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Take some time over the next week or two for everyone in your group to work individually through this exercise. Work through your answers together as a group in following meeting(s). This is a great opportunity to encourage and pray for one another.

1. What is some of the fruit of the flesh in your life right now (see left tree)?
2. What anti-gospel beliefs are you holding and need to repent of?
3. What truths of the gospel do you need to cling to in this season of life?
4. As you go through this process, are you experiencing the fruit of the Spirit in your life? In what ways is God renewing you?

GOSPEL COMMUNITY

SESSION 3



SESSION 3: GOSPEL COMMUNITY

This session articulates our understanding of biblical community and the values any healthy Community Group will have. Start your group by reading and discussing the following Scripture passages:

Acts 2:42-47

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

1 Peter 4:8-11

Romans 12:3-13

FOUR ESSENTIALS OF A COMMUNITY GROUP

Consistency

It is impossible for a Community Group to thrive when the group and its people are inconsistent. In order for a Community Group to be effective, it must first have consistent gatherings. Rhythms are critical to our spiritual life, and promote spiritual formation. There should be discernible rhythms not only in how often a Community Group gathers (weekly, bi-weekly, etc.), but also in the nature of its gathering (curriculum, content, etc.). Secondly, Community Groups must have consistent people. By being a member of a Community Group, you are committing to be fully engaged with these rhythms.

Maturity

Community Groups are the primary way we encourage people to grow with us in Christ. Therefore, each Community Group must be a place where we emphasize spiritual growth and maturity. What does this look like practically? Let's consider what it is not. For example, suppose a group meets only for the purpose of fellowship, with no regular engagement with the Word or prayer. Another group may incorporate the Word and prayer in their gatherings, but most members would say it is not leading to any growth or transformation in their lives. Neither group would constitute what we envision for Community Groups. Community Groups are oriented towards discipleship. Our study of God's Word is engaging, and changing us. Our prayer reaches beyond life circumstances and into our hearts. Community Groups do not shy away from maturity, but press into it.

Authenticity

Our community should be defined by authenticity. Community Groups are safe, relational environments where we have a unique freedom to get absolutely real with one

another. We cannot grow in Christ if we build walls around our hearts with one another. To pursue authentic community is to “walk in the light” with brothers and sisters in Christ (1 John 1:7). And the way we respond to one another’s authenticity is important, too. Here we have the opportunity to practice both rejoicing with one another, and weeping with one another (Romans 12:15). Authenticity should be received by other group members with appropriate confidentiality, prayer, and support.

Accountability

It is easy for Christians to feel like we’ve “checked the box” with attending a group gathering, and to leave behind everything we have learned in that living room. But Community Groups should encourage accountability that helps us stay true to loving God, the local church, and one another. We should love one another enough to practice holding each other to a biblical standard in all of life. This involves practicing repentance, experiencing spiritual growth, and being humbly open to correction when we fall short. None of us are perfect; it’s okay not to be okay. But it is not okay to stay there.

OUR COMMITMENTS

Take some time as a group to work through and discuss each of these “essentials” together. Using them as a guide, work together to establish some commitments you want to make as a group. What are the “non-negotiables” you as a group want to commit to?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

GOSPEL MISSION

SESSION 4



SESSION 4: GOSPEL MISSION

In the first three sessions, we focused on the task of becoming a disciple. In this last session, we now turn to the task of making disciples.

GOD-GIVEN INFLUENCE

Read and discuss the following passages as a group:

Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15

Psalms 8:3-8

Matthew 28:18-20

One of the main reasons that we often fall short in making disciples is that we have a diminished view of our influence. We think to ourselves, “Evangelism isn’t my spiritual gift,” or, “I don’t have all the answers.” But Scripture seems to indicate that we have more disciple-making influence than we might realize.

What do we see taking place in these passages? In Eden, God’s plan for humanity was simple: to bear the image of God and reflect His image throughout creation. To do so, God gave man *authority* over creation. He gave man influence!

Fast forward to Jesus standing before His apostles. Jesus argues that “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” Yet Jesus *commissions* His disciples, giving them authority, to continue His mission in the world.

It is clear from these passages that God has given man influence. As one pastor puts it, “The only question that remains for you is, how will you use your influence?”⁴

⁴ Mark Dever, *Discipling*, 25.

USING YOUR INFLUENCE⁵

Initiate.

Discipleship is not passive. It is an active helping others learn to follow Jesus. To disciple, we have to discern who needs discipling. We have to establish a connection with this person (if we don't have one already), and do the ground work of building a discipler-disciple relationship with them.

This can feel overwhelming, and daunting at times. But we need to remember that we cannot disciple *everyone*. We need to determine where, and with who, God has uniquely given us influence, and start there. We also shouldn't feel the burden to be an expert before entering into a discipling relationship with someone. Remember, Jesus chose untrained, unskilled men as his chief apostles (see Acts 4:13). We only need to be willing to initiate.

Look outside *and* inside the church.

Jesus once lamented, "the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few" (Matthew 9:37). Sometimes we lack awareness or urgency to take the gospel outside of the church, or we shove the responsibility on church leadership to do all of this mission work. But we are *all* called to be workers in the harvest, which means looking to where God has given us influence *outside* of the church to reach the lost.

But in our efforts to disciple, we must not forget that there are also people *inside* the church who need discipling. Healthy churches should have plenty opportunities to disciple people who are either younger in age, young in their faith, or experiencing a particularly challenging season of life. Discipleship can and should happen "inside" too!

Teach.

Most of us have a reflex to shy away from teaching. It intimidates us to think about discipling someone by teaching them. But teaching someone is little more than having a spiritually meaningful conversation with someone. This is one of the great benefits of participating in a Community Group; though there is usually a Group "leader" or "facilitator," we all *teach* one another when we disciple.

⁵ Material from this section adapted from Mark Dever, *Discipling*, 36-44.

Correct.

Mark Dever writes, “Part of being a Christian is recognizing that sin deceives us, and we need other believers to help us see the things we cannot see about ourselves.” Discipleship sometimes requires us to speak truth gently and lovingly to another. The overall health of the church benefits greatly when its members privately practice giving (and receiving!) biblical correction.

Model.

Peter tells us that Christ has “left you an example that you should follow” (1 Peter 2:21). As we saw in our first two sessions, we cannot stop at Gospel Theology (session 1); *Gospel Renewal* (Session 2) in Christ should be our goal as disciples. It’s been said that theology is often more *caught* than *taught*. And while we need teaching, we also need to prioritize modeling our theology to others that we are in discipling relationships with.

Be humble.

The one being disciplined is not the only one who has to be humbled; the disciple-maker must be as well. We are tempted to avoid Gospel Mission because we can’t get our focus off of our weaknesses. But Christ wants us to humbly accept those weaknesses, and lean on Him to be our strength as we carry out His mission.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Think about our conversation about God-given influence and how it applies to your own context. Where, and with who, has God given you unique influence, that could be the place He is calling you to be on mission?
2. Refer back to the six ways we “use our influence” for discipling relationships in the above section. Which of these challenges you the most?
3. Name one person that you aim to begin a discipling relationship with.