

# GOSPEL DELTA

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GOD'S TRANSFORMING POWER FOR OUR GROWTH & CHANGE

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MANY WOULD SAY THAT JESUS WAS THE GREATEST MAN WHO EVER LIVED, regardless of their religious affiliation. The word "Christian" means "little Christ," as in, one who seeks to walk in the ways of Jesus. But anyone who wants to be more like him is undoubtedly confronted with a harsh reality: many changes need to occur if we are to resemble the amazing man Jesus Christ.

Delta ( $\Delta$ ) is the mathematical symbol for growth and change. The concept of change is not foreign to us. Right now, there are probably several things about yourself you'd like to change. But change also raises many questions: Why should I change? What needs to change? How do I go about changing? Why is change so difficult? This tool was developed for to help address those questions, and to help lead a small community of people toward lasting change, by discovering the transforming power of the Gospel.

AND WE ALL, WITH UNVEILED FACE, BEHOLDING THE GLORY OF THE LORD,  
ARE BEING TRANSFORMED INTO THE SAME IMAGE FROM ONE DEGREE OF  
GLORY TO ANOTHER. FOR THIS COMES FROM THE LORD WHO IS THE SPIRIT.

~2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

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# WHAT IS A DELTA GROUP?

## GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION

Delta ( $\Delta$ ) is the Greek symbol for growth and change. Deep inside every human heart there is a longing for change, for transformation. Unfortunately, change is difficult, and we live in an age when the only 'practical' help available to struggling people is pop psychology or self-esteem bestsellers. We believe that the key to real change is found only in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is the ground and source of both our salvation and our sanctification, and therefore any pursuit of change that isn't centered on the person and work of Christ is ultimately powerless. Our understanding of and belief in the gospel should be central to who we are and to how we live.

## CHANGE HAPPENS IN COMMUNITY

The term DELTA GROUP refers to a group that usually consists of three to six people—men with men, women with women— who meet together weekly. They seek to be known and to bring the gospel to bear on each other's lives so that they become more like Jesus. We know that lasting change can only happen in community, and we need regular reminders from one another of the truth of the gospel. We need each other in order to be transformed.

## A DELTA GROUP HAS 3 ELEMENTS:

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1) **DISCIPLESHIP** *A disciple of Jesus is someone learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life.* Essentially, everything we do together in community is a part of discipleship. However, discipling one another will involve:

- reminding each other of our identity in Jesus Christ,
- admonishing and teaching one another to obey Jesus' commands. ([Matthew 28:18-20](#); [Colossians 3:15-17](#)), and
- training one another to serve in tangible ways. ([Ephesians 4:11-13](#))

2) **LOVE** *Christians are brothers and sisters who care sincerely for one another.* This includes:

- getting to know one another's stories, listening closely to each other and to the Holy Spirit so we can carefully and empathetically direct each other to truth. ([John 16:7-15](#))
- checking one another's heart and passions by asking questions like: How are you doing? Who are you loving well? Not so well? Where are you living in fear? What can we celebrate with you? What are you struggling through? ([Romans 12:10,15](#))
- praying with and for each other. ([Romans 12:12](#); [Ephesians 6:18](#); [James 5:16](#))

3) **ACCOUNTABILITY** *Holding one another accountable is more than just asking hard questions.* It involves:

- encouraging each other to live out what we believe through making goals and helping each other fulfill them. ([Hebrews 10:24-25](#))
- reviewing the past week and how faithful we have been in keeping our word.
- speaking the truth in love as we see areas of sin, correcting and rebuking with God's Word when necessary. ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#))

## A DELTA GROUP HAS 2 GOALS:

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### 1) EDIFICATION *God's grace brings about spiritual growth and maturity.*

God's heart for his people is that they would be a community of edification: constantly growing, deepening, and building one another up in love. Paul's words in Ephesians 4 echo this sentiment:

*"Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."*  
([Ephesians 4:15-16](#))

Growth in the Christian life is a process of renewing every dimension of life by living out the ramifications of the gospel, and applying it to every area of thinking, feeling, relating, working and behaving. As we grow together, confidentiality must be a key component of the group. Take whatever you learn about yourself in your DELTA GROUP and share it with as many people as possible. What you learn about others, however, is private information. While anyone can give permission for their info to be shared at any time, the general rule of thumb is to honor the confidentiality of the group as you learn more and seek to move the gospel forward in each other's lives.

### 2) TRANSFORMATION *God's grace brings renewal to every aspect of our lives.*

In the midst of a culture inundated with magic formulas, easy shortcuts, and soft answers to difficult questions, the truth is that real change can only be achieved through the continual rediscovery of the gospel. The Apostle Paul said "the gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). He goes on to explain that that salvation has a past, present, and future reality. That means that faith in the work of God on our behalf in and through Jesus is the only thing that will ultimately bring about lasting change and transformation.

## A DELTA GROUP HAS 1 PURPOSE:

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### 1) MISSION *To make disciples who make disciples.*

Among the last things Jesus said to his followers were these words:

*"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* ([Matthew 28:18-20](#))

Those who follow Jesus as his disciples don't live merely for their own personal transformation. Jesus' disciples seek to bring about gospel change and impact everywhere they go, by making disciples who can make disciples. There is an expectation of multiplication in Jesus' parting instruction.

Therefore, the hope for every DELTA GROUP is that each participant would one day lead another group. The timeline will vary from group to group, but a DELTA GROUP should always be started with this goal clearly in mind. Begin praying even now about who God might have you lead in the future.

# HOW DO WE USE THIS STUDY?

Each week when you meet, this GOSPEL DELTA study will help set a basic pattern for your time together. The leader of the group will walk you through the discussion. There is some variation, but roughly the same elements are involved each week:

**SETUP** A key thought that helps initiate your discussion of the week's material.

**NOTES** A place to jot down notes and thoughts from the discussion, or to process through the Exercise.

**BIG PICTURE** This is a place for you to summarize in a few lines what you learned each week.

**THE BIBLE SAYS...** A short passage of scripture to read and discuss

**PRAY TOGETHER** DELTA groups should always be praying together, but occasionally this element will appear calling you to a specific prayer focus.

**ARTICLE** These articles are taken from a variety of authors. Read them out loud together each week. The leader will guide a discussion of the material.

**EXERCISE** This element helps solidify the week's truth by giving you something specific to do together.

**LATER THIS WEEK...** To ensure that discipleship gets lived out day to day, you'll leave with something to think about or do before your next meeting.

## OTHER PRACTICAL THOUGHTS

Here are some things to keep in mind each time you meet:

- Be wise about your meeting place. A coffee shop can work for some groups, but it may not give you the privacy you'll need for honest conversation. Meeting in a home or the quiet corner of a larger public space may be better options.
- You're going to be doing some writing throughout this process. You can use your own journal or the participant's guide that's provided for you. Make sure you have a Bible with you, too.
- You'll be scheduling additional times together, so bring some sort of calendar to each meeting (phone, laptop, paper, a pen for writing on your hand, etc.).

# WEEK 1: STORIES

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## SETUP

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All of our lives are made up of a series of stories. Some of them are true (or seem true to us) and some parts of our stories are caught up in false realities. But there is a big Story that actually helps us make sense of our lives and why things work the way they do in the world. It's called the Story of God. It's a story found throughout the Bible and it tells of an amazing God who created a perfect world full of beauty, love and amazing possibilities. The story we're about to read is not a direct quote; it is a summary of the narrative arc of the whole Bible. It will quickly give us the big picture on what God is up to and what life is all about...

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

## THE STORY OF GOD SUMMARY

This is a story found in the Bible, about God, a being who has always existed and is the creator of EVERYTHING. God is the only one in this story who always does what is good, right and perfect—the Bible calls him Holy. While God created the foundations of the earth, angels (his first creation) were there watching. They sang together and worshiped God... but some of these angels rebelled against God and his ways. The Bible teaches that all rebellion against God is called sin. And because of God's holiness he will not allow sin to remain in his presence, so he sent the rebellious angels, now known as demons, down into darkness on the earth.

Then God decided to create another being, called humans, in his own image. God said, "Let us make man in our image to be like us." He then prepared the earth as a place for the humans to live—filling the earth with plants, birds, fish and animals of all kinds. God created the first humans, Adam and Eve, and placed them in a beautiful garden and trusted them to care for and rule over all of his creation on earth.

God lived closely with these first humans, spending time with them daily, showing them how to live life in the best possible way. They lived their life close to God and under his protection—a life that was full and complete and eternal. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God and his authority, choosing to live in their own ways instead of his. Since God will not allow evil and rebellion to remain in his presence, Adam and Eve were sent

out of the garden, away from God. Separated from God and no longer following his ways, Adam and Eve were now subject to sickness, pain, and death. God told them, "*The way you have chosen to live will bring you great struggles and pain, and then you will return to the ground from which you came.*" Not only were these humans now separated from God because of their sin, but they would also suffer death as they were separated from the giver of life.

After leaving the garden the number of humans on earth grew rapidly. Not only did sin spread from Adam and Eve to their sons—it spread from generation to generation.

Even though humans were created in God's image, everyone chose to disobey God. They all constantly acted out in violence against each other. This went on for thousands of years.

Then God established a special relationship and a covenant promise—representing the deepest of all agreements—with a man named Abraham. God told Abraham, "*I'll make you the father of a great nation and famous throughout history. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. The entire earth will be blessed through your descendants. I will always be your God and you will always be my people.*"

Abraham's family, called the Israelites, were to be a new kind of people who would show the world what it means to once again live in God's ways. God gave them a vast amount of land where they enjoyed his blessings as they grew into a large nation.

But as time went by the Israelites began doing what was right in their own eyes and rebelled against God and his laws. They stopped trusting in God and worshiped idols—people, things, wealth and power—over God. In their rebellion, the Israelites faced great struggles and ended up a defeated nation of slaves. But God continued to love his people and promised that one day a descendant of theirs would come to rescue and restore humanity, and all of creation, back to the way God originally created it.

Then there was 400 years of silence between God and his people. The Israelites, called Jews, had been under the control of other nations for hundred of years. They were now ruled by Rome, the most powerful empire that the world had ever known.

Finally, God sent an angel to a young woman named Mary in the town of Nazareth. The angel appeared to her and said, "*You will become pregnant and have a son and you are to name him Jesus. He will become a king whose kingdom will never end! This will happen supernaturally by God's Spirit, so this baby will be called God's Son.*"

God revealed to Mary and her soon-to-be-husband Joseph that this boy was the long awaited Messiah king, the one who God promised he'd send to rescue his people! Sure enough the next year, Mary gave birth to a son whom she named Jesus, which means "the God who saves". Jesus grew up in both height and wisdom, and was loved by God and everyone who knew him. He lived a remarkable life, always choosing to live in God's ways and do what was good, right and perfect.

As a man, Jesus called people to follow him, inviting them to be a part of what he called the Kingdom of God. Calling people to once again live under God's rule and reign. He said, *"God blesses those who realize their need for him; the humble and poor, the gentle and merciful—the Kingdom of God belongs to them. God blesses the pure in heart and those who hunger and thirst to be with Him."* He taught people that the Kingdom of God is within our hearts.

He said, *"God showed his great love for people by sending me—his only son—to this world. Anyone who believes in me and lives in my ways will find life that is complete and eternal! He sent me here to save people—not to judge them. Those who want to live in sin and darkness will reject me and bring God's judgment on themselves. But those who want to live in God's ways will trust me and live forever!"*

As God had promised, he sent Jesus to rescue humanity from sin and the penalty of death. God accepted Jesus' perfect life in place of our own. Jesus was brutally beaten and died painfully on a wooden cross, taking the punishment that all of rebellious humanity deserved! Three days later Jesus conquered death when God raised him back to life and he was seen by over 500 eyewitnesses.

Soon afterward, Jesus went to be with his Father in heaven, rising up into the clouds right before his followers' eyes! He promised that he would send his own Holy Spirit to come and dwell within them. The Spirit would remind them of all Jesus taught, transform their hearts to be like Jesus and give them power to walk in the ways of God like Jesus did. Jesus also sent his followers to go out and tell others about him—his life and his sacrifice for their sins— and lead them to trust him and walk in his ways.

This was the beginning of what the Bible calls the Church—a community of people all over the world who, because of Jesus, once again enjoy a life that is full and complete—living in the ways of God.

We can join this amazing story... the story continues with us!

The Bible also tells us the end of this story... Jesus promised to come back one day to destroy all evil, sin and rebellion. Then there will be no more sickness, pain, or death. God's Kingdom will come in fullness, and everyone and everything will live under his rule. Until then, we get to live in God's ways, giving people a foretaste of what life is like in Jesus' Kingdom.

## EXERCISE

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Now let's share our own life stories with each other (about 10 minutes each) and see where our lives really do (or don't) line up with God's story.

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Make plans to do something fun together in the next two weeks. Get together outside of this weekly meeting to do pretty much anything you enjoy that will allow you to interact a lot and have fun together.

# WEEK 2: GOSPEL

## SETUP

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The gospel has been compared to a pool shallow enough for a toddler to wade but deep enough for an elephant to swim. It's both simple and profound, affecting those with young faith or mature faith. The Story of God we read last week is the grand redemptive story of the gospel. One of the stories Jesus told that most vividly captures the heart of the gospel is found in Luke 15. Let's take a look at it together.

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

## THE BIBLE SAYS...

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Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and

sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

" 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' " (Luke 15:11-32 NIV)

## WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

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! And we 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 fully understand and engage the gospel.

### 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), we *are being* saved from the *power* of sin (sanctification) and we *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 like 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 which 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!*

## EXERCISE

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Think of a specific friend or neighbor who does not know Jesus. Imagine he/she asked you, “I’ve heard you and your friends use the word ‘gospel’ a lot. Can you tell me what you mean by that?” In light of what you’ve learned last week and today, how would you explain the gospel to this person if you only had 2 minutes for this first conversation?

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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*Think about this for next time:*

We defined a disciple as “someone who is learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life.” What is one specific area of your life where you are not yet applying the gospel fully? Where is there a need for restoration in your life? If you had to pick one thing to start with, trusting God to make the change in your life, what would that be?

*Do whatever you need to do to remind yourself to think about this question this week. Put it in your calendar, write a note and put it where you’ll see it often, etc.*

# WEEK 3: GOSPEL CHANGE

## SETUP

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**What is success to you?** Don't discuss the definitions from your culture, society or friends, but your personal definition of success in life.

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

## THE BIBLE SAYS...

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*But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This, then, is how you should pray:*

*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:6-13)*

## PRAY TOGETHER...

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Prayer is a vital part of the life of a disciple. Spend some time praying together as a group before you continue. Ask the Spirit to give you wisdom as you discuss becoming like Jesus today. And remember—prayer is simply a conversation between the Father and his kids. There's no need to sound impressive or rehearsed. We're invited to come boldly, so say what's on your heart. And you can use Jesus' prayer to guide you if you'd like.

## ARTICLE

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### 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. The Bible 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; (Ephesians 4:22)*

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. But he does it perfectly.

*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. (John 1:14)*

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, angry at sin, 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. But 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 shoulder, 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. In order 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.

## EXERCISE: GOSPEL CHANGE PROJECT

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Remember that a disciple is someone learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life. So over the next several weeks, you will get to allow the gospel to change you in a specific area, making you more like Jesus one degree at a time. Many discussions with your DELTA partners will be about bringing the gospel to bear on this specific area, which we'll call your gospel change project. The next time around you can easily use this same guide, and focus on a different gospel change project as you lead others.

What specific area of your life, actions, attitudes would you like to change?

Take some time right now to pray and ask God to reveal to you what area he wants each of us to work on.

*Here's some help...*

Think of an area of your life that you would like to change. It might be a behavior (like lying or getting drunk or inappropriate relationships) or it might be an emotion (like getting depressed or bitter or angry).

*Is your gospel change project about changing your behavior or emotions?*

It is no good choosing change in someone else. For example, you cannot choose 'having better behaved children' or 'having a better marriage'. You must choose something about you. For example, you might choose 'not shouting at my children' or 'not getting irritated by my spouse'.

*Is your gospel change project about something specific?*

Try not to choose something too general like 'being a better parent'. Choose a specific behavior or a specific emotion. It should be specific enough for you to be able to remember the last time you did it or felt it.

Is there something in your life that you're kind of embarrassed to bring up right now? It's not making you happy and you know it's not making God happy. That's probably the thing the Spirit's bringing to mind for you to work on to be more conformed to the likeness of Jesus.

Share with each other the area of life the Spirit is bringing to mind, and **write it down**.

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Notice how often this thing you want to change comes up in your life. (You may want to jot down some notes.) How does it affect you? How does it affect others? More importantly, how does this thing you want to change make you look **less** like Jesus? Remember the point of gospel change is that we look more and more like Jesus and show the world what he is like. Who and what are people seeing in those moments?

*Put in place whatever reminders you need to answer these questions this week.*

# WEEK 4: HEART & MOTIVATION

## SETUP

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Bring to mind whatever you decided on for your gospel change project. What do you think is behind that sin in your life? Today we will begin to look at why we often do the very things we don't want to do.

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

## THE BIBLE SAYS...

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Teaching his disciples, Jesus said...

*No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks. (Luke 6:43-45 NIV)*

## PRAY TOGETHER...

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Pray together through this passage. You may talk with the Father about some of these questions:

Where have you seen good fruit in your life? Bad fruit?

What does this reveal about your heart? What's the real problem?

## ARTICLE

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### WHY WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE? PART I

Why do you want to change? Think about it for a minute. Why do you want to be more like Jesus? Most people want to improve on some character issue in their life, change some behavior. What's motivating you to want to be a more patient or loving person? To be a better wife or father?

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).

And 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. But the reality is that there is nothing we can do to earn or lose God's love.

And 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 I accept you in him." God cannot love a Christian more than he does now - no matter how much we change our lives. And 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. But 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 godly, 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. Or you measure yourself against other people and decide you are more righteous. Indeed often we point the finger at other people's fault 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 that 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 that 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.")

And so we perform in order 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 that 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 like "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 let down is having to face myself in the mirror. This means that I am viewing my sin as primarily an offense against me.

### 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. And 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. And 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. But we are justified through faith in what Christ has done. When you feel the desire to prove yourself, remember that 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. And 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 there 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 that we can be justified. Jesus died on the cross, separated from his Father, bearing the full weight of God's wrath so that 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 that you helped pay off the debt; that it was joint effort. It would be pointless and insulting.

*You will cleanse no 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.

## EXERCISE

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Take a look at the following paragraphs. We have taken some verses from the Bible and made them say the opposite of what they actually say. Let's see if we can turn them back into what they really say.

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.

It is by changing that your 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 that God plans for us then we can become God's masterpiece, new people in Christ Jesus.

You can check by looking at Romans 5:1-2 and Ephesians 2:8-10.<sup>1</sup>

**If what we talked about today is true, how should it affect my thoughts?  
How should it affect my passions and motivations?  
How should it affect my actions?  
How will we encourage and hold each other accountable to these things?**

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Discuss what you are learning with at least one other person outside of this DELTA group. **Who might that be?** Tell them why you most often want to change (to prove yourself to God, others or yourself). Hold each other accountable to this. Maybe check in with each other during the week with a quick phone call to encourage each other to be faithful.

# WEEK 5: IDENTITY

## SETUP

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Have you ever asked yourself the questions, “Who am I?” and “Why am I here?” In a sense, we all live each day out of our answers to those questions. The New Testament teaches over and over that we have a new identity because of Jesus. And again and again it calls us to “be who we are.” Change is not about achieving something so that we can impress. It’s about living out the new identity that God gives us in Jesus. So who are we? <sup>2</sup>

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

*But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir... It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery... You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. (Galatians 4:4-7; 5:1; 5:13 NIV)*

Sons in the Greco-Roman world had legal standing, privilege and authority that daughters did not. So in one sense, whether we are male or female, we are made "sons" of the Father.

Whether your dad was amazing, average, absent or abusive, think back to the father in the parable of the lost sons as a picture of God who is the perfect father.

### **What might be some implications of being a son in God's family?**

For you personally... For a group of people who are all in this Family... For everyone you know that isn't part of this Family...

## ARTICLE

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### WHY WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE? PART II

We used to be slaves to sin, says Paul. We were trapped by it. We all know this if we stop to think about. Think about the times you have tried to change, but have failed. We cannot be the people we want to be, let alone become people who are like Jesus.

We are also slaves to the law. In Galatians Paul is talking about the law of God given through Moses. But what he says is true of any attempt to change using a set of rules. Instead of setting us free from sin, law crushes us.

But God sent his Son to buy our freedom. We are no longer slaves with a slave master. Now we are children with a Father. We do not have to worry about proving ourselves because God says, "You are my child." We do not have to worry about being accepted by God because God has sent his Spirit so that with confidence we can call him 'Abba, Father'. (In Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, Abba is a respectful and intimate name for a father.) Our identity as sons of God the Father is so central and so pervasive in the gospel that J.I Packer wrote, "You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator... 'Father' is the Christian name for God."<sup>3</sup>

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. And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. But 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 so alone in her big room. She would have cried if she had not long since learnt 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 that 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. So 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 that others may experience what God is like. We are ministers of reconciliation bearing God's message of reconciliation. As we obey Jesus 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 that God's give 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. But *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 that God gives to us. It is not an achievement that 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.

It is as if 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. And 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 so much. But it doesn't satisfy and it charges a high price. That price is broken lives, broken relationships, broken hopes. Ultimately the wages of sin is death. But 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! And 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? <sup>4</sup>

## EXERCISE

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Let's meditate on what it means to be a child of the Father. Compare slavery to sin to being a child in God's family.

On the cross Jesus cried out: "It is finished." Imagine yourself answering back: "Not quite, there is still some things I need to do to finish the job." Think about how ridiculous and insulting this is.

**Write a summary of why you would like to change**, putting it in your own words in a way that resonates for you. Add some ideas of how you could strengthen your desire to change.

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Make plans to do something together this week just to be family together. Maybe you help do yard work at one of your homes and share lunch afterward.... or maybe get all of your families together for dinner one night... or go for a hike... or play a game... or visit a museum... maybe you just go grocery shopping together.

# WEEK 6: RULES

## SETUP

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Have you despaired of ever changing? Do you think you are a lost cause? Maybe you think it is different for you. Other people can change, but your history or temptations or problems make it different for you. The glorious good news of Jesus is that you and I can change.

Part of the problem is we often try to change in the wrong way.<sup>5</sup>

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

*You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!"? Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires. (Colossians 2:20-23 NLT)*

## ARTICLE

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### HOW ARE YOU GOING TO CHANGE? PART I

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' day people thought they could be pure through ceremonial washing. Today it can be spiritual disciplines or 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. And so they cannot bring true and lasting holiness. We need heart change. <sup>6</sup>

### WHAT THE 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. And we receive it by faith alone.

#### 2. THE LAW CANNOT CONQUER THE FLESH

But 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 & 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. But God's whole purpose in the plan of redemption is that his Son get the glory not only for our justification, but also for our sanctification. And this the law could not do.”<sup>7</sup>

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. But the gospel says we have been forgiven by and 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 “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” As Tim Keller likes to say, we need to repent of our damnable good works. Here's a little more from Keller on the gospel...

*“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 re-discovery of the gospel.”*

### EXERCISE

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Take some additional time to meditate on Keller's words. Then write out some implications of the gospel for your gospel change project.

We'll be looking more at how we change next week...

### LATER THIS WEEK...

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Continue to think about the implications of the gospel on your gospel change project. Write down at least five.

*Put in place whatever reminders you need to do this. How might you be able to hold each other accountable?*

# WEEK 7: FREEDOM

## SETUP

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We saw last week that the law , although it has the appearance of wisdom, cannot restore our hearts. How can we grow and change? Is it up to us?

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

*So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)*

## ARTICLE

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### HOW ARE YOU GOING TO CHANGE? PART II

#### 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. So 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 that they would fall into unfaithfulness; but rather than leaving them in their failure, God himself would come and circumcise their hearts so that they could live faithfully as God's people. This promise of God was echoed later in the Old Testament in places like Ezekiel 36:

*I will sprinkle clean water on you,  
and you will be clean;  
I will cleanse you from all your impurities  
and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart  
and put a new spirit in you;  
I will remove from you your heart of stone  
and give you a heart of flesh.  
And I will put my Spirit in you  
and move you to follow my decrees  
and be careful to keep my laws. (Ezekiel 36:25-27)*

So change—both in our hearts and the actions that flow out of our hearts—must come from God himself! The Apostle Paul describes this amazing transformation in His letter to the Ephesians.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things

on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 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. So, 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 that 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 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 is 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.”<sup>8</sup>*

## EXERCISE

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Write a summary of how you are going to change. Write down the aspect of God's work of change that especially gives you confidence that you can change. <sup>9</sup>

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Read what you wrote in the Exercise above at least 3 times (or even every day) this week.

*Put in place whatever reminders you need to do this. How might you be able to hold each other accountable?*

# WEEK 8: WORSHIP & THE HEART

## SETUP

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Our struggles reveal our hearts. Why do we do the things we do? Where do evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice all come from? Jesus gives us the answer...

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

## THE BIBLE SAYS...

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*"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...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)*

*For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin. (Romans 14:23 ESV)*

## PRAY TOGETHER...

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Pray together through these passages. You may talk with the Father about questions like this: What kinds of things have you seen come out of your heart?

Pray for each other. Ask God to give you the wisdom and grace to live by faith.

## ARTICLE

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### 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, 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 worshipping. Everything we do is an affirmation of who or what we are looking to for significance, security, approval, etc.

The reality is that your life is like 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.

Another analogy is that our lives are like a garden hose that is always on. Worship is always flowing out of us like water out of that hose. The question is, where are we going to point the hose? Something is going to get wet with our worship. But who or what is it! It's always on.

There is no neutral on the worship gear shift of your life. You are always in gear, and you are always in drive or reverse. Romans 1:25 says, "we've exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped 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. But 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 over 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, it can be deceived, it desires things, it lusts, it 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. And 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. But 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<sup>10</sup>

Human beings are always interpreting, or making sense of our environment and our circumstances. And 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/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.<sup>11</sup> When it comes to sinful patterns in our lives, efforts

to simply 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 like lying, manipulation, violence, theft, adultery, addictions and eating disorders, and negative or sinful emotions like anxiety, depression, envy, guilt, bitterness and pride all arise when our hearts do not trust God and do not worship God. And so the solution is faith and repentance. We need to:  
trust God instead of believing lies = faith  
worship God instead of worshipping idols = repentance

The key is to make the link between our specific sins, and the lies and idols in our hearts.<sup>12</sup> We will look into this in the next several weeks.

## EXERCISE

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Begin writing a summary of when you sin and what is going on in your heart. We'll be thinking more about what's going on in our hearts in the next few weeks.<sup>13</sup>

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Complete your summary from the Exercise during the week. Take some time to prayerfully ponder the questions "What do your struggles reveal about your heart?".

*Put in place whatever reminders you need to do this. How might you be able to hold each other accountable?*

# WEEK 9: TRUTH (4G'S PART I)

## SETUP

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Behind every sin and negative emotion is a lie. Every time we don't trust God or his word then we are believing something else... a lie. Life and freedom are found by trusting and delighting in the truth about God. Our problems are created by the gaps between what we believe in theory and what we believe in practice. We need to learn to preach the truth about God to our hearts.

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.*

*He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.*

*And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”*  
(Genesis 3:1-13 NIV)

## ARTICLE

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### WHAT TRUTHS DO YOU NEED TO TURN TO? PART I

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 actually voice this kind of thinking, but this unbelief is at the root of every sin and every negative emotion.

So 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. But there are many things about God that 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 well spring 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 that God is in control, but I don’t really believe that 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 in order to win the battle against sin.

Imagine that you have never tasted honey. You might possess the knowledge of it's sweetness because people you trust have told you of 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 that 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.

Over the next few weeks, we'll discuss 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<sup>15</sup>

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

*Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom. (Psalm 145:3)*

A fathom is a unit of measurement used to determine the depth of large bodies of water. So when David says that no one can fathom God's greatness, he's not just saying that we can't understand it. He's saying that if we had a fathom-stick, and we 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 that he is in control of all things, that nothing escapes his notice, that nothing happens that he doesn't know about, that HE is the one who keeps the earth spinning on it's axis and rotating around the sun. God is great!

But 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; and 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.

And 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).

No where 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. And he sent his Spirit to live inside of humans, empowering them to do the same works he accomplished on earth.

*Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (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.

## EXERCISE

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### READ THIS FROM ISAIAH 40

*"[God] with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens...  
Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these?  
He who brings out their host by number,  
calling them all by name,  
by the greatness of his might,  
and because he is strong in power  
not one is missing."*

You've probably seen a textbook image of our solar system with all of the planets on a single page. You can see that the Earth is tiny compared to Jupiter, but you don't get a sense of how big the solar system really is. As a way to inspire our understanding of God's greatness and glory, we're going to take a glimpse at a scaled down solar system.

**How does thinking about the heavens affect your thoughts of God's greatness?  
What are some implications of the truth God is great? For you? your Growth Group? your neighbors?**

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Choose a part of the Story of God that you think portrays well the greatness of God. Come ready to share it next time. Also try to notice when your heart goes toward wanting to be in control this week.

*Put in place whatever reminders you need to do this. How might you be able to hold each other accountable?*

# WEEK 10: TRUTH (4G'S PART II)

## SETUP

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Continuing from last week, we'll explore two more truths about God. Life and freedom are found by trusting and delighting in the truth about God. Our problems are created by the gaps between what we believe in theory and what we believe in practice. We need to learn to preach the truth about God to our hearts.

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

## THE BIBLE SAYS...

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Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31-32)

Jesus said to him, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life." (John 14:6)

## PRAY TOGETHER...

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Pray together and ask the Father to set you free from lies and to give you the grace to cling to Jesus as the Truth.

## ARTICLE

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### WHAT TRUTHS DO YOU NEED TO TURN TO? PART II

#### 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/disapproval. We 'need' the acceptance of others and 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*,<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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.

Or we use the language of 'need'. We elevate often good desires (for 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.

Remember in week 3 we said that Jesus is the glory of the Father, and that 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.

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?<sup>18</sup>

#### 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. And 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.

But 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, your soul needs rest. Your body is thirsty, your soul is thirsty. Your body is hungry, your soul is hungry. Your body needs love and intimacy, 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!

So 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.

And 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? When do you say, "when I have THIS, then everything will be ok?"

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 every 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 that God is gracious...he forgave my sins so I will not go to hell when I die..." And yet, 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." So 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. But through the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, he offers us life. And the only thing we have to do in order 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.

But 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 that 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 towards 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.

But 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 that 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 overeat, 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.<sup>19</sup>

## EXERCISE

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Write a summary of the truths you need to turn to in faith, particularly regarding your gospel change project. Choose a part of the Story that best illustrates those truths about God to your heart.

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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This week, say the truth to yourself at least twenty times:

"God is all I need." Say it slowly. "God... is... all... I... need." Say it out loud. Say it back to him: "You are all I need."

*Put in place whatever reminders you need to do this. How might you be able to hold each other accountable?*

# WEEK 11: IDOLATRY

## SETUP

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We said to ourselves last week, “God is all I need.” But influenced by lies about God instead of God’s Word, our desires (they often feel like needs) are often for things other than God and his glory.

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

*Prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do. (1 Peter 1:13-15)*

## ARTICLE

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### 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.”<sup>21</sup>

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.<sup>22</sup>

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 in order to have *it*. I will sacrifice to get *it*. I will compromise, 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.”

But 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, a person can idolize their spouse. They can connect all of their sense of security and significance and acceptance to what their spouse thinks of them. (This can be true for a person who does not even have a spouse).

But 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. But 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.

But 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." Because 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, 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 10 commandments.

*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before me. "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God. (Exodus 20:2-5)*

The people responded by saying repeatedly, "Everything the Lord has said we will do!" (Exodus 19:8; 24:3, 7). But a few weeks later, after Moses had spent nearly 40 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 that 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).

But Moses stepped forward. He interceded on behalf of the people, begging God to change his mind.. And God withheld judgment on the whole group. God still poured out his wrath, and at least 3000 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. So God could rightly say of humanity, "I'm going to wipe them all out!" But Jesus steps forward and intercedes. And 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 that we deserve as idol worshippers, and he lives to continually make intercession for us as we mess up over and over again.

*My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (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.

## EXERCISE

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You may want to review weeks 8-10 before completing this exercise. Begin the exercise together and finish it later this week.

**Pray together and ask the Spirit to reveal some of the specific idols in your life.**

**What idol do you think is behind the issue you're addressing in your gospel change project? Write these out.**

**Then identify the lie or misplaced desire that is behind each idol (ask, "What am I saying about God when you worship that idol?").**

**Finally, write down the truth about God that you need to believe when you are tempted to worship those idols.**

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Continue the exercise above, writing down your thoughts on each question. Check in with each other mid week to see how this is going.

*Put in place whatever reminders you need to do this. How might you be able to hold each other accountable?*

# WEEK 12: REPENTANCE & FAITH

## SETUP

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

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

## THE BIBLE SAYS

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*When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death. (James 1:13-15)*

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. (Hebrews 4:15)*

## ARTICLE

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### 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 that he sinned against God? How can that be? Because 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!

But 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 that the way to stop sinning is to change our behavior. But 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 image God the way we were intended to image him. 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 through Gospel DELTA:

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 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. And since we have believed lies about him and desired things more than him, we must go to the root of our rebellion. Repentance can not 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.”) And 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.”

*And 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, than 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! And 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.

## EXERCISE

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Pray together concerning your gospel change project. Think about the truth you need to turn to in order to overcome that sin. What does true repentance sound like? What does right worship sound like? Begin writing this out.

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Continue writing out your answers to the questions in the Exercise. Spend extra time with God this week, repenting of your sin/idolatry and worshipping him for who he truly is. This practice will be an invaluable tool in your fight against sin.

*Put in place whatever reminders you need to do this. How might you be able to hold each other accountable?*

# WEEK 13: GOSPEL RECAP

## SETUP

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This week will give you an opportunity to review all of the key concepts you've discussed thus far. Hopefully, you've seen growth as a disciple—one who is learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life.

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

## THE BIBLE SAYS...

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*Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.*

*“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’*

*“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples. (Luke 14:25-33)*

## EXERCISE

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This exercise will take some time, but it will be well worth it. Read **The Appendix**, and rewrite a 10 minute version of your story. Then, spend some time together as a group outside of your normal meeting time. Share a meal, grab coffee or beer, and share your stories with each other again. It might surprise you how differently you’ll tell it in light of all you’ve learned.

Read **The Appendix** and begin writing or outlining your thoughts with the time you have now.

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Complete rewriting your story and share them together.

*Put in place whatever reminders you need to do this. How might you be able to hold each other accountable?*

# WEEK 14: PRIDE

## SETUP

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We have seen God is at work changing us. So why do we not change more than we do? What stops us changing? Is it a lack of discipline or knowledge or accountability? These all matter, but the number one reason people do not change is pride.<sup>23</sup>

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

## THE BIBLE SAYS...

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*All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. (1 Peter 5:5-6)*

## PRAY TOGETHER...

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Pray together through this passage. You may talk with the Father about some of these questions:

**Where is pride present in your life?**

**What does it look and sound like to “humble yourself under God’s mighty hand”?**

## ARTICLE

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### WHAT STOPS YOU FROM CHANGING?

As we’ve seen over the last few weeks, change into the image of Jesus is something that God brings about as He works both faith and repentance into our lives. So we might wonder, “If God is doing the work of change, why haven’t I changed more?” Can things in my life short-circuit the change that God is in the process of bringing? Ultimately, the reason that we don’t change more than we do is because we don’t believe and trust the gospel. This unbelief manifests itself in two primary ways in our lives: love for self and love for sin. This week, we’ll talk about love for self, which is pride. Nothing slows change more than pride. Pride minimizes God as well as minimizing our sin, two key elements of the gospel.

#### 1. PROUD SELF-RELIANCE: MINIMIZING GOD

In our desire to change, we all naturally fall into the trap of performance. This kind of pride can easily manifest itself in subtle ways that we may not even recognize at first. Have you ever felt ashamed of your sin because you “know you’re a better person than that?” This sense of shame is fueled by our pride. We believe that we should be able to live up to our own standard of holiness. Subtly, we even believe we should be able to live up to God’s standard, too. This effectively minimizes God’s holiness by bringing it down to a level that we believe is attainable. We love ourselves so much we actually believe we can justify ourselves. This is why we are most afraid of letting ourselves down, of failing to live up to our own standard.

However, we know from God’s story in the Bible that no one is capable of matching God in His holiness and glorious perfection. Having to admit this to ourselves over and over—that we do not measure up, that we cannot save ourselves—is really the first part of believing the gospel. Winston Smith describes our deep need through the story of Peter at the Last Supper:

*Jesus’ last evening with his disciples was an intense time packed with “last words” in a sense. Curiously, while the other gospel writers focus on the institution of the Lord’s Supper, John shows us another ritual picture of Jesus’ redeeming work—the washing of his disciples’ feet. At the evening meal Jesus takes off his outer garment, wraps a towel around his waist, pours water into a basin and begins. When he gets to Peter he is met with a strong response:*

*“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet” (Jn.13:8).*

*Startling, but understandable. I don’t claim to know what was going on in Peter’s mind but I think it’s a reasonable guess that it was some combination of pride and shame. Peter didn’t seem to mind Jesus washing the other disciples’ feet. Maybe it wasn’t hard for Peter to see that they needed it. Perhaps Peter was even*

*moved to see that Jesus was willing to do it. But having Jesus kneel before him as a servant after knowing him as Lord and master was something quite different—something intolerable. I’m sure Peter, like most of us, would rather figure out some way of cleaning himself. At least part of us would find prideful satisfaction in being able to take care of our own mess. But another sizable part would like to avoid having another, especially Jesus, see our filth. And the thought of Jesus having to touch it . . . well, that makes us just want to say no.*

*Jesus’ response is as direct and startling as Peter’s. “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me” (Jn. 13:8). Well, that clinches it, doesn’t it? Jesus insists on putting an end to both our pride and our shame. There is no other way to relate to him. We can’t simply see ourselves as needing a little guidance and Jesus as our helpful guide. We can’t see ourselves as essentially “do-it-yourselfers” who partner with Jesus to help the less fortunate. No. We must acknowledge just how fouled we have become. We trod through a fallen world. We tramp through the mess of our own sin and we’ve been smeared by the sinful deeds of others. We are rebellious. We are wounded. We are proud. We are ashamed. We need all of it washed away. Jesus insists that we accept him as God who kneels before us in love and humility to cleanse, forgive, and restore us.*

*There’s a lot more to this passage but for today I’m thinking about this: whether it’s shame or pride, part of me doesn’t want Jesus to cleanse me. But there’s no other way. Jesus won’t give me any wiggle room. I can’t be a part of him unless I let him do the cleansing. I have to let him see and touch my sin and my shame. But there’s part of me, too, relieved that I can quit trying to do it on my own.<sup>24</sup>*

Humbling ourselves and acknowledging our need for forgiveness and cleansing upholds the holiness of God and cures us of our self-love.

## 2. PROUD SELF–JUSTIFICATION: MINIMIZING SIN

Pride not only shows up in our lives in our tendency to try to perform up to God’s standards, it also shows up when we minimize our sin by pretending that it’s not all that bad. Bob Thune and Will Walker describes this tendency in their book *The Gospel-Centered Life*:

*Growing in our awareness of our sinfulness is not fun! It means admitting—to ourselves and others—that we are not as good as we think we are. It means confronting what Richard Lovelace called the complex web of “compulsive attitudes, beliefs, and behavior”<sup>25</sup> that sin has created in us. If we are not resting in Jesus’ righteousness, this growing awareness of our sin becomes a crushing weight. We buckle under its load and compensate by pretending that we’re better than we really are. Pretending can take many forms: dishonesty (“I’m not that bad”), comparison (“I’m not as bad as those people”), excuse making (“I’m not*

*really that way”) and false righteousness (“Here are all the good things I’ve done”). Because we don’t want to admit how sinful we really are, we spin the truth in our favor....*

*To discern your subtle tendencies toward pretending, ask yourself this question: What do you count on to give you a sense of “personal credibility” (validity, acceptance, good standing)? Your answer to that question will often reveal something (besides Jesus) in which you find righteousness. When we are not firmly rooted in the gospel, we rely on these false sources of righteousness to build our reputation and give us a sense of worth and value.<sup>26</sup>*

Again, honesty about the true nature of our sin, that it is an offense against a holy God, helps cure us of the love for self that want to minimize sin.

## EXERCISE

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Pray together again—now in light of what you have learned today. Confess your sins of proud self-reliance and proud self-justification to the Father together. “He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9) Worship him together for being the only one we can truly rely on and the only one who can justify us.

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Listen this week for ways that you...

- change the facts about your sin in order to hide it
- compare yourself to others, or
- make excuses for your sin.

Write these down and bring them next week.

*Put in place whatever reminders you need to do this. How might you be able to hold each other accountable?*

# WEEK 15: GOSPEL-CENTERED

## SETUP

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Last week, we saw pride as the main barrier to real change. Another major change inhibitor is when we hate the consequences of sin, but we still love the sin itself.

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

After Nathan the prophet went to David and confronted him on his sin, including the murder of Uriah and adultery with Bathsheba...

*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight. (Psalm 51:3-4)*

## ARTICLE

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### HATING THE CONSEQUENCES OF SIN, BUT NOT SIN ITSELF

Last week we discovered that nothing hinders change more than pride. But there's another reason we don't change—love for sin. We can easily deceive ourselves into thinking we're repentant and we hate our sin when what we really hate are the consequences of sin. The harsh reality is that we don't change *because we don't really want to change*.

It's easy to hate the consequences of our sin. The man who cheats on his wife hates the coldness he receives from her. The thief hates the fact that he must spend some time behind bars. The addict hates the fact that they can't hold down a job and bounce from house to house. Everyone hates the guilt that comes from making a mistake. In these situations, we are sad and sorry because of the fallout from our sin, but not because of our sin itself.

Hating these consequences is not enough of a motivation to change. If avoiding consequences is our only motive to not sin, then we would gladly continue enjoying our sin if we could only find a way to do it without getting caught.

If we want to truly be transformed, we must first hate our sin. Remember in Week 12 we learned that unless we see God as the most offended party, we will not hate our sin. Only when we see our sin as a finger wagging accusation against God will we begin to hate it rather than love it.

Then, we must love something else more than the sin we've loved for so long.

Scottish mathematician and theologian Thomas Chalmers, wrote this around 200 years ago:

*...the most effectual way of withdrawing the mind from one object, is not by turning it away (to nothing), but by presenting to its regards another object still more alluring...The love of the world cannot be expunged by a mere demonstration of the world's worthlessness. But may it not be supplanted by the love of that which is more worthy than itself? The heart cannot be prevailed upon to part with the world, by a simple act of resignation. But may not the heart be prevailed upon to admit into its preference another, who shall subordinate the world, and bring it down from its wonted ascendancy? ...In a word, if the way to disengage the heart from the positive love of one great and ascendant object, is to fasten it in positive love to another, then it is not by exposing the worthlessness of the former, but by addressing to the mental eye the worth and excellence of the latter, that all old things are to be done away and all things are to become new... the only way to dispossess [the heart] of an old affection, is by the expulsive power of a new one."<sup>27</sup>*

### A CROSS-CENTERED LIFE

Affection for Jesus is the only thing that will draw the gaze of our hearts away from the lure of sin. Listen to what John Piper says about "seeing and savoring Christ":

*Hearing the word of the cross, and preaching it to ourselves, is the central strategy for sinners in the fight for joy. Nothing works without this. Here is where we start. And here is where we stay. We never outgrow*

*the gospel. Here we see the glory of Christ more clearly than anywhere else. Indeed the gospel is “the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). If seeing Christ is the key to savoring Christ—and it is!—then here is where we must linger. The word of the cross is the revelation of the glory of Christ.*

*And here in the cross is where every enemy of joy is overcome: divine wrath, as he becomes a curse for us; real guilt, as he becomes forgiveness for us; lawbreaking, as he becomes righteousness for us; estrangement from God, as he becomes reconciliation for us; slavery to Satan, as he becomes redemption for us; bondage to sin, as he becomes liberation for us; pangs of conscience, as he becomes cleansing for us; death, as he becomes the resurrection for us; hell, as he becomes eternal life for us....*

*Through the cross God purchased and secured every possible blessing that could ever be needed to make us happy forever. “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32). The answer to that question is not uncertain. God will—signed in blood—give us all things with Christ, because of the death of his Son. That is, he will give us all things that are truly good for us. We must preach this to ourselves every day, because Satan is preaching the opposite. What could stop our joy if we really believed this truth: Everything we need to be satisfied in God, the cross has made certain. It cannot fail.<sup>28</sup>*

## EXERCISE

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As a DELTA group, write down some ways you can help each other fight sin by reminding each other of the cross throughout the week. Make a commitment to call each other at least one time this week to check in and remind each other of the truth of the gospel.

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Follow through on your commitment and call each other at least once this week.

*Put in place whatever reminders you need to do this. How might you be able to hold each other accountable?*

# WEEK 16: MEANS OF GRACE

## SETUP

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By now you may have identified lies behind your sinful behavior and the truth you need to turn to in faith. You may have identified the idolatrous desires you need to turn from in repentance. Sadly, however, although understanding can be a big step forward, it does not equal change. Even if you have not fully analyzed your heart - and there may be issues behind issues—you still know the gospel truths and the gospel disciplines that will set you free. But the gospel disciplines of faith and repentance are a daily struggle. So, *what strategies do you need to put in place to reinforce faith and repentance?*<sup>29</sup>

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8)*

*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. (Galatians 5:16-17)*

## ARTICLE

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### WHAT STRATEGIES DO YOU NEED TO REINFORCE REPENTANCE AND FAITH?

Our old nature has sinful desires - the idolatrous desires that cause sinful behavior and emotions. But the Spirit has placed in the heart of every Christian a new desire - the desire for holiness. So we sow to the flesh whenever we do something that strengthens or provokes our sinful desires. And we sow to the Spirit whenever we do something that strengthens our Spirit-inspired desire for holiness.<sup>30</sup>

It is not a mystical or complicated principle. Not sowing to the sinful nature means avoiding anything that might strengthen or provoke our sinful desires. It means saying 'No' to the first stirrings of sinful desire in our hearts (mortification). It means avoiding situations where our sinful desires will be provoked. Sowing to the Spirit means doing whatever strengthens our Spirit-inspired desire for holiness. It means replacing the lies behind sin with the truth about God - his greatness and goodness.<sup>31</sup>

### AVOIDING THE DESIRES OF THE SINFUL NATURE

*No temptation has overtaken you but except what is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. (1 Corinthians 10:13-14)*

It is not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted in every way, yet he was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). However, scripture is clear that we are to take the way of escape that God gives from temptation ("flee!"). Jesus taught his followers to pray, "Lead us not into temptation."

We need to avoid situations in which we know we might particularly face temptation. We cannot change ourselves simply by avoiding temptation: change must begin within our hearts. But avoiding temptation does have a part to play. It is never the whole solution, but it can be part of the solution. As my friend Samuel puts it, 'Avoidance buys us time.' Sometimes sinful desires feel strong. But if there is no stimulation for those desires, there is time for the truth to prevail in my heart.<sup>32</sup>

Most of our sinful desires can be fed by things in our culture. The lies behind our sins are lies that are perpetuated at a community level. The world around us celebrates sinful desires and spreads lies about God. We cannot live in (isolation from the world). But we can and should take steps to reduce its influence on us.<sup>33</sup>

John Stott sums up this whole idea well:

*Every time we allow our mind to harbor a grudge, nurse a grievance, entertain an impure fantasy, or wallow in self-pity, we are sowing to the flesh. Every time we linger in bad company whose insidious influence we know we cannot resist, every time we lie in bed when we ought to be up and praying, every time we read pornographic literature, every time we take a risk which strains our self-control, we are sowing, sowing, sowing to the flesh. Some Christians sow to the flesh every day and wonder why they do not reap holiness.<sup>34</sup>*

# FOLLOWING THE DESIRES OF THE SPIRIT

The best way to keep down our sinful desires is to sow to the Spirit. When Paul tells Timothy to flee sinful desire, he always tells him to pursue righteousness in its place.<sup>35</sup> “Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (2 Timothy 2:22)

Sowing to the Spirit means saying ‘Yes’ to whatever strengthens our Spirit-inspired desires. As we have seen, we sin when we believe lies about God. Sowing to the Spirit means filling our hearts with the truth about God. We sin because sinful desires matter more to us than God. We sow to Spirit when we cultivate our love for God.

Here are five things that reinforce faith. Sometimes people call these “spiritual disciplines”. But this is not helpful terminology. It can make Christian growth seem like an achievement on our part. In reality it is God who changes us through his grace. The only true spiritual disciplines in the Christian life are faith and repentance - actions that direct our attention to God’s gracious activity. So instead it is better to use the traditional term: “the means of grace”. These are ways God is gracious to us and by which he strengthens his work of grace in our hearts. They are the means God uses to feed our faith in him. This is what sowing to the Spirit looks like in practice.<sup>36</sup>

## 1. BIBLE

When Jesus prayed for his followers, he prayed, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.” God has graciously revealed himself to us through his word, and he uses it to help transform us. Primarily, scripture does this by reminding us of the gospel—who God is, what he’s done for us, who we are in light of that, and how we should live as a result. The Bible shows us the glory of Jesus over and over, revealing both our deep need for him and his gracious provision of redemption for us. The Bible is the single most important resource for sowing to the Spirit.

## 2. PRAYER

Our hunger for prayer should spring from two things: a desire to be with God himself, and a deep awareness of our need for him. Talking to the Father about him and about our need for him will transform us. By his grace, he has given us full access to himself through Jesus. Why would we not go? J. C. Ryle says:

*Praying and sinning will never live together in the same heart. Prayer will consume sin, or sin will choke prayer ... Diligence in prayer is the secret of eminent holiness. Without controversy there is a vast difference among true Christians ... I believe the difference in nineteen cases out of twenty arises from different habits about private prayer. I believe that those who are not eminently holy pray little, and those who are eminently holy pray much.<sup>37</sup>*

## 3. COMMUNITY

One of the reasons God has put us Christian communities is to help us change. We can’t sow to the Spirit alone very effectively. The church is to be a community of change. We will think more about this next week. But here are some ways that the church is a means of grace:

- we remind one another of the truth
- we are taught the Bible by people God has gifted for this purpose
- we pray together for God’s help
- we model Christian change and holiness for one another
- we see God at work in the lives of other people
- we remind one another of God’s greatness and goodness as we worship him together
- we are given opportunities for service<sup>38</sup>

## 4. CORPORATE WORSHIP

The root cause of sinful behavior and negative emotions is idolatrous desires. When we worship God we are reminding ourselves that God is bigger and better than anything sin offers.

One special means of grace is communion or the Lord's Supper. The bread and wine remind us that we are now children of God through the death of Christ. They remind us that we belong to God because we were bought with the price of Christ's blood. They remind us that we do not need to prove ourselves because we are justified by Christ's blood.<sup>39</sup>

## 5. SERVICE

We often think of service as the fruit or sign of change. But it is also a means of grace that God uses to change us. Sin is fundamentally an orientation towards self. Serving God and others can help redirect us outwards, taking our attention away from ourselves. Serving others in practical ways is a great prescription for people suffering from negative emotions. When we are self-absorbed, we focus on our problems and successes. Serving others is a great way of turning from a preoccupation with yourself.<sup>40</sup>

## PRAY TOGETHER...

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Over the last 16 weeks, you've talked and prayed repeatedly about the importance of multiplication. Jesus calls us to make disciples who make disciples. As you near the end of the 18 weeks in this guide, **spend some more time praying together how each of you should pursue multiplication.**

Are each of you ready to lead a few others through Gospel Delta? Or is there more work to be done? Have you just recently become a follower of Jesus, and you need to go through Gospel Delta one more time before you can lead others through it? **Pray and discern the specific next step that God is calling each of you to take in a few weeks.** The best way to learn is to teach, so don't be reluctant to step out in faith!

## EXERCISE

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Choose one of these books or passages of scripture to study this week and experience as a means of grace. You can begin reading it together right now.

- Exodus 32-34
- Psalm 107
- John 15:1-17
- Philippians
- Colossians

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Ask the following questions of the text you chose:

- **Who is God?**
- **What has he done for us?**
- **Who are we in light of that?**
- **How should we live as a result?**

Use a notebook or journal to write down your answers. Bring them next week and discuss together what you learned. Pay attention to how this exercise leads you to worship God and how it is a means of grace.

*Put in place whatever reminders you need to do this. How might you be able to hold each other accountable?*

# WEEK 17: COMMUNITY OF CHANGE

## SETUP

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Too often we think about change as something we have to accomplish—on our own. But change happens best in the context of community. We need each other, in all of our sin-stained imperfection, to help lead us to lasting transformation.

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

## THE BIBLE SAYS...

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*Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*

*Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:17-32)*

## ARTICLE

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### CHRISTIAN GROWTH

In the summer of 2008, Tim Chester gave a talk in Tacoma entitled, “Christian Growth.” His text was Ephesians 4:17-32. Listen to his talk as a group, and spend some time discussing it.

<http://goo.gl/IDFf3>

Full url: <http://gospeldelta.com/2008/08/christian-growth/>

## EXERCISE

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Talk about where you heard the elements of DELTA being described. Then discuss three specific ways your DELTA group can live this out together.

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Put at least one of these three specific ways from the Exercise into practice this week. You may need to make some plans together.

*Put in place whatever reminders you need to do this. How might you be able to hold each other accountable?*

# WEEK 18: LIFETIME & MISSION

## SETUP

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Tim Keller says, “God never draws us in without sending us out.” As those who’ve been transformed by the gospel, we cannot help but be pushed out on mission. Jesus laid down his life for us so we could lay down our life for him and his mission, which is to make disciples.

## NOTES

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## BIG PICTURE

*Summarize in a few lines what you learned today...*

*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. (Galatians 5:13 ESV)*

## ARTICLE

As the gospel transforms us we experience great joy and deep gratitude in our hearts. That internal change in our hearts must lead to external change in our actions. Bob Thune and Will Walker illustrate this beautifully in their book *Gospel-Centered Life*:

## THE GOSPEL PROPELS US OUTWARD

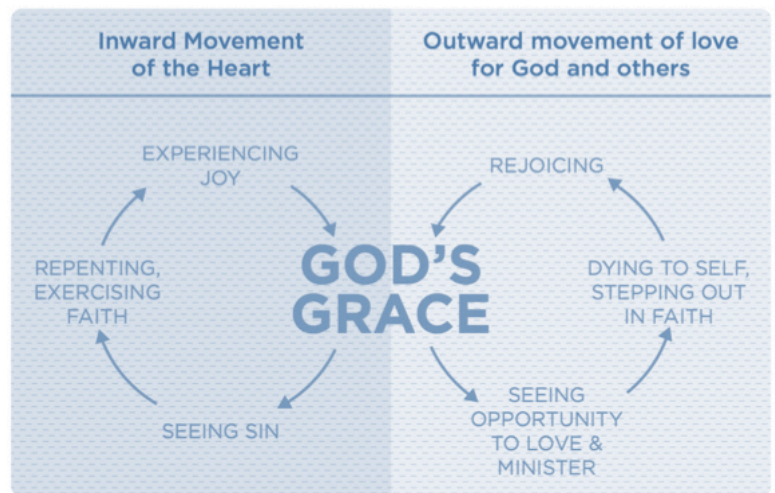
*For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. (Galatians 5:13 ESV)*

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.

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 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).<sup>41</sup>

## EXERCISE

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God’s grace propels out outward. As a group, lead your whole Growth Group in caring for someone in your neighborhood who is in need. Prayerfully plan the details. Explain to the group how the gospel is motivating you to do this. Ask the Spirit to use this opportunity to bring about change in the lives of people in the Growth Group and neighborhood. Afterwards, discuss the process as a group and talk about how it gave you a fresh perspective on the gospel.

Begin now with prayer to determine who in your neighborhood to care for. And if you have time, begin planning.

## LATER THIS WEEK...

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Continue with the **Exercise**, of course, and read the **Epilogue**.

Remember, the goal is disciples making disciples, so if you haven’t yet, *follow through with the next steps you prayerfully decided on during Week 16*. Getting to lead others to learn to apply the gospel to their lives is a great privilege and will help you grow even more.

Celebrate together what the Father has done in your hearts through the gospel over the past few months! He’s making you more like Jesus!

# EPILOGUE

The process of becoming more like Jesus will not end until we see him face to face. Here's some parting thoughts as you move forward in your journey as a disciple.

## GOSPEL TRANSFORMATION

We began with Paul's words, "the gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). Stay rooted in the fact that you are not what you do—you are what's been done for you by Jesus.

Continue to walk in the habit of repentance and faith! Use your deepened understanding of the gospel to root out sin in your life. Keep asking, "What does repentance sound like?" and "What does right worship sound like?" Turn from sin and worship God from the heart over and over again.

## CHANGE HAPPENS IN COMMUNITY

We desperately need each other. Speak the truth in love to one another in community. Remind each other of your gospel identity. Let the gospel shape all of your relationships and all of your interactions. Submit the big decisions of your life to a community centered around the gospel.

## THE MISSION: MAKE DISCIPLES WHO MAKE DISCIPLES

There's only a few things we can do on earth that we can't do in heaven—sin, and make disciples. Jesus has left us here to make disciples. Don't delay in beginning a new DELTA relationship. Pursue gospel change with a friend, a neighbor, or someone from your Growth Group. Imagine the thrill of leading others to the point of being able to lead someone else towards greater dependence on the Spirit of Christ! There's nothing else like it on earth.

# APPENDIX : TIPS FOR TELLING YOUR STORY IN 10 MINUTES

Adapted from Redemption by Mike Wilkerson <sup>42</sup>

## KEEP IT SHORT: 10 MINUTES OR LESS!

Usually, it's good for one person in the group to serve as a timekeeper for the storyteller and to give a 1 or 2 minute "heads up" near the end. If you've never told your story at all, you might be surprised how quickly 10 minutes goes! And if you have told it before, you may be perplexed that we're only giving you 10 minutes! How can you tell your life's story in 10 minutes?

You can't. And we're not really asking you to. We know that there is far more in your life that is significant than can be packed into 10 minutes. We're asking you to spend 10 minutes telling us some of the most significant shaping events, relationships, and patterns in your life that will give us a window into where God has you at this point in your spiritual journey. For now, we just want to have everyone weigh in with something significant. We're not trying to hear everything there is to hear up front. We'll look forward to hearing more from each other over time.

## WHERE TO BEGIN?

How do you choose which themes and details of your life to share in such a short time? You may very well have 4 or 5 strands or themes within your story that are very meaningful and would give us insight into who you are and how you view yourself. Choose one or two. Others may come out over time as the group moves forward.

Share something that reveals where you are today, not just where you've been in the past. Telling about the past merely serves the purpose of filling out the context that helps us understand your present experience. So pick a theme that's alive for you today. If there's a particular concern that has brought you to a DELTA Group, you should include that concern and it's context in your life. Within that theme, share the details that most significantly shed light on where you are today. For example, your parents may have been divorced—no doubt a significant event in your life. Should you share it in your story? If it doesn't provide some context for your current struggle, considering leaving it out (at least initially). On the other hand, if their divorce has been a shaping influence that leads up to where you are today, it might be helpful to share.

Get the idea? Think about where the action takes place in your life today, and work backward to prioritize what of your past to share.

## THE FACTS

Your story is not really about all the facts of your personal history: where you grew up, how much money your parents made, the fact that you were born on a "cold and stormy night..." Those are facts about your past that may or may not be relevant to the meaning of your past. We're looking for meaning. Share facts of your life that help to communicate a particular meaning.

Choose only the facts that best communicate the significant meaning you want to share. Let the other relevant but secondary facts come out over time. Avoid sharing facts that don't have significant meaning in your story at all.

## WHAT IF I DON'T SEE THE CONNECTIONS YET?

Maybe you're not sure how your story fits together with your present. That's OK. It's a lifelong process for all of us. Perhaps this experience of being a part of a DELTA group will help you gain some clarity on what God is and has been doing in your life. Share what seems relevant and be open to gaining more clarity over time.

# COMMON SHAPING INFLUENCES

Here are some events that can have profound shaping influences on us. (See the section below for some ways to discern which of these might be truly significant to telling your story and which may be less relevant.)

- extended family history
- parents relationship
- your relationship to either of your parents
- relationships with siblings
- moments of intense trauma (physical, emotional, financial)
- moving to a new city, home, school
- harm, abuse, betrayal done to you, once or many times
- leaving home and moving out on your own
- harm you've done to others
- patterns of habitual sin
- conversion to follow Jesus Christ
- physical ailment, injury, defect
- patterns of social pain, suffering, conflict, trial
- times of great blessing (emotional, physical, financial, spiritual)

## IT DOESN'T ALWAYS BEGIN WITH "ABUSE"

Often, the most shaping influences are our lives are suffering of various kinds. So if you've experienced abuse, harm, betrayal, severe suffering in your past that is a shaping influence, share it. Share the full weight of it. Don't minimize it.

On the other hand, don't try to dig for something to label as "abuse". You may have some significant themes in your life that we need to hear about that don't have any apparent connection to some abuse in your past.

So tell it like it is, like you see it, without feeling like you have to add something into your past in an attempt to "explain" the present. Speculative explanations won't help, and may only distract you from getting to core issues in your heart.

## SOME QUESTIONS TO GUIDE YOUR SHARING

Optionally, you may use some of the following questions to guide your sharing. In addition to these consider sharing appropriate elements of your journaling through the early chapters of the redemption book.

1. What are your deepest wounds?
2. Who wounded, abused, or hurt you?
3. How did you deal with it?
4. What lies did you come to believe?
5. What suffering do you experience that is beyond your control (like abuse)?
6. What battles do you face that you brought into your own life (like sinful habits)?
7. What do want most deeply?
8. What or whom do you most love, or most hate?
9. When do you get the most sad and depressed? When do you get hopeless?
10. What do you get the most excited about? What brings you the greatest pleasure?
11. What do you especially want to avoid?
12. What do you think you need? What are your "felt needs"?
13. What do you see as your rights? What do you feel entitled to?
14. Who must you please? Whose opinion of you counts? From whom do you desire approval and fear rejection? Whose value system do you measure yourself against? In whose eyes are you living? Whose love and approval do you need?

15. Where do you find refuge, safety, comfort, escape, pleasure, security?
16. What or who do you trust?
17. How do you spend your time? What are your priorities?
18. What do you want to get out of life? What payoff do you seek out of the things you do? What do you get out of doing that?
19. How do you define who you are?

## A PRACTICAL TIP

Most people have never had the opportunity to share their story. Those who have were probably not limited to 10 minutes! In order to effectively communicate the essentials about God's work in your life in the time allotted, you'll need either notes or a manuscript. No one can do a good job of sharing their story in only 10 minutes without notes to guide them. And just the process of writing out your story will be very helpful for you and will give you new perspective on your history.

Adapted from Soma Communities' *Gospel DNA Participant's Guide*

<http://tacoma.somacommunities.org/mediafiles/gospel-dna-participants-guide.pdf>

- <sup>1</sup> Tim Chester, *You Can Change: God's Transforming Power for Our Sinful Behavior & Negative Emotions* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 42-43.
- <sup>2</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 34.
- <sup>3</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1973/1993), 201-202
- <sup>4</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 35-42.
- <sup>5</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 46.
- <sup>6</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 47-48.
- <sup>7</sup> Adapted from John Piper, "How the Spirit Does What the Law Could Not Do", <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/how-the-spirit-does-what-the-law-could-not-do>
- <sup>8</sup> Tim Keller, "Redeemer Vision Paper #1: The Gospel: Key to Change". [http://www.redeemer2.com/visioncampaign/papers/Vision\\_Paper\\_1-The\\_Gospel-The\\_Key\\_to\\_Change.pdf](http://www.redeemer2.com/visioncampaign/papers/Vision_Paper_1-The_Gospel-The_Key_to_Change.pdf).
- <sup>9</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 67.
- <sup>10</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 76.
- <sup>11</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 76.
- <sup>12</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 77.
- <sup>13</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 79.
- <sup>14</sup> This analogy is from a sermon by Jonathan Edwards called 'A Divine and Supernatural Light,' Works Vol. 2 (Bell, Arnold & Co., 1840), 12-17.
- <sup>15</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 88.
- <sup>16</sup> Edward T. Welch, *When People are Big and God is Small* (P&R, 1997).
- <sup>17</sup> Edward T. Welch, *When People are Big and God is Small* (P&R, 1997), 15.
- <sup>18</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 91-92.
- <sup>19</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 104.
- <sup>20</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 106.
- <sup>21</sup> G.K. Beale, *We Become What we Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 2008), 203-204
- <sup>22</sup> Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Dutton, 2009), xvii-xix.
- <sup>23</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 127.
- <sup>24</sup> Winston Smith, *Do You Want to Say "No" to Jesus' Touch?*, accessed 4/11/2011 at <http://www.ccef.org/do-you-want-say-%E2%80%99Cno%E2%80%9D-jesus%E2%80%99-touch>
- <sup>25</sup> Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 88.
- <sup>26</sup> Bob Thune and Will Walker, *The Gospel-Centered Life: A Nine Lesson Study Leader's Guide* (Jenkintown: World Harvest Mission, 2009) 12-13. <http://www.whm.org/gcl>.
- <sup>27</sup> Thomas Chalmers, "The Expulsive Power of a New Affection". (Sermon date unknown), 2-8. <http://www.monergism.com/Chalmers,%20Thomas%20-%20The%20Expulsive%20Power%20of%20a%20New%20Af.pdf>
- <sup>28</sup> John Piper, *When I Don't Desire God: How to Fight for Joy* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004), 91-92.
- <sup>29</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 145.
- <sup>30</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 146.
- <sup>31</sup> Summarized from Chester, *You Can Change*, 145-152.
- <sup>32</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 147.
- <sup>33</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 148.
- <sup>34</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (IVP, 1968), 170.
- <sup>35</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 152.
- <sup>36</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 153.
- <sup>37</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Practical Religion* (Banner of Truth, 1878, 1998), 71, 74-75.
- <sup>38</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 157.
- <sup>39</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 157-158.
- <sup>40</sup> Chester, *You Can Change*, 158-159.
- <sup>41</sup> Thune and Walker, "Gospel Centered Life", 46-47.
- <sup>42</sup> Adapted from Mike Wilkerson, *Redemption* (Seattle: Mars Hill Church, 2009), Appendix 2, 94-97.