

CBC College +

GOSPEL: Kingdom Come

The Gospel Around the Table

Part 1

Week 5

This week is the first half of “The Gospel With Us.” While God works in individual people, his history-long aim is to recreate for himself a people. So while the gospel applies to us personally, it also applies to us corporately. This week’s readings and reflections give the first three of seven specific practices, designed to help draw your community more strongly together, as you specifically consider the familial nature of our life in Christ.

Eating to Remember

Week 5, Reading 1

If you and others around you are going to grow in gospel fluency, you need consistent immersion in a gospel-speaking community. This needs to be much more than a weekly gathering of the church where the gospel is preached (though it should include this). It also should be more than a weekly Bible study, small-group gathering, or missional-community meeting (though I also recommend these). Growth in gospel fluency requires regularly being with others who know and love Jesus, speak about him often, and commit together to regularly remind one another of the gospel when they forget.

From the very beginning of the story, the act of eating has played a very significant role in the worship and remembrance of who God is, what he has done, and who we are. God provided a great place for Adam and Eve to live, with all the food they needed. They regularly had the opportunity to remember God, his word, and his work, as well as who they were and what they were called to do. For them, every meal was a time to remember God’s abundant provision and express their worship of him alone.

When we eat, we see that our food looks good. Some meals look like a painting by Monet, others look like a Picasso, but they are all works of art. We can smell our food. Just think of all the wonderful aromas of the best meals you've had. Don't you love them! And as you put your food in your mouth, there's an explosion of sensations—sweet, sour, bitter, salty. It's like a party in your mouth! And you don't just taste your food, you feel it as well. There are so many textures to experience. And then you hear it as it crunches, or sloshes or slurps its way into your body (some people are annoyed at this part of eating). Through all of this, you are nourished and replenished, strengthened and rebuilt. God wants us to eat and remember—enjoy and worship him—and, at the same time, have our needs met by him.

Remember what he said to Adam and Eve: “Eat from any tree in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat of that tree, you will surely die” (see Gen. 2: 16–17). Every meal was an opportunity to remember, trust, and obey. Every meal was meant to be an act of remembrance and worship. But they didn't remember, trust, and obey. They ate unto themselves. God designed them to trust in his ability to provide for them. Something outside of them was meant to take care of a deep need inside of them—and he would provide that something. They were not to look outside of his provision.

All of this was meant to point us toward God's ultimate provision in Jesus. Eventually, Jesus came to be God's ultimate provision for us. He is the bread of life that meets our deepest needs and satisfies our greatest longings. Every meal is meant to cause us to remember and worship Jesus.

What if you took time at every meal—even very simple ones—to give thanks to God, praying not just at the beginning, but throughout the meal? Our family is trying to use our evening mealtimes more intentionally. We are presently rehearsing the Ten Commandments and going through the gospel with each one of them. We also have given each night a theme to guide what we do together at the meal—this is further described in Reflection #1.

There is one meal specifically given by Jesus, to remember and proclaim the gospel—we'll see that later this week. But for now, consider our normal, everyday meals: what if your friends, your family, your small group, or your missional community made it a point to make every single meal a remembrance and worship experience? What if you slowed down enough to remember Jesus at every meal? What if you savored every moment as an opportunity to praise God?

Thoughtfully read the following passages of Scripture related to today's theme. Take a few moments to write down words and phrases that particularly struck you, as well as any thoughts or personal applications they prompted. Make these words a prayer to God.

- Genesis 1-3
- Isaiah 25: 6-12
- Luke 7: 33-35
- Luke 19: 1-10
- Philippians 2: 1-11
- Revelation 19: 6-10

Eating to Remember

Week 5, Reflection 1

One way your community can begin to regularly rehearse the gospel together is in the everyday meals you eat together each week. To apply the concepts of this week's "Reading #1" in your everyday life, pray that God will open your eyes and guide you, then answer the following questions and complete the exercises.

1. Considering the content you read, in your own words describe some of the ways that meals can remind us of who God is and what he's done.
2. How has God designed meals to be pictures of both necessary provision and multi-sensory joy? Which of those realities do you most easily lean toward as you consider food? Why? What's the danger in seeing food merely as provision or as merely joy-giving?
3. 1 Corinthians 10: 31, the apostle Paul charges followers of Jesus, "whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." How can the act of eating remind us of our need for Jesus, and how can it lead us to worship God?
4. In chapter 10 of Gospel Fluency, Jeff describes his family's weekly rhythms of intentionality with meals: On Mission Monday, we remember together our family's mission to glorify God and fulfill his purposes in saving us... Teaching Tuesday is when one of the children takes responsibility for our learning from God's word at the meal... With-Family Wednesday is the night we eat with our missional community... Thanksgiving Thursday is when we take time to give thanks for all God has done... On

Fun Friday, we go out to eat, or we eat together and then go to a movie, have a game night, or take a special outing... Serving Saturday often means we are with others for a meal or serving some people... And Sunday is when we remember Jesus through taking communion together at our church's gathering (to be considered further in Reading and Reflection #2; for more on this weekly rhythm, see Gospel Fluency, chapter 10). Whether every meal, every day, or key activities, what are some ways that you and your family and/ or friends can view meals with greater intentionality? With what people should you eat regularly, how often, and why? What could that look like, and when will you start?

As you consider celebrating God through eating normal, everyday meals with others, read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “Jesus came to be God’s ultimate provision for us. He is the bread of life that meets our deepest needs and satisfies our greatest longings. Every meal is meant to cause us to remember and worship Jesus.” Consider writing out your thoughts and prayers as you reflect.

5. In a sentence, what do you think Jesus is saying to you based on what you have read?

6. Based upon what you believe Jesus is telling you, are there any actions that need to be taken today or this week?

The Meal

Week 5, Reading 2

On the night Jesus was betrayed, he shared the Passover meal with his disciples. That meal commemorated the night when God struck down every firstborn son of Egypt while protecting his people from the same fate. Their protection came through the Passover lambs that were sacrificed and eaten inside homes where the doorposts had been covered with the lambs' blood. This was the final straw for Pharaoh, and he finally let God's people go. Ever after, the Passover was a remembrance meal of God's redemption of Israel out of slavery.

At his last meal with his disciples before his death, Jesus showed how every Passover meal was pointing to him. And at this meal, Jesus changed the Passover to the Lord's Supper as his meal. It became a meal at which we remember how he redeemed us out of slavery to sin and Satan by becoming the true and better sacrificial Lamb of God for us.

Jesus picked up the bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying: "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." Paul said, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11: 26). We should remember him regularly with the meal and practice proclaiming his death to each other through it.

Another helpful practice for both remembrance and growth in gospel proclamation is to speak the gospel through the elements to each other's needs, hurts, and longings in small-group gatherings or missional-community meetings. I first tried this during a missional-community gathering at our home in January several years back. I explained to our group that I wanted each of them to share something they were struggling with; a desire they had that was yet to be met; or doubts or fears they might be experiencing. Then one of us would take the bread and the cup, and speak the truths of Jesus' body given and blood shed for us to the need... We [went] around the circle: one after another, we confessed our need for a Savior, and one after another, we proclaimed the good news of Jesus to our very real needs. It was an incredibly joyous and tear-filled experience of grace!

I've led this same experience many times now with brand-new Christians as well as church leaders. It isn't always the same experience. Some are not very fluent in the gospel and therefore struggle with how to speak it to specific needs. However, I let people know that's okay when I start and that those in the group will help one another. I usually ask for someone to volunteer to share, and let the person to the right know he or she will be asked to speak the gospel to the need. I then say: "If you don't know what to say, let us know and the rest of us will help. Over time, we will all get better at this."

God has given us many ways to remember him and grow in proclaiming the gospel. They are around us all the time in what is called general revelation—creation and the rhythms of life within it. Our job is to learn to see the truths of God around us and speak the truths of the gospel into it. The meal—"the Jesus Supper"—is the one he told us to use to regularly remember him. It is also one of the most effective ways I have found to train us

to do this in all the other places of life as well.

Start with the meal every week, then practice remembering Jesus at the others meals, and you will have twenty-two stops through your week in gospel remembrance and proclamation. If you do this, you will be well on your way to growing in gospel fluency with others!

Thoughtfully read the following passages of Scripture related to today's theme. Take a few moments to write down words and phrases that particularly struck you, as well as any thoughts or personal applications they prompted. Make these words a prayer to God.

*Read at least one Gospel account of Jesus' Last Supper

*Matthew 26: 17-29

*Mark 14: 12-25

*Luke 22: 7-23

1 Corinthians 11: 17-33

The Meal

Week 5, Reflection 2

A second way your community can regularly rehearse the gospel together is by participating together in the Lord's Supper with intentionality. To apply the concepts of this week's "Reading #2" in your everyday life, pray that God will open your eyes and guide you, then answer the following questions and complete the exercises.

1. Considering the content you read, in your own words describe the concept of "the Lord's Supper" or "communion" (or in some traditions, "eucharist").
2. What has been your understanding of, and personal experience with, "the Lord's Supper"? If there is brokenness, misunderstanding, or even guilt or baggage associated with this, are there ways the gospel can become good news, even to that reality? In what ways can others help you through that?
3. In what ways can you see it as remembering Jesus' death for our sins? In what ways can you see it as a proclamation of that death, to ourselves and to others?

4. The Lord's Supper, taken in community, can be a meaningful venue for speaking good news over each other: [A] helpful practice for both remembrance and growth in gospel proclamation is to speak the gospel through the elements to each other's needs, hurts, and longings in small-group gatherings or missional-community meetings. While you'll have the opportunity to carry this out with your group at this week's meeting, consider this personally now: in what specific ways is Jesus' death, which we remember and proclaim with the bread and wine of communion, good news to the areas you've been wrestling through over the course of this Handbook? Spend a decent amount of time on this question, answer it in light of the different areas of struggle, and worship God for Jesus' death for every one of those struggles.

As you wrap up this focus on the specific meal by which Jesus calls his followers to remember him, read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “God has given us many ways to remember him and grow in proclaiming the gospel. They are around us all the time in what is called general revelation—creation and the rhythms of life within it. Our job is to learn to see the truths of God around us and speak the truths of the gospel into it.” Consider writing out your thoughts and prayers as you reflect.

5. In a sentence, what do you think Jesus is saying to you from what you have read?

6. Based upon what you believe Jesus is telling you, are there any actions that need to be taken today or this week?

He's the Better...

Week 5, Reading 3

“I can't stand my job! I've been working there for too long to be treated like this,” she said.

We had just started eating dinner at our weekly missional community family meal when one of our members started unloading her frustrations about work. “I should have received a raise a long time ago and I am still in the same position that I started in two years ago,” she went on to say. “My boss keeps telling me I will eventually get a promotion, but it seems like I keep getting overlooked. I'm really tired of this! I'm ready

to quit.” She continued sharing her frustrations about the working conditions and the poor benefits, and how her coworkers didn’t help the situation, as most of them had bad attitudes and poor work ethics.

This is a pretty normal occurrence for group life in a church—and for life in community anywhere, for that matter. We struggle with work and want a place to vent. Likewise, we experience pain and frustration in our relationships. Roommates get on our nerves. Finances are not always abundant or predictable. Parents wound us or let us down. So do our children. We have plenty to talk about and often much to complain about.

Typically, in a gathering like this, the initial response to our sister’s complaints is often additional complaining: “I know what you mean! My job stinks as well.” “You deserve better! Your boss doesn’t know what he has in you. Maybe one day he’ll wake us and realize what an incredible person you are!” “Yeah, well, it might be too late when he does, because if I were you, I’d quit!” A gospel community can do better than that.

I regularly encourage our groups to ask these questions: 1) How does the gospel bring good news to this situation? 2) What about the gospel do we need to hear right now? 3) What about the gospel have we forgotten or failed to believe? and 4) How is Jesus better than what we have or what we want?

Part of our job as a gospel-fluent community is to continue to remind one another that Jesus is “the Better.” He is the better boss. He is also the better worker, who did a far better job than us. He is the better friend. He is the better Son, who perfectly obeyed the Father on our behalf—and on our children’s behalf as well.

Parents, some of you need to remember this. Your children fail. They’re not perfect. And they were not meant to live the life you thought you should have. Many parents are trying to live vicariously through their children, silently saying to them: “Be the athlete I wish I had been. Get the grades I could never earn. Gain the popularity I could never attain. Give me the relationship I never had with my parents.”

So many parents see their children as substitutes for their childhood. But children can’t handle this weight. It will crush them. And that will disappoint parents who think this way. There is only one perfect child. Jesus is the better child. Your children need to know and believe this. You do as well. Maybe you’re not the parent. Maybe you’re the child who needs to know that Jesus is better. Jesus shows us the better Father and is for us the better Son.

This is what we need to practice doing together in our groups. We need to keep pointing

each other to Jesus and showing how he is the Better everything. How do we do this? First, as a reminder, it is important to establish the group in the four key questions that we walked through in Week 4: 1) Who is God/ Jesus? 2) What has he done or what is he doing? 3) Who are we in light of that work? and 4) How should we live in light of who we are?

Let's think about how these questions might have been answered in regard to [a] young woman with an unlikeable job and bad boss. 1) Who is God/ Jesus? Jesus is her Lord, her boss. And he is a good, great, gracious, and generous boss! 2) What has he done for her (in other words, how do we know he is a good boss)? He did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as her ransom. He didn't give her the wages she deserves. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (the better boss). And he sat down at the right hand of God the Father, where he is making constant intercession (speaking great words on her behalf) with the Father for her. 3) Who is she in light of that work? She is seated with him in the heavenly realms, a child of God, approved of by the Father, a beneficiary of all that belongs to Jesus, and she now serves as an ambassador for the King of kings. 4) How should she live? She should work with joy, freedom, power, and hope.

We go to work for Jesus, the only boss worthy of our worship, deserving of our thanks, and capable of granting us genuine, lasting approval. In Reflection #3 we'll try the same exercise with any situation or struggle. As a matter of practice, pick a relationship or situation (spouse, friend, child, work, provision, identity) and work through these questions together as a group.

Thoughtfully read the following passages of Scripture related to today's theme. Take a few moments to write down words and phrases that particularly struck you, as well as any thoughts or personal applications they prompted. Make these words a prayer to God. Consider God's "better" role in the relationships described in

- 1 Timothy 5: 1-6: 3
- Colossians 3: 18-4: 1
- Ephesians 4: 1-7

He's the Better...

Week 5, Reflection 3

This week's final way for your community to rehearse the gospel together is by helping each other see Jesus as "the Better," compared to everything and everyone else in your lives. To apply the concepts of this week's "Reading #3" in your everyday life, pray that God will open your eyes and guide you, then answer the following questions and complete the exercises.

1. Considering the content you read, in your own words describe as many benefits as you can of living alongside a close community of people who know Jesus and can press you toward the gospel.
2. Part of our job as a gospel-fluent community is to continue to remind one another that Jesus is "the Better." He is the better boss. He is also the better worker, who did a far better job than us. He is the better friend. He is the better Son, who perfectly obeyed the Father on our behalf—and on our children's behalf as well. How has your community served you well over the past several weeks and helped you on your journey into gospel fluency? Is there anyone you need to express gratitude to, who has helped you in specific ways?
3. We can be honest and consider the other side of question #1 as well: list as many difficulties as you can think of, of living alongside a close community of people who know Jesus and can press you toward the gospel. Why are those things hard? This week reminds us of the four questions (Who is God? What has he done? Who are we? How should we live?)—how might we need to ask those four questions related to the difficulties of living in community?
4. The first column on the next page lists various relationships that many people exist in. Regardless of how "good" or "bad" each human relationship is for you, the reality of Reading #3 is that Jesus is "the Better" version of that relationship: he fulfills the idealized version of it; he will never let us down as other humans do. In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus proves himself "better." For at least three relationships below, write a few words in the first column describing the human version of your experience. In the second column write a few words that describe Jesus, as he fulfills that role and relationship in an objectively greater way. (Feel free to add other relationships)

As you rest in the fact that Jesus is the better everything and everyone, read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “This is what we need to practice doing together in our groups. We need to keep pointing each other to Jesus and showing how he is the Better everything.” Consider writing out your thoughts and prayers as you reflect.

5. In a sentence, what do you think Jesus is saying to you based on what you have read?
6. Based upon what you believe Jesus is telling you, are there any actions that need to be taken today or this week?

LOOK BACK

After completing your readings and reflections, take a few moments to look back on what has happened: what have you learned? How has God shaped and impacted you? What do you especially want to remember, do, and/or share with your community this week?