

CBC College +

GOSPEL: Kingdom Come

Introduction

“I’m an unbeliever. So are you.” -Jeff Vanderstelt.

We all struggle with unbelief on a daily basis, a battle to believe that God is really good and can really be trusted at all times.

This guide is meant to begin a journey of rediscovering our belief in the gospel as Jesus intended it to be understood. The first goal of this guide is to help us become fluent in the gospel - to help us move from unbelief to belief in any and every area of our lives where it is difficult to believe God’s promises. The second goal which is simply an overflow of the first is to help us speak the truths of Jesus into the everyday moments of life as we become a more gospel-fluent people.

This is meant to be an interactive guide to go through not simply as an individual, but as a family. Just as a family operates, what we put into it, we are going to get out of it; so get ready to lean it and let Jesus remind us of the gospel, remind us how he wants to transform not just our spirituality, but every aspect of our lives.

**Much of the material that is to follow is taken from Jeff Vanderstelt’s books, “Gospel Fluency & Gospel Fluency Handbook.” For more information you can visit saturatetheworld.com and check out the books.*

How to use this guide

Every week, this guide will comprise of three readings and reflections which are meant to immerse us into the culture of the gospel that we might become fluent.

Personal Reflections before Diving in:

1. How would you briefly define the gospel?
2. How would describe being “fluent” in something? In what areas in your life -

whether a language, skill, process, etc. - would you describe yourself being fluent?
How did you become fluent in those areas?

3. Is your experience more that the gospel applies to all of life, or just certain aspects/portions? Whatever your answer, how do you think that belief has come about?

4. Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-11
 - a. What are the elements of “the gospel” Paul lists here?

 - b. Why does he say the gospel is of first importance?

 - c. From this text or otherwise, what do you know of Paul’s life and belief - our unbelief - that would cause him to write that he is “the least of these...unworthy to be called an apostle”?

 - d. How did the good news of the gospel change Paul’s unbelief into belief?

 - e. In what ways does Paul’s example give you hope for your own areas of unbelief? (Belief is the goal of Paul’s final words above!)

5. Slowly read back through the text of 1 Corinthians: as you do, make it your prayer that God would help you remember - and believe and rest in- the truth. Consider writing out your thoughts and prayers as you reflect.

Gospel Fluency

Week 1

This first week lays the foundation for the rest of our journey together as a family. While the readings & reflections contain some theological elements, we encourage you to jump in and be honest and personal since the subjective and experimental elements are equally important parts of this week's groundwork.

Everyone is an Unbeliever

Week 1, Reading 1

Consider the following quote that was mentioned at the beginning of the introduction: "I'm an unbeliever. So are you."

You are probably thinking to yourself why would we create this guide and begin this journey if we do not believe? Most people believe that an individual falls into one of two categories: you are either a believer or unbeliever; you either believe in Jesus Christ and what he has done for us or you don't. Now after countless years in ministry, it has become obvious to us that every one of us, pastors included, are unbelievers in some areas of our lives.

Don't misunderstand me. I do believe there are some who are a part of God's family, and those that are not. There are those who have put all their chips in, given their lives to Jesus and now have new life. They have become new creations and have been given fresh starts because of their faith in Jesus Christ and what he has done for them. And I believe that there are others who are still dead in their sins and not yet truly alive in Christ.

When I say we are all unbelievers, I mean we still have places in our lives where we don't believe God. There are spaces where we don't trust his word and don't believe that what he accomplished in Jesus Christ is enough to deal with our past or what we are facing in this moment or the next. We don't believe. We are unbelievers...

It's very possible that even though you are familiar with Jesus you have yet to believe in Jesus for yourself, for your life. Or maybe you have come to faith in Jesus, but it hasn't really changed what you do daily or how you engage in the everyday stuff of life.

The apostle Paul said to the believers in Jesus in Galatia, "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God [Jesus], who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

They had started something else to make them right instead of Jesus. Paul called them back to an awareness that the good news about Jesus — the gospel — is for all of life; **Everything**. A life of true living is a life full of faith in Jesus, a life of believing in Jesus in the everyday stuff of life. God is intent on making everything about Jesus, because it is *through him* that all things came into existence and it is *in him* that they are sustained.

Every sin and issue that stands in the way of our faithfulness to God's design and Jesus' commands is ultimately a gospel issue. Since all sin is the outcome of unbelief in God, we can learn to apply the truth about him and the good news to every area of our lives. To do this, we will have to learn to trust God and others with our sin and the messiness of our lives.

God also wants to rescue you from unbelief and sanctify you to become like Jesus. *Sanctification* is just a big word for becoming more and more like Jesus through faith in Jesus. You *become* like what you *believe* in. So becoming like Jesus requires believing in Jesus more and more in every part of your life. Sanctification is moving from unbelief in Jesus to belief in Jesus in the everyday stuff of life. You're not there yet, are you? Neither am I. We're still unbeliever who need Jesus more — in more ways and more places.

We all face daily struggles and battles, sometimes from enemies we can't even see. We hear lies and accusations. We struggle with temptations and we are often deceived. We hear words that were spoken over us when we were younger, echoing in our hearts in ways that don't breed life to our souls. We look at our present situations and wish they were better. And many of us face uncertain futures that, without God, cause us to lead lives of anxiety, worry, and fear.

We all need help because we can come up with plenty of reasons not to believe, not to hope, not to trust God's word and work for us. We need the gospel and we need to become a gospel-fluent people. We need to know how to believe and speak the truths of the gospel—the good news of God—in and into the everyday stuff of life. In other words, we need to know how to address the struggles of life and the everyday activities we engage in with what is true of Jesus: the truths of what he accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection, and, as a result, what is true of us as we put our faith in him. The gospel has the power to affect everything in our lives.

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 application they prompted. Make these words a prayer to God.

- Matthew 28:18–20
- John 1:12-13
- 2 Corinthians 5:17
- Ephesians 1:22-23, 2:1-10
- Colossians 1:15-20

Everyone is an Unbeliever

Week 1, Reflection 1

To apply the concepts of this week’s reading 1, into your everyday life, pray that God will open your eyes and guide you, then answer the following questions.

1. Considering the content you read, how would you define unbelief in God?

2. What does unbelief in God produce, in the way we think, talk, and act in our everyday lives?

The first reflection builds a foundation for the rest of the guide, by asking you to be 100% honest with God and with yourself: what struggles and battles; what lies and accusations; what temptations or words from the past, pull you away from trusting in God and believing his gospel? In other words, what are some areas of personal unbelief?.

Here are some examples to help get the ball rolling:

- “I have conversation with my wife, and when she points out something I’ve got to get better at, I hear the word *failure* in my head.”
 - “I try to lead a good conversation about the Bible at the dinner table with my children, but instead of eager beavers on the edges of their seats, I get slouched bodies and rolling eyes. *Bad father.*”
 - “I teach on being a good neighbor, one who knows the stories of the people who live on your street, but since I moved into my current neighborhood a few months ago, I know only the story of failed attempts to meet people. *Hypocrite.*”
3. What are 3-5 situations in your own life and the specific lies/accusations/unbelief

revealed by each?

As you look back at those lies and areas of unbelief, remember—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “God wants to rescue you from unbelief and sanctify you to become like Jesus. *Sanctification* is just a big word for becoming more and more like Jesus through faith in Jesus. You become like what you believe in. So becoming like Jesus requires believing in Jesus more and more in every part of your life. Sanctification is moving from unbelief in Jesus to belief in Jesus in the everyday stuff of life.”

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

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

Give them Jesus

Week 1, Reading 2

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the church in Ephesus, states: “and he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Eph. 4:11-15).

It is God’s intent that every person who comes into a relationship with him through Jesus

Christ eventually grows up into maturity. And maturity looks like Jesus. He is the perfect human, providing an example of what we are meant to be. A mature Christian is one who resembles Jesus Christ in thought, attitude, emotion, and behavior. And one of the most significant ways by which we grow up into maturity is by speaking the truth in love to each other.

Many wrongly believe that speaking the truth in love is actually just speaking hard words to each other with loving hearts: “You have bad breath, but since I love you, I’ve got to speak the truth to you.” “We want you in our group, but you aren’t very kind to others, and as a result, people don’t want to be around you! I’m just speaking the truth in love!” But that is not what Paul is talking about here. Sure, we do need to speak truthfully to one another, and do it with love for each other, but Paul has something more in mind.

We need to read just a few verses further to discover what Paul means. He clarifies the truth that we are to speak to each other in verse 21. He states, “The truth is in Jesus.” “Speaking the truth in love,” for Paul, is shorthand for “speaking what is true of Jesus” to one another—that is, speaking the gospel to one another. Paul knows that if people are going to grow up into Christ in every way, they need to hear the truths of Jesus (the gospel) and learn to speak them into everything.

Too often, when giving people answers to their questions or solutions to their problems, we give them something other than Jesus. If they are struggling with their finances we give them the best budgeting plans we know of. If they are working through relational discord, we teach them communication techniques. If they are struggling with doubt, we challenge them to just believe, promising that all will get better if they do. But we fail if we don’t give them Jesus. Nobody needs another self help method, they need Jesus.

In some cases, we encourage them to read their Bibles or pray, which, of course, are wonderful things. However, if we don’t teach them to meet and know Jesus through their Bible reading and prayer, we are dangerously close to leading them away from Jesus through very good things. This is the heart of idolatry—taking a good thing and making it a “god thing.” We take something that God gave us to direct us to him and love it or depend on it more than him. As a result, we fail to come to him through it.

I have met too many people who love their Bibles yet have no genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. They don’t really know him. They don’t really love him. They don’t worship him. Instead, they worship their Bibles. They are not growing up into maturity because they are not growing up in Christ.

...If we fail to give each other Jesus, we lead each other away from Jesus. We might grow

in Bible knowledge, but not in love for Jesus. We might become the most religious pray-ers of all and yet be talking to the wrong god. We could have our finances in order while our hearts are completely out of order, because we are doing it all for the wrong reasons. We might be great at communication and conflict resolution, but if we are not reconciled with God through Jesus Christ, then our relationships will be shallow and temporary in nature.

Think of it this way—if we are to help one another grow up into Christ in every way, we need to learn how to speak the truths of Christ into everything—every aspect of life, every situation we face, and every issue we address. This is gospel fluency.

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 application they prompted. Make these words a prayer to God.

- John 3:16, 5:39-40
- Romans 5:8, 8:32
- Ephesians 4:1-32

Give them Jesus

Week 1, Reflection 2

1. Considering the content you read, how would you define speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15)?

2. Reading Ephesians 4:11-15 and reflect on the passage and the contrast Paul builds between maturity and childhood, as you answer the following questions
 - The goal of v. 11’s various gifts and perspectives is to help other followers of Jesus grow into maturity. What specific phrases does Paul use to describe the maturity for which the body (God’s Church) is “equipped” and “built up”?

 - Consider each of the “childish” ways Paul lists that people try and grow in Christ: why does each one fail us?

- “Tossed to and fro by the waves”: what are some of life’s waves that can capsize your belief and hinder your growth in Christ?
 - “Every wind of doctrine”: how does mere mental ascent to biblical truths—without stirred affection for the God those truths reveal—hinder your growth in Christ?
 - “Human cunning”: how can trust in yourself, your abilities and your objective view of life, faith, and God, all let you down as you pursue growth in Christ?
 - “Craftiness in deceitful schemes”: what are some ways that you’ve been taught or encouraged to grow in Christ—maybe even by well meaning Christian leaders—other than a deepening belief in the gospel of Jesus? How do those ways fail you?
- Considering Paul’s comment that we receive “truth in love, we are to grow up *in every way*...in Christ”, what are some areas of life and faith that God has gifted you with belief and maturity? What are some areas of life and faith that you feel weaker and prone to disbelief? It’s in these areas that God’s “truth in love” might be most helpful at this point in your personal growth in Christ.
3. Look back at the areas of unbelief you identified in this week’s reflection: In what ways does God provide an answer to each area, specifically through the person and work of Jesus? It’s okay if you don’t fully know; you may ask a friend, or you may spend some time in the Bible or in prayer, asking God to show you truths of the gospel. For areas of gospel truth you do know, write a few words like those mentioned above, “speaking” truth to the specific areas of unbelief you wrote

down:

As you reflect back at the truths you applied to those areas of unbelief, remember—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “Jesus is the true and better human, and everything in life is better if Jesus is brought into it. He has done everything better. He can make everything better. And the truths about who he is and what he has done, when applied to our lives, are always a better answer than anything else. There is good news and great help for absolutely everything in life in the person and work of Jesus Christ.” Consider writing out your thoughts and prayers as you reflect.

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

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

Fluency

Week 1, Reading 3

I have found that most Christians don't really know why we need the gospel, what it is, why it is good news, and what it actually does—at least not enough to apply it to the everyday stuff of life. It's not that they can't know it well, but most aren't being equipped to become gospel-fluent people. Most believers have become gospel-snippet people, who speak gospel catch-phrases. They're speaking gospelish, but not the actual gospel in a way people can hear and believe. They say: “Well, we preached the gospel, but they rejected it. People just have hard hearts and deaf ears”...

I'm not sure that we should just write ourselves an excuse when we preach what we believe is “good news.” It may not be good news to our hearers if we don't take time to listen, understand, and then speak the gospel to the real brokenness and longing of their souls in a way that they can hear—a way that sounds like the good news of Jesus for them and their present situations. We must do better at this.

You gain fluency in a language when you move from merely translating an unfamiliar language into a familiar one to interpreting all of life through that new language. It happens when you can think, feel, and speak in a language. In a sense, the new language becomes the filter through which you perceive the world and help others perceive your world and theirs.

I spent the second semester of my junior year in college in Spain to fulfill my language requirement. Prior to leaving home, I took a crash course in Spanish, learning some basic grammar and common phrases. [Once in Spain] I lived in a home where my host mom knew no English. Some of my professors spoke only Spanish, and the majority of the people in the town where I lived were unable to speak English at all. For the first month, I went to bed exhausted every night. Communication was tiresome. I had to listen very closely to people as they spoke Spanish (way too fast at first), process every word and phrase, translate to English, think about what I wanted to say in English, translate that back to Spanish in my head, and then speak it while trying to remember how to maneuver my mouth to say every word correctly. It was exhausting! So, during this time, I learned to listen a lot and talk very little, because talking was just too tiring.

After a few months of being immersed in constant Spanish for every moment—hearing it everywhere I went, reading it on every sign, listening to radio and television broadcasts in Spanish, and speaking it most of the day—I woke up one morning realizing I had been dreaming in Spanish. Something had changed. It became more normative for me to see something and describe it in my head with Spanish words and ideas... Gradually, I stopped translating every word and phrase because I started thinking in Spanish. I was becoming more fluent.

I believe this is what God wants his people to experience with the gospel. He wants them to be able to translate the world around them and the world inside of them through the lens of the gospel—the truths of God revealed in the person and work of Jesus. Gospel-fluent people think, feel, and perceive everything in light of what has been accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

They see the world differently. They think differently. They feel differently. Most significantly, those who are growing in gospel fluency are experiencing ongoing transformation themselves. They are experiencing ongoing change as the truths of the gospel are brought to bear on their thoughts, beliefs, emotions, and actions, transforming them into greater Christlikeness every day. They are growing up into Christ in every way because they are learning to hear and speak the truths of Jesus Christ into everything.

You do need to receive some formal training in the basics of the gospel, just as learning a language requires knowing the basics of grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure... However, formal training alone does not make one fluent. You become fluent through immersion in a gospel speaking community and through ongoing practice. You have to know it, regularly hear it, and practice proclaiming it.

Language fluency requires immersion into a community of people who speak the language consistently. Gospel fluency requires immersion into a community of people so saturated with the gospel of Jesus Christ that they just can't stop speaking the truths of Jesus wherever they go and in whatever situations they find themselves in.

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 application they prompted. Make these words a prayer to God.

- 1 Cor. 1:18, 2:14
- Eph. 1:22-23, 4:15
- Colossians 1:15-20

Fluency

Week 1, Reflection 3

1. Considering all the content you've read this week, how would you define "gospel fluency"?

2. Considering reading 3, what are some examples of "gospelish" you've experienced in your own life? In what ways are they different than, and insufficient for, true "gospel immersion"?

"God wants his people to be able to translate the world around them and the world inside of them through the lens of the gospel—the truths of God revealed in the person

and work of Jesus. Gospel-fluent people think, feel, and perceive everything in light of what has been accomplished in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

“They see the world differently. They think differently. They feel differently.

“When they are listening to people, they are thinking: ‘How is this in line with the truths of the gospel? What about Jesus and his work might be good news to this person today? How can I bring the hope of the gospel to bear on this life or situation so this person might experience salvation and Jesus will be glorified?’”

3. The Apostle Paul encourages followers of Jesus to “walk in wisdom toward outsiders [those who aren’t followers of Jesus], making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Col. 4:5-6). Consider this poignant charge, on a few different levels:
 - Paul first encourages a life in which followers of Jesus live among those who aren’t followers of Jesus. List the names of people in your life who don’t follow Jesus, who you’d consider close friends.

 - What are some of the qualities of actual salt, that Paul applies to our speaking with those who don’t follow Jesus? (It may be helpful to answer in light of the posture Peter calls Christians to, in 1 Peter 3:15-16)

 - Answering each person connotes personalization. It means there is no single right way to speak the truth of the gospel, whether to yourself, to other Christians, or to those who don’t follow Jesus - what does *good news* sound like to that individual?
 - Among the countless beautiful truths seen in the gospel, which was/were most impactful in the way that God made the gospel real to you in your salvation?

 - List some of the truths of the gospel you think might be most impacting a) to a few close friends in your Christian community, and

b) to the friends you listed above, who don't yet believe in Jesus

As you look back at your first steps into seeing the world through the lens of the gospel, remember—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “You gain fluency in a language when you move from merely translating an unfamiliar language into a familiar one to interpreting all of life through that new language. It happens when you can think, feel, and speak in a language. In a sense, the new language becomes the filter through which you perceive the world and help others perceive your world and theirs.” Consider writing out your thoughts and prayers as you reflect on this truth.

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

5. 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?

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GOSPEL: Kingdom Come

The Gospel

Week 2

“If last week’s content laid the foundation for the rest of the book, this week is your 101 class: like learning any new language, you’ll work through the A, B, C’s; you’ll build out a few charts; and you’ll practice, practice, practice. In these ways, this week may be the most technical of the entire Handbook, but purposefully so: if you don’t get the basic “grammar” down, you’ll never learn the language.

The True Story

Week 2, Reading 1

All of us are living our lives under a dominant story. We perceive the world and human interactions through the stories we know and believe. For most of us, that is our story of origin, our family story. This is a much smaller story inside the larger one, and often it leads us to wrong perceptions of God, ourselves, others, and the world around us. In some cases, we believe outright lies.

But there is a true story. It’s the story of God found in the Bible. It’s the story that redeems, heals, and completes our personal stories—the smaller stories within the true story. We will talk about the makeup of the gospel (like vocabulary) and how it has meaning for our lives (like grammar), but we first need to get the overarching story, because it is the true story that informs the meaning of the gospel.

Creation

“In the beginning God . . .” (Gen. 1: 1). That is how the story begins—with God. God eternally existed in community—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—one God in three persons, existing in perfect unity. Nothing else existed. In the beginning, God created by his word. He created the heavens and the earth out of nothing.

He spoke and it all came into being. God's word brought about God's work. The questions "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" are not meant to be answered outside of what God says and what God does. Before we go any further, ask yourself: "Who or what do I look to—trust in, depend upon—for my worth?"

God called the man to trust him and obey him: "Believe who I say you are. Trust in what I've done to make you who you are. And as a result, do what I command"... [Genesis 1 and 2 displays a picture of perfect Creation]: a mandate to love, work, and rule in such a way as to show all of creation what God is like. A good and beautiful garden. A man and woman living in harmonious and pure love, naked and unashamed, daily enjoying each other, working and ruling over creation, and interacting with God in their midst. It was all very good! But that was about to change.

Fall

They didn't believe. They didn't trust God's word and work. The problem was unbelief. The action was sin. The result was death. The Serpent, the Devil, convinced the woman that God's word was a lie and his work was not good: "God knows you aren't as good as you could be. He knows that if you just took matters into your own hands, you would be much better. You can be like God if you just eat the fruit of the tree he told you not to eat of." She believed the lie and ate the fruit, then she gave some to her husband, and he ate too.

God had told them they were very good—they were made in his image, after his likeness. But they didn't believe him. Instead, they believed the Devil, the master of lies. God had told them they would surely die if they ate the fruit. But they didn't believe him. Instead, they believed the lie of the Devil, that they wouldn't die. As a result of their rebellion, sin entered the world and brought about death and destruction. The wages of sin is death—spiritual, relational, and physical. Sinful rebellion produces brokenness, suffering, and death. This is because rebellion against God is rebellion against the giver of life. And this rebellion began and continues to go on because of unbelief in the truthfulness of God's word and the sufficiency of his work.

Redemption

Thankfully, the story doesn't end with destruction and death. Even as the man and woman were being informed about the curse of sin and its effects on their lives and relationships, God also promised to put an end to the Serpent and the rebellion he had started. Through Eve's offspring, Satan would eventually be crushed (Gen. 3: 15). God would have the final word. He would save us from our sin. He would rescue us from

Satan. He would put death to death. His word is true and his work is sufficient.

[Adam and Eve had failed. As the Bible unfolds, generation after generation of God's people fail too.] God's plan, however, did not. He would still fulfill his word. Through the offspring, the world would be blessed. Another son—the true Son of God—would accomplish it. Jesus is that Son. Jesus came as the true and better Adam, the true and better Abraham, and the true and better Israel. God's full and final redemption to rescue us from slavery to sin and Satan came in the form of a baby. He is God's redemption plan. He always was—even before the creation of the world.

New Creation

Jesus was raised with a glorified body. He took on our sin at the cross, where he paid for it with his blood and destroyed its power. He overcame death and was given new life. And in his glorified, sinless body that can no longer be taken down by Satan, sin, or death, he has been given all authority in heaven and earth. He is the new and better Adam over a new and better creation. The church is Jesus' bride. We are God's new-creation people. All those who believe in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection go from having Adam as their authority and life source to having Jesus as the new Adam. Adam sinned, and everyone born since then was born into sin as a result. Everyone except Jesus.

Everything has changed. Our identity and our purpose, as well as our understanding of the truths of God, have completely changed. We also have a future hope. The new creation is not just personal but cosmic. God will bring about a new heaven and new earth, which we will get to live in and enjoy forever. The true image of God, Jesus, will light up that world with his glory, and we also, with renewed resurrection bodies, will reflect God as redeemed, recreated, and resurrected image bearers, transformed by the glory of Christ. This is our story.

This is the story. This is the true and better story that can redeem and make new every other story. You want to change a culture? Give them a new story. Language will follow.

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

The True Story

Week 2, Reflection 1

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, what are the four key movements in the Story of God?

2. Think through various realities in life: from the Scriptures to personal experience, from the arts to nature, from history to your relationships, what are some ways you see, hear, and experience this story being re-told, over and over again, in everyday life?

3. Zoom in a bit: a) In the first column below, write some of the ways that each movement of the Story of God can display and remind us of God's hope and design for his people. b) In the second column, write some of the ways that each movement can point us specifically toward Jesus:

	Question	Objective/Biblical Answer	Area of Disbelief	Possible "False"
Creation				
Fall				
Redemption				

New Creation				
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4. The image of a father displays the various ways that our own stories define or redefine our worldviews. “All of us are living our lives under a dominant story. We perceive the world and human interactions through the stories we know and believe. For most of us, that is our story of origin, our family story. This is a much smaller story inside the larger one, and often it leads us to wrong perceptions of God, ourselves, others, and the world around us. In some cases, we believe outright lies.”

If we don’t view life through the lens of God’s Story, we view it in light of a lesser story. In the first column below, we’ve listed the dominant questions asked by each movement of God’s story. In the second column, we’ve listed some of the objective, biblical answers to those questions which come when God’s Story is our dominant story. In the third column, re-write a few of the areas of disbelief you struggle with, that you wrote down in Week 1*. In the final column, consider this week’s Reading #1 and write down one or two “other answers” those areas of disbelief may lead you to answer these questions, and a one-or two-word summary of the dominant story you may be believing more than God’s Story.

**NOTE: If you didn’t pick areas in Week 1, or if it would help you to start with less personal areas of disbelief, choose some common areas of disbelief in peoples’ everyday lives. Here are a few starting points: “We are Jesus’s people, who speak the truths of Jesus into the everyday stuff of life. Speak the truths of Jesus to rightly order our budgets. Speak the truths of Jesus for finding a spouse. Speak the truths of Jesus for how we respond to our employers or employees. Speak the truths of Jesus for how we parent our children. Speak the truths of Jesus into everything.”*

	Question	Objective/Biblical Answer	Area of Disbelief
Creation	Where is my Identity? What do I look to, trust in, depend on, for my worth?	Child of God, created in his image; my identity is in Christ alone; I am reliant/dependent on him	

Fall	What is Wrong? What is the real problem/ issue?	Sin Rejection of God Brokenness that's part of living in a fallen world	
Redemption	What can fix this? What will make this right?	Jesus	
New Creation	Where is hope? In what is my confidence found?	God's promises shown throughout history Eternity/Jesus' return	

We live as the redeemed people of God, becoming more and more like Jesus every day so that more and more people come to him through our visible and verbal testimony. This is our story. This is the story. This is the true and better story that can redeem and make new every other story.” Consider writing out your thoughts and prayers as you reflect on this truth."

6. In a sentence, what do you think Jesus is saying to you based on what you have read? Where have you walked in unbelief today?

7. Based upon what you believe Jesus is telling you, are there any actions that need to be taken today or this week? What can you do to begin walking in belief?

Power for Salvation

Week 2, Reading 2

When people say they are saved, what do they mean? Think of this chapter as a vocabulary lesson. To become fluent in any language, you must develop your vocabulary. So let's delve into the aspects of the gospel that are expressed in the person and work of Jesus more fully.

Belief in the gospel is not a one-time decision or a conviction that we need salvation only for our past lives and future afterlives. Belief in the gospel is an ongoing expression of our ongoing need for Jesus. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1: 16). What do we believe? What are we putting our faith in?

Jesus' life represents both the righteousness of God in human form and the perfect fulfillment of the standard of righteousness on behalf of humanity. If you want to know what the righteousness of God looks like, you look at Jesus' life, and if you want to be declared righteous by God, you need to have faith in how Jesus lived on your behalf, not just in how he died. We all needed a new human to give birth to a new humanity—a perfect man who is also the true image of God, fully displaying what God is like by living a fully submitted and obedient life before God. Jesus is that man. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1: 15). We need more than the humble life of Christ. We also need the victorious rule and ministry of Christ to overcome Satan's schemes, bring healing and restoration to the brokenness that sin produces, and provide reconciliation between God and man.

Jesus was betrayed, arrested, wrongly accused, and crucified. The perfect Son of God, the righteousness of God, the one who knew no sin, became sin at the cross so that we might become the righteousness of God in him. We needed a perfect substitute—one without sin, fully pleasing to God—who would die in our place. The Bible says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6: 23). Our sin, our rebellion, every way in which we fall short of the glory of God, were put on Jesus at the cross. His perfect life was exchanged for our life of sin. Jesus died for our sins. He took our sins on himself—on his real physical, human body—and then died for them. Our sins were buried with Jesus. They were not just removed and put in another place. They were destroyed by his death. If your faith is in Jesus, your sins, past, present, and future, were terminated through Jesus' death.

[Jesus] was raised on the third day and appeared to more than five hundred people. He was raised with a glorified body, one without sin. This was a body for the new creation. The gospel doesn't just bring about forgiveness of sins and save us from hell. The gospel of Jesus Christ empowers us to live a whole new life today by the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead. After Jesus rose from the dead, he ascended to the right hand of God the Father, where he is now making intercession on our behalf. He is continually praying for us, willing to empower us by his Spirit in us, and speaking a better word over us than Satan, sin, or our past experiences speak.

After Jesus' resurrection and ascension, God sent his Spirit to wake us up from spiritual death, convict us of our sin, make the truths of the gospel clear to our hearts, grant us repentance and faith, and bring about new life as a result. By his Spirit, we are born again from the dead, spiritually speaking. We become new creations in Christ. Each of us has a new nature, a new identity, and a new purpose. And the Spirit in those who believe is a sign of all of this. The Spirit is also the means by which we have the power to live entirely new and different lives. He is the sign that we are forgiven and cleansed, changed and made new, chosen and adopted by God—he wants us, he chose us, he changed us, he empowers us, and he loves us.

All of this is a gift. It is all by grace. “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast (Eph. 2: 8–9).

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 application they prompted. Make these words a prayer to God.

- Mark 1:9-11
- Romans 1:16-17, 3:21-26, 8:9-17
- 1 Corinthians 15:1-6, 15:20-23
- 2 Corinthians 5:16-21
- Philippians 2:6-8

Power for Salvation

Week 1, Reflection 2

1. Considering the content you read, define “salvation”, and explain what it is Christians believe we're saved from?

2. What stands out to you, or particularly strikes you, as you consider the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus?

3. In your own words, explain why each following element matters in general, and why each is vital to your understanding of the concept of salvation?

- Jesus' life (think through various biblical truths regarding Jesus' life on earth, and especially consider Jesus' obedience, sinlessness, baptism, humility Spirit-ledness, and kingship)

- Jesus' death (think through various biblical truths regarding Jesus' death, and especially consider the substitution, atonement, forgiveness, and propitiation offered through his death)

- Jesus' resurrection (think through various biblical truths regarding Jesus' resurrection, and especially his bodily resurrection, his ascension, and his sending of God the Spirit)

4. "Jesus died in our place to save us from the wrath of God and the penalty of sin, which is spiritual, relational, and physical death. He saves us from spiritual death and makes us alive in Christ. He atones for our guilt and removes our shame. He reconciles us to God so that we can also be reconciled to one another. And ultimately, though our bodies will fail and die, he will give us glorified resurrection bodies that will live forever."

Look back at the "possible false answers/ stories" you wrote down in Reflection #1. In essence, if we're finding our answers in any place but God—and the objective, biblical answers He gives to our questions—we're pursuing a false savior. Take some time and compare and contrast the possible false answers you wrote earlier this week to the implications of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection you wrote in today's Reflection. Where does each story find its power? What does each story promise? Historically, how has each proven to fulfill promises or let you down? Etc.

Potential Power in Other Stories	Actual Power in Jesus (Life/Death/Resurrection)

As you consider the power of Jesus’ life death, and resurrection, and the power found therein for salvation and growth, end with—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: **“The gospel is the good news of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, who is King. The gospel saves and brings God’s rule into our lives (his kingdom) in order to bring the good news of his power into the world. The gospel changes us from the inside out and spreads through our lives and lips to the world by his Spirit. This is the gospel that is the power of God for salvation to all who believe.”** Consider writing out your thoughts and prayers as you reflect on this truth.

6. In a sentence, what do you think Jesus is saying to you based on what you have read? Where have you walked in Unbelief?

7. Based upon what you believe Jesus is telling you, are there any actions that need to be taken today or this week? What can you do to begin walking in belief?

What's Faith Got to Do with It?

Week 2, Reading 3

We all live by faith in someone or something. And everything that we are and do is a result of what we believe. Our behaviors are the tangible expression of our beliefs. It is by grace you have been saved through faith... A gospel-fluent community that is growing in faith in the gospel is evidenced by people confessing their sins to one another regularly... A gospel-fluent community that is growing in confidence that Jesus fully atoned for our sins extends grace and forgiveness to one another. It is by grace—the gift of God in Jesus—that you are saved from the consequences and control of sin. And it is through faith—belief in Jesus' work on our behalf. Every sinful attitude, motive, thought, or action is a result of unbelief in God's word and work.

Paul teaches in Romans 1: 18–32 that we all, like Adam and Eve and all their descendants, have exchanged the truth of God for a lie and have worshiped the creation instead of the Creator. We put our faith in the things God has made or the things we can do instead of God. God gives us over to our wrong belief and lets it produce in us what all idolatry produces—sin, brokenness, perversion, and pain. He does this so that we will see the wretchedness of sin and turn back to him as the one who forgives our sin, cleanses us from unrighteousness, and heals our brokenness.

The gospel is not just the power of God to save, but also the revelation of God that we need to be saved and that the only one who can save us is Jesus. The Spirit's job is to reveal to us our unbelief, grant us repentance, and lead us to know and believe in Jesus. That is the work we do. We turn from unbelief to belief in Jesus. Unbelief can take several forms: 1) we don't believe because we lack the truth about God; 2) we believe lies about God; 3) we fail to put our faith in what we know to be true of God; 4) we've been wounded and need healing.

First, many don't know who God really is. They don't know what he is like or what he has done for us. A person can't believe in God if he or she is unaware of the truths about God. There is no salvation—no transformation—apart from knowing God. One of the reasons Jesus came—and one of the reasons why the gospel is such good news—was to reveal the truth about God and to bring us into relationship with him. In the gospel, we have the revelation of what God is like and what God has done. God is revealed through Jesus' life, Jesus' ministry, Jesus' death, and Jesus' resurrection. What is your God like? What do you believe about God? Growing in gospel fluency requires growing in our knowledge of God

as he is revealed in and through Jesus Christ.

Second, in some cases, our unbelief involves believing lies about God. Satan deceived Adam and Eve into believing lies about God, and we regularly buy into his lies as well. We might know certain truths about God, but fail to believe those truths because we are deceived into believing lies. Jesus came to dispel the lies. Regularly, we hear Jesus say, “Truly, truly I say . . .” He is replacing the lies we believe with the truths of God. Not only does he proclaim those truths verbally, but he is also the ultimate example and display of those truths. Growing in gospel fluency requires regularly replacing lies we have believed with the truths of God revealed in Jesus. One of the reasons God sent his Spirit to us is to reveal the lies and help us believe the truth about God. I regularly invite God’s Spirit to do this in my life. You can too.

Third, we often say we believe something to be true about God, but our lives show that we don’t actually believe it. We know a truth we should believe, but in actuality, we don’t. For instance, we profess belief in a God who forgives our sins through faith in the death of Jesus, but we continue to believe we need to behave better in order to make up for what we’ve done. When we do this, we are living in unbelief in the gospel. The gospel is the power of God to save us not only because our sin of unbelief is forgiven through Jesus’ death on the cross, but also because in the gospel we come to know and believe the liberating truths of God revealed in Jesus Christ. And through believing those truths, the lies we’ve believed are dispelled and the truth sets us free to really live.

Finally, for some of us, disbelief isn’t primarily an issue of knowing, believing, or repenting. Some of us struggle with the things of God because we’ve been wounded, and healing is needed as we consider what faith looks like. In the gospel, God offers people forgiveness, eternity, adoption, and many other blessings. But the gospel also promises that “by his wounds you have been healed” (1 Peter 2: 24). Without faith, we can often operate out of our flesh. Without healing, we can easily operate out of our brokenness. That brokenness might drive us toward sinful thoughts and behaviors. If this theme resonates with you, know that whatever happened—whatever burden you’re carrying and whatever pain you’ve experienced—Jesus is sufficient. As one who was despised and rejected, mocked, beaten, and killed, there is no wound so deep that Jesus cannot relate; there is no pain so large that God cannot heal; there is no heart so broken that the Spirit cannot help and comfort. God is good, and he extends healing to you.

So what do you believe? The gospel won’t fluently come out of you to others unless it’s changed you first.

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.

- John 6: 28-29
- John 14: 1-14
- Romans 1: 18-32
- Romans 3: 22-25
- Col. 1: 15-19
- Eph. 2: 1-10
- James 2: 17

What's Faith Got to Do With It?

Week 2, Reflection 3

1. Considering the content you read, define "faith," specifically as it relates to God.

2. "Tim Chester, in his book *You Can Change*, asserts that underlying every sinful behavior and negative emotion is a failure to believe a truth about God. He then suggests four liberating truths as a good diagnostic tool for addressing sin in our lives:

- God is great—so we do not have to be in control.
- God is glorious—so we do not have to fear others.
- God is good—so we do not have to look elsewhere.
- God is gracious—so we do not have to prove ourselves.

"Let's take the first as an example: If we believe God is great—that he is in control—then we can trust him and be free from the need to take control or manipulate situations. On the other hand, if we feel anxious or have an urge to take control, it is because we have believed the lie that God is not great—that he's not really powerful and in control—so we have to be. In the gospel, we see just how great God is as he overcomes every enemy we face, including death.

“Jesus came to dispel the lies. Regularly, we hear Jesus say, ‘Truly, truly I say . . .’ He is replacing the lies we believe with the truths of God. Not only does he proclaim those truths verbally, but he is also the ultimate example and display of those truths.”

Looking back at the areas of unbelief you’ve been wrestling with since Week 1, and the various readings and reflections, is there one “theme” that seems to be central to your difficulty? If you can, identify which of the four truths is, in general, the most difficult for you to regularly believe about God. (It’s OK if there’s more than one)

3. “Unbelief can take several forms: 1) we don’t believe because we lack the truth about God (we don’t know what God is like or what he has done for us); 2) we believe lies about God (our unbelief involves believing lies about God); or 3) we fail to put our faith in what we know to be true of God (we believe something to be true about God, but our lives show that we don’t actually believe it).”

Look back at the areas of unbelief you’ve been working through over these past couple weeks. For each one, can you identify one of these three forms as the source of your unbelief? Write a few of the areas of unbelief, and put a check in the box (or boxes) you feel might be its source. In preparation for your Group Discussion, use the right column to prayerfully write any questions or thoughts it might be helpful to work through when you meet your community this week.

Area of Unbelief	Source?	Question/Notes To Discuss
	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know <input type="checkbox"/> Believe Lies <input type="checkbox"/> Life Doesn't Display Belief	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know <input type="checkbox"/> Believe Lies <input type="checkbox"/> Life Doesn't Display Belief	

	<p>Don't Know</p> <p>Believe Lies</p> <p>Life Doesn't Display Belief</p>	
	<p>Don't Know</p> <p>Believe Lies</p> <p>Life Doesn't Display Belief</p>	

As this week ends, and before our Handbook takes a more practical turn, we pause again to consider the answer to our every unbelief: “grace through faith” in the person and work of Jesus Christ*. That’s the power of the gospel; that’s the climax of God’s true, best story. Read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “The gospel is the power of God to save us not only because our sin of unbelief is forgiven through Jesus’ death on the cross, but also because in the gospel we come to know and believe the liberating truths of God revealed in Jesus Christ. And through believing those truths, the lies we’ve believed are dispelled and the truth sets us free to really live.” 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? Where have you walked in unbelief?

6. Based upon what you believe Jesus is telling you, are there any actions that need to be taken today or this week? What can you do to begin walking in belief?

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?

CBC College +

GOSPEL: Kingdom Come

The Gospel in My Heart

Part 1

Week 3

Weeks 1 and 2 of our journey together focused on the foundation and basics of gospel fluency. Without understanding unbelief itself, and without knowing the Story of God and the power of the gospel, any hope of these concepts becoming real in our lives would be lost. The rest of the Handbook considers how to apply the concepts of Weeks 1 and 2 to ourselves (Weeks 3 and 4), as a community (Weeks 5 and 6), and as it relates to others (Weeks 7 and 8).

As you might expect from this week's title, "The Gospel in Me" asks you to be introspective: all three Week 3 Readings and Reflections are meant to be "diagnostic"—helping you define specific areas of need for the gospel. Week 4 will focus more on the "remedy," helping give you specific ways to remind yourself of the truths of the gospel, as you grow increasingly fluent over time.

Good News to Me

Week 3, Reading 1

I'm often asked why it's so hard for many people to talk to others about Jesus... I have come to believe that the main reason people don't talk about Jesus isn't that they lack training. I am convinced it is that they lack love. People need heart change—not just once, but over and over again, because their love grows cold. People need to be deeply affected by the incredible news of Jesus on a daily basis. What affects you greatly creates in you great affections. And those affections lead you to express verbally and physically what you love most, because you talk about what you love. Furthermore, you love what you talk about. And we all talk about what most affects us—what most powerfully works to affect change in our lives. Jesus said that it is out of the overflow of the heart that the

mouth speaks (Luke 6: 45). What comes out of your heart displays what's in it and what has captured it.

Do you talk about Jesus? Has he captured your heart? Do you love him? When you come to know and experience the love God has for us in Jesus; when you realize that God loved us so much that he was willing to suffer and die for our sins, even though we were his enemies; when you meet Jesus and experience him pouring out his Spirit into your heart, filling you with himself and his love, you can't contain it. You have to talk about it! The gospel is incredible! The word gospel literally means "good news." Is it good news to you?

What do you get most excited about? What has most captured your affections? Be honest for a moment. What is it? Who is it? And why has it or he or she captured your heart? And if your affections have been captured, how have you been affected? What do you do in light of your heart being captured?

Most importantly, has Jesus captured your affections? Why or why not? Are you impressed with him? It will show, you know. If he has captured your affections, you will not be able to stop talking about him.

Another reason I talk about Jesus is that I've found you not only talk about what you love, but you also love what you talk about. Sometimes our love grows cold. Our hearts lose affection. We forget what we have, so we drift from what we love.

If you lack love for Jesus and want your love for him to grow, start talking about how amazing he is. Talk to yourself about him. By the way, you won't be alone in this venture because he sent his Spirit to tell you what is true, good, and amazing about Jesus. The Holy Spirit is the best at bragging on Jesus because he has known him forever and is more impressed with him than anyone. Read the Gospels and watch him closely. I would encourage you to read at least one Gospel a year to regularly reacquaint yourself with the love of your life. As you read, slow down and pay attention to his actions and words. Observe how well and how much he loves. Watch for his kindness and gentleness. Don't miss his gracious love for the broken, the weary, and the sinful.

Then, as the Spirit shows you more about Jesus, talk about what you see and learn. Talk to your roommate about how amazing Jesus is. Tell your friends. Speak with your children about him. The more you do, the more you will love him. And the more you love him, the more you will want to talk about him. Never forget how he loved you first... Regularly go back to that day when his love for you first showed up on the front porch of your heart. Don't forget what it was like when you were first captured by his affection for you. In your thoughts, go back regularly to what life was like without Jesus, then

remember how he changed your life forever. If that has not yet happened to you, if your affections have not yet been captured by Jesus Christ, I pray that will change for you. As it does, tell others about his love. You talk about what you love and you love what you talk about.

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.

- Luke 6: 45
- John 3: 17-21
- 1 John 4: 7-21
- Revelation 2: 2-7

Good News to Me

Week 3, Reflection 1

To apply the concepts of this week's reading 1, into your everyday life, pray that God will open your eyes and guide you, then answer the following questions.

1. Considering the content you read, how would you define "love." Additionally, explain why the gospel is regularly called "good news."

2. "What do you get most excited about? What has most captured your affections? Be honest for a moment. What is it? Who is it? And why has it or he or she captured your heart? And if your affections have been captured, how have you been affected? What do you do in light of your heart being captured? Most importantly, has Jesus captured your affections? Why or why not? Are you impressed with him? It will show, you know. If he has captured your affections, you will not be able to stop talking about him."

These questions are similar to those that respected counselor Dr. David Powlison asks in his article, "X-Ray Questions." Originally published in 1999, "each question circles around the same basic issue: Who or what is your functional God/ god? Many of the questions simply derive from the verbs that relate you to God: love, trust, fear, hope, seek, obey, take refuge, and the like. Each verb holds out a lamp to guide us to Him who is way,

truth, and life. But each verb also may be turned into a question, holding up a mirror to show us where we stray. Each question comes at the same general question. In individual situations –different times, places, people—one or another may be more appropriate and helpful. Different ways of formulating the motivation question will ring the bells of different people.” 3 Powlison’s article includes 35 questions; we’ve included 10 below. Choose at least five questions to answer honestly, and please don’t pretend that your answer to each one is truthfully “Jesus.”

- What do you want, desire, crave, lust and wish for? What desires do you serve and obey?
- What do you seek, aim for, pursue? What are your goals and expectations?
- What do you fear? What do you want? What do you tend to worry about?
- Where do you find refuge, safety, comfort, escape, pleasure, security?
- What or who do you trust?
- On your deathbed, what would sum up your life as worthwhile? What gives your life meaning?
- Whose victory or success would make your life happy? How do you define victory and success?
- What do you see as your rights? What do you feel entitled to?
- How do you spend your time? Who are your priorities?
- What are your characteristic fantasies, either pleasurable or fearful? Daydreams? What do your night dreams revolve around?

3. Think about the things you answered in Question #2: write a few of them in the left column below. In the middle column, write a few of the reasons that thing is so precious to you. Finally, in the right column, compare each one to Jesus: are you more impressed with, excited about, and affectionate toward that thing/ person, or toward Jesus? Why do you think that is?

What you Love	Why you Love it	Love for that vs. Love for Jesus
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4. What are some of the things that most amaze you, stir your affections for, and excite you about Jesus? What is about who he is, what he’s done in his life, death, and resurrection, that is especially “good news” to you right now? Write down at least five*, and pursue ways in the next few days to share each with someone else—maybe with someone who follows Jesus and someone who doesn’t.

**If this is new to you and you cannot think of specific things you love about Jesus: your close community has committed together to help each other as you journey together through this Handbook; be honest with them and ask them to help you with this, by remembering your story and pointing out things in your life they think may help stir your affections and excitement for Jesus.*

As you ponder the person and work of Jesus, and your love for him compared to other things, read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “You will talk about [Jesus] if you love him. If you don’t, start talking about him, what’s he’s done, and what he’s done for you, and you will love love. And you’ll begin to see more and more clearly how wonderful his gospel is and how powerfully it works. As a result, you will talk about Jesus more and more. He is the best news there is.” 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?

We Talk About What Works

Week 3, Reading 2

We like to talk about what is impressive. We talk about what changes us. We talk about what works. We were created by God to work, and in Christ Jesus, we were re-created for good works that God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph. 2: 10). This is why we talk about what works. We like things to work. And when things work well, we talk about that. We also talk about what does not work for the same reason.

Now, stop and think again about what you talk about. What works in your life. What doesn't work. The gospel works, and it addresses what doesn't work.

It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Through the gospel, God forgives, heals, fills you with love and power, sets you free, and enables you to live an altogether different life. You know this if you believe the gospel, because if you believe it, you know how well it works. The gospel of Jesus Christ changes you. And when it changes you, you talk about it.

If we are going to be fluent in the gospel, we need to stop and reflect on how the gospel works in our lives. What has God done in you? How has he changed you? How is he at work in you right now? Maybe you currently need the power of the gospel at work in your life. What work do you need God to do in you today? How might the gospel work to address that? It's possible you haven't yet experienced God's power to save you. Or maybe it's been a while since you have walked in the power of the gospel to save you today. For this reason, I decided to place this section, "The Gospel in Me," before the next one, "The Gospel with Us." You won't be fluent in the gospel if the gospel isn't really good news to you yet.

We have a far greater story to tell than [any other story on earth]. We were enemies of God, hopeless and helpless, enslaved to sin and Satan, being crushed daily by his destructive blows. For hundreds of years, the world needed a Savior. We needed to be set

free, forgiven, and restored. Jesus came, and it did not look good. He was from Nazareth, for goodness' sake! But he lived the life we couldn't. He went "undefeated" [by sin and death] for thirty-three years. Then, on the cross, it looked like it was over—and it was. But it wasn't a victory for evil. Jesus won as he rose again on the third day! Sin was paid for, Satan was crushed, and death was dealt a deathblow. Jesus made a public spectacle of Satan, sin, and death, and overcame for us.

Now we are free, forgiven, loved, and more than conquerors! Do you believe it? Do you love it? Do you love him? If so, tell the world! Tell your community. Tell your friends. Tell your spouse. Tell your children. Tell your neighbor. Tell your boss. Tell your coworkers. Tell your enemies. Tell them every day. Tell everyone that love has come to town and defeated death, hatred, sickness, and sorrow!

It's good news! It's great news! It's the gospel of Jesus Christ!

It starts in you and spills out of your heart through your mouth to the world, for it's out of the overflow of your heart that your mouth speaks. You will talk about him if you love him. If you don't, start talking about him, what's he's done, and what he's done for you, and you will love him. And you'll begin to see more and more clearly how wonderful his gospel is and how powerfully it works. As a result, you will talk about Jesus more and more.

He is the best news there is.

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.

- Matthew 27: 32–28: 20
- Luke 23: 26–24: 53
- Romans 1: 16–17
- Ephesians 2: 1–10

We Talk About What Works

Week 3, Reflection 2

1. "We like things to work. And when things work well, we talk about what does not work for the same reason. Now, stop and think again about what you talk about.

What works in your life? What doesn't work?"

2. Look back at the things you wrote down in your answers to Powlison's "X-Ray" questions in reflection #1. How many of your answers stem from believing that your answer produces or provides something for you, or otherwise somehow "works"?

3. The Bible says that God created the world, and that before sin, the world and everything in it was good. Everything God created worshiped and glorified Him; everything on earth saw God as the one who produces anything good, provides the earth with everything good. In other words, God was the ultimate "Worker" in His creation. In previous weeks, we've seen this theme through a couple different lenses: in the Story of God, sin and brokenness are the ultimate, objective problems with the world—and the solution is Jesus. The "4 G statements (God is Good, Glorious, Great, and Gracious) are poignant because they remind us of truths in the midst of believing lies. In other words, "the gospel works, and it addresses what doesn't work." But if we're fully honest at times it's just so hard to believe that the gospel is the solution to every problem, and that God is the pinnacle of goodness, glory, greatness, and grace in our lives! In chapter 9 of Mark's gospel, a distraught father of a demon-possessed boy asking Jesus to heal his son declares, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (V.24) In his head He knew Jesus was the answer, but in his heart he could not believe it. When you and I find ourselves in the same position, we'll be glad to know that Jesus did not unload the wrath of God on this man; instead, he not only healed the boy, but literally raised him from the dead! This question may be difficult, but we'll ask you to be honest: prayerfully ask God to show you reasons you see other things "working" better than him, and reasons you don't think He "works" in your life. Write down your answers:

4. Whether Question #3 was easy or difficult for you, prayerfully ask God to help you rightly consider the following. Write down a few thoughts for each:
 - What has God done in you? How has he changed you? How is he at work in you right now?
 - What work do you need God to do in you today? How might the gospel

work to address that?

As you ponder the person and work of Jesus, and your love for him compared to other things, read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “You will talk about [Jesus] if you love him. If you don’t, start talking about him, what’s he’s done, and what he’s done for you, and you will love love. And you’ll begin to see more and more clearly how wonderful his gospel is and how powerfully it works. As a result, you will talk about Jesus more and more. He is the best news there is.” 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?

Capturing and Examining our Thoughts

Week 3, Reading 3

We are at war! Bullets are flying. Bombs are dropping. The enemy is closing in. Destruction is all around. There are casualties everywhere. But in our war, you can’t see any of this. Well, you can see the effects of it all over the place in the brokenness, chaos, and pain around us, but this war is invisible.

We are not fighting each other. Our war is not against “flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6: 12). And we are not fighting with physical weapons. We fight what is unseen with weapons that are not wielded by human hands. Our battle is spiritual, and so are the weapons we use. The gospel is the power of God for salvation. And our enemies are the Devil, the world, and the flesh.

The Devil screams out: “God is evil. I hate him and I will do everything to oppose him and destroy what he has made.” The world screams out: “This world is best without God, and you are best when it’s all about you.” And the flesh screams out: “I don’t need God because I am god. It’s all about me and it’s all dependent upon me.”

So what are we to do in this battle? The Bible tells us to 1) take our thoughts captive and examine them, 2) bring them into submission, 3) consider the fruit, and then 4) fight with gospel truths. Week 4 gets into the second, third, and fourth steps; for now, we focus on the first.

What is going through your mind? What do you regularly hear spoken in your head? What are you believing about God, his work in Jesus, others, yourself, and what you should do? This is why it is so important to know the gospel, rehearse it in our minds, and remember it. We cannot defeat the enemies of our souls without becoming more gospel-fluent. And part of growing in gospel fluency is learning how to recognize what is not from God—what is not in line with the truths of the gospel.

So how do you know if what you’re thinking lines up with what is true in the gospel? Well, remember that the gospel literally means “good news.” So ask yourself: “Is this good news that I’m thinking? Is it tearing God down or lifting him up? Is it tearing others down or building them up? Is it tearing me down or encouraging, exhorting, or equipping me?” The enemy of our souls [lies: Satan] brings to our minds thoughts and words that are lies about God... One good way to learn how to discern the truth from a lie is to continue reading Scripture. If what you hear disagrees with the Bible, it’s a lie.

Satan also accuses: He loves to tear us down with accusations. And most often he tries to deny what is true of us in Christ—what Jesus has done to change us. He doesn’t want us to live boldly for Jesus, so he accuses us of things that are not true of us so that we will cower in fear, guilt, and shame... He also tempts us with promises of fulfillment through sinful pleasures or pursuits. He tries to convince us that God’s ways are not good. And he loves to offer seductive short-cuts to fulfill our longings and desires. He often tries to make sin look attractive to lure our hearts away from obeying God... The enemy also loves to divide and isolate through gossip, slander, and bitterness.

The means vary, but our enemy loves to get us to turn against one another. He loves to erode our trust and give us reasons to separate or divide. And one of his greatest schemes is to isolate us as he does it. He wants us alone so he can pick us off one by one with no one around to encourage us or speak the truths of Jesus into our lives. Watch out for the schemes. In all of them, our enemy is dead set on our destruction.

The first step is to capture the thought and examine it. Train yourself to regularly stop and closely examine what you are thinking, feeling, or believing in light of the truths of the gospel.

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.

- 2 Corinthians 11: 12–14
- Romans 8: 1–11
- Ephesians 6: 10–20
- 1 Peter 5: 8–11
- 1 John 2: 15–17

Capturing and Examining our Thoughts

Week 3, Reflection 3

1. Considering the content you read, define the three things that we're at war against.
2. In your own words, what does it mean to "take thoughts captive and examine them"?

The list below, from chapter 8 of Gospel Fluency, are some of the common lies, accusations, temptations, and means of divisions and isolation Satan puts in peoples' minds. Circle all those that you have believed at some point. Then put stars by the ones you find yourself still believing at times. In the spaces below, write some of those you've been working through up to this point in this Handbook.

Some of the lies you might hear are:

God doesn't really love you.

He's out to get you and destroy your life.

God has left you. You're all alone and he doesn't care. You're not that important to him.

Besides, even if he did love you, he couldn't help you. He's not that powerful.

He can't be everywhere, you know.

And even if he could, the stuff you're dealing with doesn't matter to him.

Satan also accuses through thoughts like:

You really blew it this time! You should be ashamed of yourself.

It shouldn't surprise you, however; you always do stuff like that. You're such a loser!

How many more times do you have to fail to realize it?

You're never going to amount to much of anything.

It's all because you're a filthy sinner. It's what you do. You're no saint, that's for sure.

He also tempts us with promises of fulfillment through sinful pleasures or pursuits, such as:

Look at this image—you know it will make you feel powerful or desired or aroused.

Go ahead, take one more drink. It will make all your trouble go away.

God knows this is enjoyable. He just doesn't want you to have any fun.

You deserve better. You've worked so hard, what's wrong with a little reward?

You know you need that. And if you get it, everything will change for you.

The enemy also loves to divide and isolate through gossip, slander, and bitterness:

Go ahead, say it. You know it's true.

Everyone else should know how much they've messed up as well.

Besides, think about how good it'll make you feel to be seen as better than them!

Put some spin on this one. Make the story a little juicier. People love scandal.

They really did hurt you! They deserve to suffer for that. Don't let it go.

They should pay. It's about time they got what was coming to them!

4. Look back at three or four of the phrases you starred or wrote in Question #3.

Prayerfully ask yourself the following questions for each one, as you practice examining your thoughts. Write down answers that come to mind for some of these questions, for each phrase you consider.

- Is this really true? Or is it a lie?

- Is this from God or someone else?
- Does this sound like the Devil’s accusation or the Spirit’s conviction?
- Does it line up with the gospel of Jesus Christ? • What am I hoping in right now? What do I believe this hope promises to give me?
- Why am I considering this behavior? What will be its outcome?
- In all of this, what is true of Jesus? What is true of who I am in him?
- How did Jesus do better for me? How did he speak a better word over me?
- What about Jesus do I need to remember and believe right now?

As you wrap up this week and ponder the truths of the gospel as a means of battling unbelief in God, read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “Just as in learning a language, you need to capture and examine your thoughts to see if they line up with the gospel, then bring them into submission to Christ by regularly rehearsing the truths of the gospel to yourself over and over again. Remember, you don’t have to do this alone. You have the Spirit of God with you to develop you in the gospel. Invite him to help you, to teach you, to bring to your mind all that is true of Jesus.” Consider writing out your thoughts and prayers as you reflect on this truth.

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

2. 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?

CBC College +

GOSPEL: Kingdom Come

The Gospel in Me

Part 2

Week 4

This week is the second half of “The Gospel in Me.” Last week’s Readings and Reflections might have left you feeling a bit “low,” as they were designed to help you define specific areas of need for the gospel. Like a good doctor, last week’s goal was to examine the symptoms, define the problems, and bring us a diagnosis. This week’s Readings and Reflections are designed to be “the cure for what ails you”: as we continue fighting the war of the mind, Week 4 is a “remedy,” helping apply the sweet truths of the gospel to the lies, accusations, and temptations we each defined last week.

Fighting for Truth

Week 4, Reading 1

As we saw last week, we are always in the midst of a deep, spiritual battle. Every moment we can be won or lost, as our thoughts are turned toward or against God and truth. Thus, the Bible tells us to 1) take our thoughts captive and examine them, 2) bring them into submission, 3) consider the fruit, and then 4) fight with gospel truths. Last week considered the first of these steps; today we turn toward the other three.

Once you’ve captured the thought, ask the Spirit to help you bring it into submission to Jesus. In other words, examine it enough to see if it lines up with what is true of God and his work in and through Jesus, and what is true of you as a result of your faith in Jesus. This is one of the reasons God sent his Spirit to us—to guide us into all truth, teach us what is true of Jesus, and regularly witness to us about these truths. He also convicts us of any unbelief in Jesus and reveals the lies we have believed (John 14-16).

When I first started to become aware of my need to grow in gospel fluency, this was not a

natural process for me. I had to practice preaching the gospel to myself first. I regularly rehearsed the truths of the gospel at the beginning of my day:

- God is perfect. Jesus lived perfectly for me. He is my righteousness.
- God loves me. Jesus died for my sins. I am loved and forgiven.
- God is powerful and mighty. Jesus rose from the dead. I am more than a conqueror in him.
- God is alive and present and with me. He sent his Spirit to be with me and in me. I am not alone or without the power to overcome.
- God is for me and not against me.

Then, throughout my day, I had to preach the gospel to myself over and over again. I didn't do this alone. I asked the Holy Spirit to teach me, encourage me, remind me of what is true of Jesus, and convict and correct me when I was going the wrong way in my heart and mind.

If you are going to grow in gospel fluency, you need to do the same. Just as in learning a language, you need to capture and examine your thoughts to see if they line up with the gospel, then bring them into submission to Christ by regularly rehearsing the truths of the gospel to yourself over and over again.

One of the ways we fight the war of the mind is by considering the fruit we're experiencing or the fruit we would experience if we engaged a particular thought or suggested action. When I am not experiencing the fruit of the Spirit or my life is not resembling the life of Jesus, then clearly my mind is not set on the Spirit. That means my mind is not in submission to Christ. Whatever is in submission to Jesus Christ begins to look like Jesus and the fruit of the Spirit.

When I am teaching people how to fight with gospel truths, I introduce some cues to help them discover the aspect of the gospel they may need to press into. For instance, if someone is struggling with guilt or shame for what he has done, I encourage him to go to the cross where Jesus died and remember his words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34). We need the reminder that Jesus' death paid for all our sin, past, present, and future. He atoned for our sin, removed our guilt, and covered our shame.

If someone is struggling to overcome sin, I might encourage her to remember and believe

in the resurrection, where Jesus condemned sin's power. He gives us the same power to overcome by the Spirit who raised him from the dead. Some are dealing with feelings of inadequacy in their behavior and lean toward performance-based acceptance. If so, I direct them to remember Jesus' life, perfectly lived in their place, and the Father's words spoken over Jesus (words that are now ours in Jesus): "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3: 17).

Whatever the struggle, the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus give life, hope, and power. By faith in Christ, every attribute, characteristic, and blessing that belongs to Jesus is available and accessible by us as we depend on and submit to him. We are co-heirs with Christ, blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms, and he is present and ready to give us himself and anything we need to accomplish his will.

In essence, fighting with gospel truths is trusting in and putting on ourselves all that is true of Jesus, and therefore also true of us in Jesus. If you are going to become gospel fluent, you must be prepared to go to war. Take thoughts captive and examine them closely. Bring them into submission. Consider the fruit. Then fight with gospel truths.

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.

- John 14-16
- Romans 12: 1-2
- Galatians 5: 16-22
- Colossians 3: 1-4
- Ephesians 6: 10-20

Fighting for Truth

Week 4, Reflection 1

To apply the concepts of this week's reading 1, into your everyday life, pray that God will open your eyes and guide you, then answer the following questions.

1. In your own words, what does it mean to "consider the fruit [of a particular thought or action]," and to "fight [lies, accusations, temptations, etc.] with gospel truths"?

2. Circling, starring, and/ or writing phrases in Week 3, Reflection #3 is one way to “capture” and “examine” our thoughts, and battle lies, accusation, and temptation: you’re paying attention to something untrue, and are calling it out. Once you have done this, the next step in the battle is “submitting the thought”: “ask[ing] the Spirit to help you bring it into submission to Jesus. In other words, examine it enough to see if it lines up with what is true of God and his work in and through Jesus, and what is true of you as a result of your faith in Jesus.” One at a time, look back at the phrases you starred or wrote in Week 3, Reflection #3. Under each statement, write an area of your life you feel it might need to be applied. In addition to the phrases already written, feel free to write a few other things you know to be true of God, that are particularly impacting as you submit your thoughts to Christ.

- God is perfect. Jesus lived perfectly for me. He is my righteousness.
- God loves me. Jesus died for my sins. I am loved and forgiven.
- God is powerful and mighty. Jesus rose from the dead. I am more than a conqueror in him.
- God is alive and present and with me. He sent his Spirit to be with me and in me. I am not alone or without the power to overcome.
- God is for me and not against me.

3. Without looking at the Bible, write down as many marks that Paul defines as the “work of the flesh” in Galatians 5, then as many marks that Paul defines as the “fruit of the Spirit.” It’s okay if you don’t get them all. (once you’ve written as many as you remember, read Galatians 5: 16-23 and fill in the rest).

Now look back at some of the phrases you starred or wrote in Week 3, Reflection #3, as still being areas of unbelief. Use the space below to write some of the lies, accusations, temptations, divisions, or isolations, and an area of your life you feel each might need to be applied—whether outwardly or even “secretly” (in your own heart and mind).

4. The Apostle Paul explains our weapon in the battle of our mind is the “armor of God” found in Ephesians 6: *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil...*

Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit. (Eph 6: 10-11, 14-18)

These “pieces of armor” are not things that we, mere humans, can pick up and wield by our own power. The truth of this passage is that Jesus alone is the fullness of each piece of the armor of God. On the next page, write the ways that Jesus, through the gospel work, is the fulfillment of each phrase.

In the next column, write some specific ways that some of the armor above can especially help you battle the “work of the flesh” and produce “the fruit of the Spirit” in areas of unbelief.

Finally, write ways that seeing Jesus as the fullness of each piece of armor helps make us “strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might,” as we “stand against the schemes of the devil” and let God fight for us in the war of our minds.

Pause to thank God that we don’t go into war alone: God has created us to rely on his Spirit, and on each other, as we fight to love Jesus and as we battle sin, Satan, and our flesh. Read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “Remember, you don’t have to do this alone. You have the Spirit of God with you to develop you in the gospel. Invite him to help you, to teach you, to bring to your mind all that is true of Jesus.

You should also be in community with others who know and love Jesus, who can help you in the battle.” 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?

From Fruit to Root

Week 4, Reading 2

Part of our job in growing in gospel fluency is paying attention to the overflow of our hearts. What comes out in the form of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors finds its origin inside of us. Too often, we focus our attention on changing the external rather than addressing the internal. But Jesus was very clear that what defiles us proceeds from inside our hearts—our beliefs and our motives. The fruit of our lives comes from the roots of our faith. Just as a thermometer detects a fever, what we see or experience tells us about the gospel health of our hearts. So we need to learn to trace the fruit back to the root.

Over the years, I have learned to ask four key questions in progressive order when forming people in the gospel: 1) Who is God? 2) What has God done (which reveals who God is)? 3) Who am I in light of God's work? and 4) How should I live in light of who I am? I encourage people to apply these questions to their Bible study and to all of their discipleship processes.

When I am seeking to discern unbelief in the gospel, I reverse the order of those questions: 1) What am I doing or experiencing right now? 2) In light of what I am doing or experiencing, what do I believe about myself? 3) What do I believe God is doing or has done? and 4) What do I believe God is like? In other words, I trace the fruit back to the root. If the fruit is not like Jesus, that is an indicator that our faith is not in Jesus. Remember, we're all still unbelievers in many areas of our lives (as we saw in [Week] 1). We do not always believe the truths about God as revealed in the gospel; therefore, we are living in unbelief.

How do we know if the fruit of our lives is like Jesus? Well, it helps to get to know what Jesus is like. This is why we need to continue to become more and more acquainted with him by reading the Scriptures, especially the Gospels, which describe how Jesus lived. The fruit of faith in Jesus is love for God and others. The gospel makes clear that this is not something we do on your own. Through faith in Jesus, each of us is made into a pure and holy dwelling place—a temple—where God's Spirit lives. Jesus foretold that he would send the Spirit to help us know, believe in, and be connected to Jesus, so that we could bear much fruit.

Tim Chester teaches that beneath every sin is a failure to believe a truth about God. I'm convinced the same applies to what we believe about ourselves. Because we believe lies

about God, we also believe lies about ourselves. We believe God is unloving, so we, in turn, believe we are unlovable—disposable, unwanted garbage. We believe God is not our Savior, so we have to be the savior to our friends, our spouses, or our children... We all fluctuate between the extremes of believing we are demigods sent to save the world and demons who are the scum of the earth, and everything in between. And the reason we believe what we do about ourselves is because of what we believe or don't believe about God.

We need to learn to speak our beliefs out loud. So often, we are not even aware of what we are believing in any given moment. We just go along, living in false belief, and, as a result, we continue to engage in sinful behaviors. I am so blessed to have a friend and partner in Jayne who encourages me to speak out loud what is going on in my heart between me and God. She is in good company with the psalmists and the prophets in the Scriptures. They knew that our transformation comes partly through our verbal proclamation of our faith—speaking out loud what we are believing in the moment. This is confession.

So often, when people are led to confess their sins, they only confess their sinful behaviors. In other words, they confess the fruit. They say: "I'm sorry I lied. Please forgive me." Or: "I looked at pornography. I know that's wrong. Please forgive me." The problem, however, is that they need to confess their sinful beliefs—the roots, the stuff below the surface that is motivating and producing their behaviors, the sin beneath the sins. All sin stems from wrong beliefs—lies we believe—and ultimately from our unbelief in Jesus. And because we generally don't go beyond the fruit to the root, we end up aiming at behavior modification instead of gospel transformation. In the gospel, we come to see that sin is wicked and our world is broken. People suffer and will suffer because of sin. We are not promised a pain-free, trouble-free, suffering-free existence. But we don't need more self-help and we don't need denial. We need deliverance.

When we address only the behaviors and push people to change what they do without a change in what they believe, the weight falls on us rather than God to handle the problems of the world and deal with the brokenness caused by sin. Instead, we need to trust in God's power to change us and change the world. [We need] gospel transformation, not just behavior modification. God's Spirit is our guide, teacher, and counselor. When those of us who belong to God confess out loud what we believe, the Spirit is right there with us to convict us of our unbelief and lead us to the truth that is in Jesus. This is how God grants us repentance. He convicts us of our unbelief and leads us to believe the truth.

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.

- Matthew 22: 34-40
- John 14: 1-14
- Galatians 5: 19-23

From Fruit to Root

Week 4, Reflection 2

1. Considering the content you read, in your own words define "confession."
2. Take a few moments of personal worship and write down as many answers as you can, to each of the following questions:
 - Who is God (what are some things He reveals as His identity, especially toward his people)?
 - What has God done (in general, and especially through the person and work of Jesus)?
 - Who am I in light of God's work (what things does God declare to be true about our own identity)?
 - How should I live in light of who I am (how should answers to the other questions impact how we think or live)?
3. "When I am seeking to discern unbelief in the gospel, I reverse the order of those questions: 1) What am I doing or experiencing right now? 2) In light of what I am doing or experiencing, what do I believe about myself? 3) What do I believe God is doing or has done? and 4) What do I believe God is like? In other words, I trace the fruit back to the root. If the fruit is not like Jesus, that is an indicator that our faith is not in Jesus."

Look back at the first three weeks of this Handbook: considering as many areas of unbelief (Week 1), lesser stories (Week 2) and lies, accusations, and temptations (Week 3) you've identified so far. For the rest of this Reflection, practice the "fruit to root" process by walking through as many of those areas as possible using the following questions. Be honest: and it's okay if you can't fully answer every question, for every area of unbelief

you try; you'll have an opportunity to ask your close community for help at this week's meeting.

4. As you consider the root disbelief in each area above, turn your answers into prayers of confession to God. Ask his forgiveness not just for your behaviors, but for the beliefs—or unbeliefs—that lie at the root of each.

Now that we've deconstructed areas of unbelief, Reading and Reflection #3 reconstructs us with a right belief in God, based on the gospel of Jesus through the power of the Spirit. Read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “God’s Spirit is our guide, teacher, and counselor. When those of us who belong to God confess out loud what we believe, the Spirit is right there with us to convict us of our unbelief and lead us to the truth that is in Jesus. This is how God grants us repentance. He convicts us of our unbelief and leads us to believe the truth.” 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?

From Root to Fruit

Week 4, Reading 3

In Reading #2, we saw Jeff's four key questions to ask in progressive order when forming people in the gospel: 1) Who is God? 2) What has God done (which reveals who God is)? 3) Who am I in light of God's work? and 4) How should I live in light of who I am? I encourage people to apply these questions to their Bible study and to all of their discipleship processes. I encourage people to apply these questions to their Bible study and to all of their discipleship processes. I do this because we all do what we do because of what we believe about 1) who God is, 2) what God has done, and 3) who we are in Christ or apart from Christ. The roots of our faith produce the fruit of our life.

Reading and Reflection #2 asked those questions in reverse order, as a exercise that worked from outside in. But once we've discovered the root issue—the specific areas of unbelief—we're only halfway done. Once we've deconstructed falsehood and unbelief,

we now rebuild our faith with truth and right belief. In other words, once we've gone from "Fruit to Root," we turn and go from "Root to Fruit.": First we ask, "What do you believe about God? Who is God?" It may be helpful to write answers to this and forthcoming questions on the side of the tree trunk, starting at the bottom and moving up with each question (see Figure 4A below).

Once we answer the first question, we ask the second: "how do we know #1 is true? What has God done, that shows us who he is?") Before we move on, it is important to note how important this second question is. So often, when a Christian tries to encourage another person to believe or behave differently, he fails to proclaim the gospel—the good news about what God has done in Jesus Christ to reveal himself to us and to change us.

So we ask this second question, and praise God for the tangible ways he shows us—in our lives, in the Bible, and throughout history—his truth. It may help to ask and answer these first two questions multiple times, as we declare different truths about God, and remember and celebrate ways he's proven those things: "what else do you believe about God? ...How do you know that? What has he done to show us this is true?" As we continue to speak out loud the truths of God reveals to us through the gospel, [we experience] a change. [We are] transformed by the renewal of her mind, just as Paul says in Romans 12: 2. This wasn't just behavior modification. This [is] much deeper. This [is] gospel transformation, which always leads to behavioral change.

By now our answers are working their way up the trunk of the tree, to the fruit produced by our newly-rooted right belief. So we ask the final two questions, over and over, and we celebrate God's work in the answers He brings to mind by his Spirit. "What are you believing about yourself now? Who are you in light of God's work?" And "What are you experiencing? How should I live as a response to this?" We are not saved just once in our past. We continue being saved in the present. God's salvation didn't just happen to us. It is also continuing to happen. He is actively saving us. The gospel is good news for our sanctification—the ongoing work of God saving us and conforming us daily into the image of Christ. Our activity in this process is ongoing repentance from unbelief to belief in the gospel.

Since Readings #2 and #3 work together, I encourage you to begin paying close attention to the fruit of your life, but don't make the mistake of engaging in a self-change project. With the help of the Spirit, and ideally in community with others who love Jesus and believe the gospel, practice tracing the fruit to the root. Examine what you have been believing and where your beliefs are not in line with the truth of the gospel. Confess what you believe out loud. What is the sin under the sins? What sinful beliefs have you

been holding?

Once you trace the fruit to the root, invite the Spirit to reveal the truth of who God is and what he has done for you in Christ. Ask him to give you the ability to see and believe the truth, repent from lies or unbelief, and turn to God in faith through Jesus. In other words, work your way from root to fruit. This will require knowing the gospel and spending regular time reading the Bible so as to be more equipped to speak the truth of God to the circumstances or situations you find yourself or others in.

If you begin to do this more often, you will find yourself being transformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. As a result, you will also become more and more fluent in the gospel, because the more you are changed by the gospel, the more you will want to talk about it. We all talk about what most affects us. And as you do, you and others will become more fluent together.

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.

- 2 Corinthians 3: 4-18 (and you might look back at Galatians 5: 19-23 again)

From Root to Fruit

Week 4, Reflection 3

1. Considering the content you read, in your own words define “repentance.”
2. Reflection #2 ended with deconstructing some specific areas of unbelief. But deconstruction is only half the process. For the rest of today's reflection, we reconstruct a right belief of God as it relates to those specific areas of unbelief.

Paul said that as we repent and believe the gospel—as we turn to, look at, and believe in Jesus—we are transformed, increasingly becoming more and more like Jesus: “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 Cor. 3: 18).

Pick a few of the areas of unbelief you deconstructed in Reflection #2. Then spend the rest of today's reflection answering the following questions as they relate to each specific area of unbelief.

Areas of Unbelief or Struggle —————>			
Who is God? List as many things as you can about God's identity that specifically relate to this area of struggle/disbelief.			
What has God done? How has God proven each answer to the previous question in his work in the world and especially through the person and work of Jesus?			
Who am I in light of God's work? List as many true statements about who you are that you can think of.			
How should I live in light of who I am? What beliefs are you experiencing in light of the first three questions? How do you see them changing you?			

As you wrap up this week and ponder the truths of the gospel as a means of battling unbelief in God, read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “Once you trace the fruit to the root, invite the Spirit to reveal the truth of who God is and what he has done for you in Christ. Ask him to give you the ability to see and believe the truth, repent from lies or unbelief, and turn to God in faith through Jesus. In other words, work your way from root to fruit. This will require knowing the gospel and spending regular time reading the Bible so as to be more equipped to speak the truth of God to the circumstances or situations you find yourself or others in.” Consider writing out your thoughts and prayers as you reflect.

3. In a sentence, what do you think Jesus is saying to you based on what you have read?
4. 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?

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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?

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GOSPEL: Kingdom Come

The Gospel With Us

Part 2

Week 6

Last week we began looking at tangible ways your community can rehearse gospel truths together. We can speak truth to each other through meals and through the meal. And we can speak truth to each other through helping each other see Jesus as “the Better...” in all of life. You’ve taken a few steps into “speaking the truth in love” to each other in regular ways. This week continues that pattern, as we keep considering “The Gospel with Us.” This week’s Readings and Reflections give four more practices, by which you and your community can care deeply for one another, and lovingly push each other toward Jesus through speaking the gospel into all of life.

Find Jesus in the Story

Week 6, Reading 1

Another way to grow in seeing Jesus as the Better is to get to know the larger story of the Bible. We walked through a condensed version of it in Week 2. So many people read the Bible as a bunch of individual stories. Sure, there are plenty of stories in the Bible, but the point of the whole Bible is to tell the one true story—the true and better story of the world. It is the story of God and his redeeming love. It is the story of his pursuit of us to rescue and restore us to relationships with him, each other, and a renewed creation.

In one sense, the whole Bible is the gospel—the good news that God has come to rescue and restore humanity and all creation in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ. And every part of the Bible either points forward or backward to Jesus, because he is the heart—the center—of the story. The entirety of the Bible also shows how desperately needy every single person is for God’s salvation.

Jesus is the point of every story, the fulfillment of every longing, the completion of everything that is lacking. Every character, story, and theme points to him, because it's really all about him. So how can you learn to read the Bible this way? I recommend you go through the story of God together as a group regularly. There are many ways to do this. I am increasingly convinced and concerned that most Christians can't tell the whole story of the Bible. Therefore, they likely can't show how it all leads to Jesus as the Better.

I would also strongly encourage you to commit to regularly reading through your Bible—the whole thing. So many Christians have never read their Bibles. Sure, they have favorite sections they read over and over again, but they haven't read the entire book. As a result, most don't know the whole story, so they often wrongly interpret Scripture out of context. When you don't know the whole story of God, you tend toward making the Bible about you and not about Jesus. I would highly recommend that you commit with others to do this. I have found that people are more successful in reading through the entire Bible when they do it with others in their small group or missional community. This allows them to learn together, as well as to hold each other accountable for their reading.

As you get to know your Bible more and more, look to see Jesus in every text by looking for the typology of Jesus in every story or situation. The Bible is not just recounting the story as it occurred, but in such a way as to create an anticipation, a longing, for a better person, a better solution, a better fulfillment—a better Savior. In his providence and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God insured the Scriptures would include numerous “types” (prefigurings) of Christ and would create a vacuum of longing for him to arrive and fulfill our greatest need. Learn to read the Bible, both alone and in community, while asking these questions: 1) How is this person or situation a type of Christ? 2) What is lacking in this story that only Jesus can fulfill? and 3) What is the longing or the hunger that is created here for Jesus to satisfy?

Don't settle for substitutes. Don't try to be a substitute. Jesus did better than anyone or anything. Jesus does better than anyone or anything. And Jesus will do better than anyone or anything. Jesus is the Better everything! Don't look elsewhere and don't give one another anything or anyone else. Remind one another of these truths about him in a gospel-fluent community. And be reminded yourself as you submit to others speaking into your life and experience that Jesus is the Better. Give each other Jesus. He's better.

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.

- Luke 24: 13-35
- Acts 2: 14-41
- Acts 17: 16-34
- 2 Timothy 3: 14-17

Find Jesus in the Story

Week 6, Reflection 1

Reading #1 technically advises two methods of rehearsing the gospel with others: by considering the Story of God (explained in the Introduction), and diving in and reading the whole Bible. The point of both methods, though, is the same: whether you're looking at themes of the Bible or specific texts within it, this week's first way of rehearsing the gospel together is finding Jesus in the story. 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 how you can read the Bible in a way that looks for Jesus as the key to every text. (If you're confused about this—especially regarding the Old Testament, before Jesus was born—ask others to help, or ask your community to talk about it when you meet this week.)

While some followers of Jesus don't seem to know the Bible well, it's also not uncommon in some veins of Christianity today for someone to be "Bible fluent" without being gospel fluent.

Being "Bible fluent" means we know the words, stories, and even commands of Scriptures, and at times we can teach, preach, and even try to obey those words, stories, and commands. "Bible fluency" is a great and needed goal for the Christian life. However, we often become "Bible fluent" without seeing Jesus in the Bible, and without relying on God's gospel work for all that the Bible teaches. By itself, "Bible fluency" leads to moralism (doing good things and living well by our own power), or to guilt and shame (when we fail at doing good and living well by our own power).

For example, Philippians 2: 1-11 encourages Christians to be humble toward others; it even looks at the example of Jesus' own humility as a model for our own. Without understanding God's work and the gospel's power in our lives, "Bible fluency" leaves us on our own to follow Jesus' model and become humble. Anyone who's tried this realizes it's a double-edged sword: if we try to become humble on our own, by making our own rules, changing our own mindset, or anything else, we might succeed—but often only for a season, and by the means of self-created legalism. In many cases we ironically end up prideful because of "how humble I've become"! Or we might realize how prideful we are and feel hopeless by our failed efforts which can lead to guilt and shame. Only God, working in us through the truths of the gospel, has the power to make us truly humble: knowing the Bible isn't enough to accomplish that; we need the gospel! Only by trusting in God's power and submitting to the Spirit's work, can we truly follow Jesus' example and become more humble.

Knowing the Bible without knowing God and his gospel is not true Christianity. What does it look like to read the Bible through a gospel-fluent lens? In his providence and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, God insured the Scriptures would include numerous "types" of Christ and would create a vacuum of longing for him to arrive and fulfill our greatest need. Learn to read the Bible, both alone and in community, while asking these questions: 1) How is this person or situation a type of Christ? 2) What is lacking in this story that only Jesus can fulfill? and 3) What is the longing or the hunger that is created here for Jesus to satisfy?

2. How would you define the differences in "Bible fluency" and "gospel fluency"? Why are both necessary for the Christian life? How is either without the other detrimental?

3. You did this in Week 1, but without looking back, briefly define the gospel. Once you feel good about your definition, look back at Week 1, Reflection 1: how has your definition changed and why?

4. Last week's Reflection #3 asked you to list ways Jesus is "the Better..." in general areas of your own life. Today we'll ask you to do the same, using specific images from the Bible. Pick at least five from the list below: in the first column below, write a few words about that biblical person, and how he/ she did/ didn't fulfill his/ her role. In the second column write a few words that describe how Jesus perfectly fulfilled the person's role, in a way they never could, to the glory of God:

Jesus is the Better...	Human in that role	Jesus in that role
Adam		
Abel		
Abraham		
Isaac		
Jacob		
Joseph		
Moses		
Job		
David		
Esther		
Jonah		

As you rest in the fact that Jesus is the key to every theme and text of the Bible, read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “Jesus is the point of every story, the fulfillment of every longing, the completion of everything that is lacking. Every character, story, and theme points to him, because it’s really all about him.” 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 Hero of our Story

Week 6, Reading 2

If you're into film or good fiction, as I am, you can generally discover the hero of the story pretty quickly. The hero generally is brought into the narrative pretty early, with a significant amount of character development designed to draw you in, build your interest in this person, and win you over to her. Some writers like to keep the hero hidden to create a sense of longing and intrigue, but there still is no doubt by the end who the hero of the story is. The hero stands out above everyone else.

As I listen to many Christians share their stories, I often find that Jesus has become a supporting character, not the hero. Often, a person spends large chunks of time describing his life before meeting Jesus, often going into more detail about his sin than anyone needs to know.

Jesus is just a small blip on the radar: "I realized I needed to be forgiven of my sins, and Joe introduced me to Jesus and how he died on the cross for me, so I asked him into my heart." Then the person often goes on to share how hard he has tried to be a better person, but he fails a lot. For instance, he is going to church more often and trying to read his Bible and pray, but life is busy. "Thank God he forgives us!"

By the end of the story, you've heard sin, self, and self-effort, but very little Jesus and very little good news. Often, as in my illustration, the emphasis is on a decision the person made or a welcoming invitation she extended to Jesus. Unfortunately, "I" am the hero of the story. By the way, Jesus doesn't wait for invitations into our hearts. He comes to rescue us from our slavery to sin and Satan. He invades enemy territory, breaks through the stone walls of our hearts, and delivers us from death! He's the hero, not us.

Remember, it is out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks. You talk most about what you love most. My goal in leading a group toward gospel fluency is, first of all, to find out if they know and believe the gospel. If they do, I then want to discover how much their faith in Jesus is shaping their lives. If there is little to no Jesus in their stories, then we need to lay a gospel foundation and pray God grants genuine faith in Jesus.

I use a variety of methods to have people share their stories. Recently, I have used two methods we introduced in the Introduction “Instagram Stories” (where people draw their story in twelve boxes, then talk us through it using the pictures), and “three pillars” (I give a personal example of this in Reflection #2—but the point is to reflect on three key events in your life, which have shaped, influenced, and directed the other elements of your life). The key to these methods—or any method of sharing stories—is to make sure Jesus is the hero. We’ll practice that a bit in Reflection #2.

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.

- Luke 24: 25-35
- John 5: 39-40
- Acts 2: 14-41

The Hero of our Story

Week 6, Reflection 2

Reading #2 offers two distinct ways to rehearsing the gospel with others, as covered in the Introduction: we learn to tell our own story, through “Instagram Stories” or through considering “Pillars.” The goal of each, as we carry them out in community, is to see Jesus as more and more the hero of our stories, rather than playing a supporting role. 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, think of books, plays, films, and shows: in your own words describe specific ways you can tell who the hero is. Then consider your own life: if you and Jesus were both characters in a book, play, film, or show, what role would others see you each playing?

2. Using the boxes below, tell (or re-tell) your personal “Instagram Story.” If you drew and told your “Instagram Story” in your First Meeting, look back: for each frame of the story, do you see Jesus as the hero? Did you tell the story in a way that showed Jesus to be the hero, or did he play a supporting role? If you’d do anything differently after these past several weeks, use the boxes to re-draw your story, and prepare to re-tell it at this week’s Group Meeting, with Jesus as the hero of every stage of your story.

3. Tell (or re-tell) your story through the image of “Pillars”: Here’s Jeff’s personal experience, as an example of this story-sharing method: “In my story, the first pillar is the shame that I experienced as a seventh grader from our pastor when he publicly embarrassed me in front of fifty or more junior high and high school students... Unfortunately, since I knew only the good news that Jesus ‘saves us from hell,’ I didn’t know he can also remove our shame in the present. As a result, I looked to myself to deal with shame instead of Jesus. But the only way you can deal with shame apart from Jesus is to perform better and hide more. I tried both. I worked harder at sports, music, and popularity, while I also found more sophisticated ways to hide my sin... I didn’t run to Jesus for help. I ran from him and everyone else for fear of being found out. I learned how to lead a double life.

“My next pillar is the day when Jesus revealed his love and grace to me while I was in Denia, Spain. In the midst of my sin and shame, he showed up and invited me to surrender my life to him. He revealed to me through the gospel that he knew everything I had done and forgave me for all of it. I knew my guilt was atoned for and my sin was taken away. He saved me and set me free. When I tell my story, I share how Jesus continued to lead me as I learned to follow him through a growing dependence upon him daily.

“Eventually, I get to my third pillar, the time when my people-pleasing idol was revealed in a very painful period of my life. I couldn’t keep everyone happy and also do what was right. I was caught, and it led to a time of significant depression. I discovered that it was the loving discipline of our heavenly Father that had brought me to that point. Clearly, I had been saved that day in Spain. However, he wasn’t finished with me. He was still saving me. It was during this time that I came to see that Jesus is more powerful than the opinion of man, and that, in Jesus, I had received the approval of God my Father, whose approval matters more than anyone else’s.

“Three pillars, three key events. Jesus is the hero.” Jeff’s pillars are likely different than yours—but we all have key moments that define our stories. Spend some time asking God to bring to mind three defining moments in your own life, and consider how you would tell your story, based on those three pillars.

If you told your story through “Pillars” in your First Meeting, look back: for each pillar, did you see Jesus as the hero? Did you tell the story in a way that showed Jesus to be the hero, or did he play a supporting role? If you’d do anything differently after these past several weeks, use the pillars below to re-write your story, and prepare to re-tell it at this

week's Group Meeting, with Jesus as the hero of every stage of your story.

If you chose to tell your First Meeting story via “Instagram Story,” consider using the pillars below to write out your story: each pillar represents a key event, moment, or turning point that greatly influenced other elements of your life. At this week's group meeting, tell your story using the pillars—just make sure Jesus is the hero of each stage of your story!

4. As you think back through your own story—with both high and low moments and Jesus as your hero, read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “Remember, it is out of the overflow of the heart that the mouth speaks. You talk most about what you love most. My goal in leading a group toward gospel fluency is, first of all, to find out if they know and believe the gospel. If they do, I then want to discover how much their faith in Jesus is shaping their lives. If there is little to no Jesus in their stories, then we need to lay a gospel foundation and pray God grants genuine faith in Jesus.” As you reflect on your story, what emotions, feelings, and beliefs emerge? Consider writing out those insights and taking time to process with God in prayer.

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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?

Our Stories in Light of *The Story*

Week 6, Reading 3

Reflection #2 gave two methods of sharing our personal stories. A third way that we've helped people grow in making Jesus the hero of their stories is by using the four movements of the one true story to help them frame their own: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and New Creation.

CREATION

Creation is all about identity. What do we believe about our origin and purpose? We all have fundamental beliefs about our origins—who or what gave us our existence, made us who we are, and shaped up into the people we are today. We all have learned to find our identity in someone or something. “How did we get here?” and “Why are we here?” are the questions we are answering in this part of our stories. The key question is: “What was my identity in?”

When I teach people how to tell their stories in light of the creation narrative, I encourage them to identify what they looked to or still tend to depend on for their sense of identity. What do they trust for their sense of worth and value? I encourage people to start their stories by talking about their background, some of their early shaping influences, and how these provided a framework for their sense of identity. Remember, the true story grounds our identity in our creation as image bearers of God, put into the world to represent what he is like in all we do. However, because of sin, we all have been born into brokenness, and the image of God in us is distorted. Also, we have been raised by broken image-bearers who have given us a distorted picture of God, self, and others.

FALL

The fall is about brokenness. In this movement of our stories, we share what has destroyed or is destroying our identity and purpose. The world is not as it should be. We are not as we should be. Brokenness is all around us and in us. Why are things broken? How did we get broken? Who is to blame for our brokenness? These are the kinds of questions people are dealing with in the fall narrative of their stories. The key question is: “Who or what was the problem in my life?”

As I teach people to write their stories in such a way as to make Jesus the hero, I also encourage them to take ownership of their culpability in their brokenness. We all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. Identify what you have done that is broken.

What have you believed about God, others, and yourself that is wrong? And how have your sinful beliefs led to sinful behaviors? When we tell our stories and fail to confess our sins, we often fail to show our need for a Savior as well. Jesus won't be the hero of the story if we don't really need a Savior for our sin.

REDEMPTION

Redemption is about rescue and deliverance. Everyone is in need of a savior. Everyone needs to be rescued and delivered. This is the part of the story where we share who or what we look to in order to save us or rescue us. The key question is: "Who or what is our Savior?"

Everyone is searching for a solution to their problem. For some, it's better friends, spouses, children, or grandchildren. Some look to exercise and diets. Others believe work will save them, or the money they earn from working will do it. Every savior, every solution, ever answer, and every person falls short of addressing our real problem. There is only one Savior who can deal with our real problem of sin, and that is Jesus Christ. At this point of our stories, I encourage people to share who or what they were looking to for deliverance and how they came to see that Jesus is a far better Savior, who rescued and redeemed them from sin and their slavery to it.

NEW CREATION

There is a deep longing in every one of us for change, for transformation, for better—for all things to be made new. Everyone is looking forward to a final conclusion, a complete fulfillment of our every longing, a hopeful climax to our story. This is the happy ending we all long for. And this hope drives us all. We all have things in our hearts and minds that we are expectantly hoping for. In the last part of our stories, we share what has changed in us, as well as the ultimate change we are longing for. We share how we've been transformed and what our ultimate hope is. The key question is: "What has changed and what will change?"

When I instruct people in writing their stories, I encourage them to share how Jesus has and is changing them. I also encourage them to share about their hope for everything to change. The gospel is not just about what has happened. It's also good news about what is happening right now and will happen in the future. We will be saved!

After we hear a person's story, I like to gather the group around the person, lay hands on her if she is okay with that, and pray, giving thanks to God for the work of Jesus in her life. The story should declare Jesus to be the hero, and then we should give thanks in

prayer to Jesus for being the hero of our stories. Gospel fluency is developed both in sharing our stories and in thanking the one who wrote them.

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.

- Acts 17: 22-31
- Colossians 1: 15-23

(And, you might read Genesis 1-3 again and look specifically for the story themes.)

Our Stories in Light of *The Story*

Week 6, Reflection 3

A final way for your community to rehearse the gospel regularly with each other is to see our own stories through the lenses of the story, the Story of God. 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. For each lens below, we give you an example and then a general scenario to practice, and ask that you add a third (or more), specific to your own life.

1. Consider your story through the lens of "creation": The key question is "What is my identity in?" Identify what you look to or tend to depend on for your sense of identity. What do you trust for your sense of worth and value? What has this looked like at different points of your life? If you're a follower of Jesus, what changed about your identity after he saved you?

- An entry-level employee with a difficult boss: might find his/ her identity in his/ her job, title, boss's approval, money, success, or proving him/ herself
- A person struggling with his/ her singleness:
- Your own story:

2. Consider your story through lens of "fall": The fall is about brokenness. The key question is: "Who or what was the problem in my life?" Often when what you look to for your sense of identity (your creation stories) fails you, that is what you blame. Sometimes your perceived problem is the culture around you or the failure of friends or coworkers.

And sometimes you see yourself as the problem. What has this looked like at different points of your life? If you're a follower of Jesus, what changed as you realized the true problem is sin—our unbelief in God?

- An entry-level employee with a difficult boss: might see losing his/ her job or messing up a big account as the greatest problem, or might see his/ her lack of ability or skills, the boss' attitude or bias, or the concept of work as a whole as the reason the boss is difficult
- A person struggling with his/ her singleness:
- Your own story:

3. Consider your story through the lens of “redemption”: Redemption is about rescue and deliverance. The key question is: “Who or what is our Savior?” Think about who or what you are looking to for deliverance and whether you have come to see that Jesus is a far better Savior, who rescued and redeemed you from sin and your slavery to it. What has this looked like at different points of your life? If you're a follower of Jesus, what has changed since you've seen Jesus as your one true Savior?

- An entry-level employee with a difficult boss: might look for “salvation” through workaholicism, perfectionism, cheating his/ her way to the top, putting aside convictions to be noticed/ approved of; the boss, performance, or self become the functional savior
- A person struggling with his/ her singleness:
- Your own story:

4. Consider your story through the lens of “new creation”: There is a deep longing in every one of us for change, for transformation, for better—for all things to be made new. The key question is: “What has changed and what will change?” We were created for more. Our present reality appears distant from the life and world we desire. Everyone longs for a new creation. So, what is our version of the new creation? What has this looked like at different points of your life? If you're a follower of Jesus, how has he changed you? How has he given you a better, ultimate hope?

- An entry-level employee with a difficult boss: hope might be found in the boss's approval, in feeling good about the job, in self-reliance, achievement, or in financial gain/ reward
- A person struggling with his/ her singleness:
- Your own story:

As you think through your own story through these four lenses, remember Jeff's encouragement to his communities as they share stories: "After we hear a person's story, I like to gather the group around the person, lay hands on her if she is okay with that, and pray, giving thanks to God for the work of Jesus in her life. The story should declare Jesus to be the hero, and then we should give thanks in prayer to Jesus for being the hero of our stories. Gospel fluency is developed both in sharing our stories and in thanking the one who wrote them." 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?