

CBC College +

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?