

CBC College +

GOSPEL: Kingdom Come

The Gospel to Others

Part 1

Week 7

This week we enter the final section of Gospel Fluency, turning our gaze to “The Gospel to Others.” The good news of Jesus is not just for those who already follow him, but is good news for everyone, and is the means through which people begin following Jesus. This week’s Readings and Reflections center around listening and learning, and displaying the gospel in meaningful ways to those around us who don’t yet follow Jesus as their Lord.

Listen & Learn

Week 7, Reading 1

I recently observed a conversation a few Christians were having with a man who has yet to come to faith in Jesus. It was amazing to me, and saddening, to watch the Christians missing the point of this man’s struggle and questions. It seemed those speaking to him were more concerned about convincing him they were right than about listening to his heart. As a result, he walked away without any good news about Jesus, becoming even more convinced that this “religion” wasn’t for him.

It’s not for me either—at least, not what I saw in that conversation. We can do better. We must do better. We’re talking about people’s souls! And we’re representing Jesus. Gospel fluency isn’t just about talking. It’s about listening as well. This requires love, patience, and wisdom. I’ve found that starting with a posture of humility, standing in a place of need, and having a heart that is willing not just to give answers but to receive insight creates a welcoming place for people to open their hearts. The more open we are to listen and learn, the more likely people are to be open as well.

[Jesus is] a master at drawing out the heart. You notice this if you read the Gospels. Jesus regularly said just enough to invite further probing or create intrigue. He also loved to ask questions so that the overflow of the heart (belief) would spill out of a person's mouth (words).

I'm amazed at how often well-intentioned Christians overwhelm people with a barrage of words. We go on and on about what we believe and what they should believe, assuming we know what others think, believe, or need. I often find that we are giving answers to questions people are not even asking or cramming information into hearts that are longing for love, not just facts. We fail to listen. We fail to draw out the heart. And we miss opportunities to really love people and share the love of God with them. They also miss out on getting to hear what's going on in their own hearts. I have found that when people, including myself, are invited to say out loud what they believe, they come to realize something is wrong.

As we are changed by the gospel, we want to share how the gospel has changed us. It's a great thing to do so. In fact, one of the keys to growing in gospel fluency is to regularly share what Jesus has done or is doing in our lives with others. Our stories are powerful demonstrations of the gospel's power to save.

However, if we don't also listen, we tend to share the good news of Jesus in a way that applies primarily to our lives, the way it was good news to us, but fails to address the situations others are facing. We can become proclaimers of good news while being ignorant of the ways in which others need to hear it. This doesn't negate how good the news of Jesus is at all.

Our job is to testify to Jesus' work in our lives while also listening closely to others so we know how to bring the truths of Jesus to bear on the longings of their hearts. We need to bring them to Jesus so he can meet their unique needs—fulfill their personal longings. In order to do this, we have to slow down, quiet our souls, ask good questions to draw out the hearts of others, and listen. Francis Schaeffer was known to say, "If I have only an hour with someone, I will spend the first fifty-five minutes asking them questions and finding out what is troubling their heart and mind, and then in the last five minutes I will share something of the truth."

My regular counsel to Christians these days is to spend more time listening than talking if they want to be able to share the gospel of Jesus in a way that meaningfully speaks to the hearts of others. We all long for Jesus Christ. Everyone is seeking him, even if they don't know it. They are looking for something to fulfill their longings and satisfy their thirst.

However, they are likely looking in the wrong places. They are going to the wrong wells to try to draw soul water. They need to look to Jesus. But they will not come to see how he can quench their thirst if we don't take the time to listen.

And as we listen, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can discern the longings of their hearts, the brokenness of their souls, the emptiness of their spirits. And then, we must be prepared to show how Jesus can meet them at the well with soul-quenching water—himself.

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.

- Proverbs 20:5
- Ecclesiastes 3:11
- John 4:1-30

Listen & Learn

Week 7, Reflection 1

1. Find a crowded place to sit for a while this week (such as a coffee shop, pub, park, etc). Spend awhile there, and simply listen to conversations going on around you. While you listen or after you leave, write down parts of the conversations that stand out to you. Reflect on them, in light of the gospel and story of God we've been considering: how do conversations you heard fall in line with the gospel? If you were engaged in the conversation what might you have said and why?
2. Write the names of at least three people you consider close friends (not acquaintances or co-workers you only see in the office — those who are truly friends), who don't follow Jesus:
3. For each of the three friends whose names you wrote above, think through a recent conversation in which you've talked about heart level stuff (what they believe, are struggling with, etc...) If you haven't had a conversation with a non-believing friend recently, take some time this week and do so and slow down to ask good questions and listen. Summarize each in a sentence or two below.
4. If we don't also listen, we tend to share the good news of Jesus in a way that applies primarily to our lives, the way it was good news to us, but fails to address the situations others are facing. We can become proclaimers of good news while being ignorant of the

ways in which others need to hear it. In Week 2, we asked you to mention the “angle of the gospel” that made it seem like truly good news to you. Look back and write your answer below. Then, for each of the three friends you listed above, list a few areas of sin, disbelief, struggle, or question in which the gospel might be good news to each.

As you think back through the way the gospel became good news to you, and the way it might become good news to specific non-believing friends, read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “We all long for Jesus Christ. Everyone is seeking him, even if they don’t know it. They are looking for something to fulfill their longings and satisfy their thirst. However, they are likely looking in the wrong places. They are going to the wrong wells to try and draw soul water. They need to look to Jesus. But they will not come to see how he can quench their thirst if we don’t take time to listen.” Write out your thoughts as you consider these ideas and turn them into 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?

Listen in Light of the Story

Week 7, Reading 2

Whenever, I am engaging in a conversation with someone, I ask the Holy Spirit to help me. He is called “the Helper,” after all (John 14: 26). “Help me slow down,” I pray. “Help me to trust you are working here in the silence. Help me to listen well—to them and to you.” In some Bible versions, “Helper” is translated as “Counselor.” So I ask the Spirit to give me the ability to hear the longings of the heart as I listen. I invite him to be the primary counselor in the midst of our time. I ask him to give me ears to hear what the real issues are, and then provide me with wisdom as to how to share the truths of Jesus in such a way that they will be good news to the other person.

I am more and more convinced that the Holy Spirit goes ahead of us, preparing people

for conversations like this. This growing confidence in God as the one who saves has freed me from the pressure to be the savior for people. Our job is to be present, filled with the Spirit, and ready to listen, then open to speak as the Spirit leads.

As you grow in listening to people's longings, also learn to listen for their overarching stories. [In last week's Readings and Reflections], I described how we can share our stories, making Jesus the hero. If we are going to speak the gospel fluently to the hearts of others, we need to listen for the dominant storylines under which others live their lives. What are their gospel stories? Who's their hero? Let's look at the fundamental questions or longings in each movement of the story in light of people God has put in our lives. Get familiar with them, and then, as you listen to people, listen for their answers to the questions:

- Creation: In what do they find their identity or sense of purpose and significance?
- Fall: Who or what is the fundamental problem they blame for the things that are broken in their lives?
- Redemption: Who or what are they looking to as their savior to rescue or deliver them?
- New Creation: What does transformation look like and what is their ultimate hope for the future?

In Gospel Fluency chapter 13, Jeff shares the Spirit's work in helping him hear two peoples' stories, and how he was able to share the gospel in meaningful ways to both. Here's a brief overview of each conversation. In the first, a woman on a plane who revealed that she was in the process of a divorce, described how she had had an affair and how her husband, in his anger, had done everything he could to destroy her image on Facebook, turning all their friends against her. He had succeeded in turning her sons against her as well. She was terribly embarrassed, broken, and demoralized. I listened for quite some time, and it became clear to me that she was sorry for what she had done and regretted the pain and shame it had brought on her and her family. And she was deeply burdened by her husband's anger and her sons' pain.

Over the course of a long conversation, I shared with the woman that she was feeling shame and guilt because of her sin and her subsequent attempts to deal with it. I shared with her the story of Adam and Eve, and how they tried to deal with their sin. I continued to show her how it led them to blame each other and brought destruction in their relationships. "What you need," I continued, "is one who can truly atone for your sin. You need someone who can handle the weight of sin, forgive you of your sin, and set

you free from it, so that it no longer defines you. You need Jesus.”

I then went on to describe how Jesus willingly went to the cross to take her sin on himself. I shared how he was willing to be publicly shamed for her so that she not only could be forgiven, but also clothed in his righteousness and freed from guilt and shame. We went on and on about how the gospel brings forgiveness, healing, hope, and even love for those we’ve hurt or been hurt by. She wanted to make things right.

She wanted forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation. Jesus had good news for her. I let her know that I know and love Jesus, and that Jesus cared and was listening to her as well. She then shared how she had never been into religion, but recently she had been seeking and checking out some churches in our area. She knew she needed help and was reaching out.

In the second example, a friend was lamenting his recent job loss. Over the course of a long conversation, he admitted that his identity had been tied to his job: “without it, I’m not sure who I am anymore.” After sharing a similar situation from his own life, Jeff prodded his friend to share more about his upbringing, and learned that the young man had lost his father during his teenage years. In hearing more of the man’s story, the Spirit helped Jeff listen and realize the following:

What was his Creation narrative? “My identity is in my job because I’m looking for approval and love from my dad.” What was his Fall narrative? “My dad died and I lost my job. And even though I could get another job, I could lose it as well. Nothing is dependable. Nothing lasts. We lose dads and jobs.” What was his Redemption narrative? “I need a dad who will love me and a job well done.” What was his New Creation narrative? “I want a dad who won’t die and will be proud of my work.”

Do you see how the gospel has great news for my friend? With the Spirit’s help, I did. So I gave it to him. Both conversations are merely summarized here for the sake of brevity, and thus lack nuance and most of the words in each conversation. We’ll say again, that both are given more context and fleshed out more in *Gospel Fluency*. But at the end of the day, [everyone needs] the good news of Jesus shared as good news for [each of our specific areas of] pain and longing. Remember, we don’t save people. God does. We listen and learn, and then we love and share Jesus.

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 14:26
- Galatians 5:22-25

Look again at how the Apostle Paul spoke to direct areas of need and question in Acts 17:16-34

Listen in Light of the Story

Week 7, Reflection 2

1. “As we listen, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can discern the longings of their hearts, the brokenness of their souls, the emptiness of their spirits. And then, we must be prepared to show how Jesus can meet them at the well with soul-quenching water —himself.” Considering the ways you wrote down in Reflection #1, that the gospel might become good news to each of your non-believing friends, take some time to pray that God might show you specific ways you might “speak the truth in love” with each. Write down a few ways Jesus might answer some of the questions/needs your friends have.

2. Each of the non-Christian friends you mentioned in Reflection #1 believes some story. If it’s not the gospel story, they’re believing a lesser story. Considering what you know of your friends, answer the following questions for each:

Creation: In what do they find their identity or sense of purpose and significance?

Fall: Who or what is the fundamental problem they blame for the things that are broken in their lives?

Redemption: Who or what are they looking to as their savior to rescue or deliver them?

New Creation: What does transformation look like and what is their ultimate hope for the future?

3. After considering your friends’ stories in light of the story, what might be a few specific ways you might share the story — their true identity in Christ, sin as the ultimate problem, Jesus as the one true savior, or the fullness of hope in God alone?

4. To put this week’s theory into practice, prayerfully consider taking a bold step, trusting God and the leading of the Spirit, and have a conversation with at least one of those non-believing friends, in which you share the gospel through one of the ways discussed in question #1-3.

As you think back through your own story through these four lenses, read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “whenever, I am engaging in a conversation with someone, I ask the Holy Spirit to help me. He is called ‘the Helper,’ after all (John 14:26)... In some Bible versions, ‘Helper’ is translated as ‘Counselor.’ So I ask the Spirit to give me the ability to hear the longings of the heart as I listen. I invite him to be the primary counselor in the midst of our time. I ask him to give me ears to hear what the real issues are, and then provide me with wisdom as to how to share the truths of Jesus in such a way that they will be good news to the other person.” As you reflect on this, write out your thoughts and spend some time talking to God about it in prayer.

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?

Display the Gospel

Week 7, Reading 3

In the true story, we learn that God has always intended to have a visible representation of himself on the earth. Adam and Eve failed. Then Israel failed. But Jesus did not. He is the true image of God—the fullness of deity in bodily form. Now, we, the church, are his body, the means by which he intends to fill every place with his embodied presence through our physical bodies (Eph. 1: 22–23). We were not just saved from sin, Satan, and death. We were also saved for his purposes here and now.

Saved from and saved for. We were saved by the power of God for the purposes of God, so that God might be made known and Jesus might be glorified. We are God’s display people, showing the world what he is like. We are also a declaration people, who proclaim who God is and what he has done by proclaiming the gospel. Reading and Reflection #3 focuses on the “display” side of this, and next week’s final Readings and Reflections turn to the “declaration” side.

In 1 Peter 2: 9-15, Peter [tells] God’s people scattered throughout Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) that they were called to live as God’s chosen people who loved others like family, just as God the Father had loved them while they were still his enemies. They were his royal priesthood, sent into the world by the Spirit to help people be reconciled to God and to each other through Jesus. And they were a holy nation, called to display what life

can be like when Jesus is King. So are we. This is our identity. This is our calling.

Show the world the love of the Father, the healing and reconciling power of the Spirit, and the sacrificial servanthood of the Son in how you live. Show them what God is like.

It has been said that behavior is more caught than taught. Every parent knows this to be true. Our children more often reflect what we do in front of them than what we say to them. The display of our lives is definitely more convincing than the declaration of our lips. In fact, if we say one thing and do another, our doing often trumps what we say in people's minds. So what are we displaying to the world?

From time to time, I've led groups to embrace the practice of being a gospel display through an activity I call "Gospel Metaphors." I encourage the group members to think about the gospel and what we come to know about God through Jesus' work. Then I invite them to share the titles, attributes, and activities of God that we see in Jesus. Advocate. Sacrifice. Healer. Forgiver. Counselor. Prince of Peace. Restorer. Redeemer. The list could go on and on. While people are sharing, I write the words down on a whiteboard or poster-sized Post-it note. Often, many suggestions are given. And I usually select a few additional attributes or titles and ask how we could provide picture of what God is like in those ways.

The apostle Paul said we are like living letters displaying the work of God to the world—gospel metaphors. As a result of an exercise such as this, I've witnessed fences repaired (Restorer); houses remodeled to make more space for people in need of places to stay (Hospitable); an empty lot that was used for drug and sex trafficking transformed into a community garden (Redeemer); debts paid off (Forgiver); college tuition raised (Provider); fatherless children cared for by men (Father to the fatherless); and many other displays of the character of God. Small and big activities alike can display what God is like, as we've come to know him in the gospel.

We are blessed by God to bless. Physical displays of what God is like show his glory in tangible form.

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.

The book of 1 Peter: Peter begins with the gospel, explains the principle of living as God's "display community," then gives specific examples of how that can look in different situations." To "Read the book of 1 Peter. See This week's themes through the progression

of Peter's letter: Peter explains the principle of living as God's "display community," then gives specific examples of how that can look in different situations.

Display the Gospel

Week 7, Reflection 3

1. Read 1 Peter 2:9-12. Peter says to God's people scattered throughout Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Then, in verse 12, he adds "Keep your conduct among the gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." Why is it important for us to both display and declare the gospel?

2. 1 Peter 2:11 paints a picture of two extremes that Christians are commonly drawn toward: on one extreme, we can not only "abstain" from sin (which is biblical) but go too far and try and abstain from "sinners" (which is unbiblical). On the other extreme, we can go beyond living "among" the Gentiles (at the time, Gentiles were anyone who didn't know God), to living "like" them (which is unbiblical). The biblical call lands in the middle of the pendulum: our charge as we display the gospel is to live holy lives unto God, but to do so publicly, in the context of meaningful relationships with non-believers. That's a life of pursuing God, lived "among" those who don't follow God.

Which extreme on the pendulum do you tend toward? What motives (both good and poor) draw you toward that extreme? How might you need to apply the gospel to that?

3. Below, write some biblical commands God gives his people in the Bible (in other words, who are God's people called to be, and how does God command us to display the gospel?). Explain how each command reflects who God is and what he does. Explain how God clearly modeled the command in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Then, write some of the results in the Bible as God's people both did and didn't fulfill those commands.

4. "Gospel Metaphors" : In preparation for your group's meeting this week consider titles given to Jesus (Advocate, Sacrifice, Healer, Forgiver, Counselor, Prince of Peace, Restorer,

Redeemer...) and add a few of your own. For at least three, write one or two ways you could put that attribute on display in tangible, everyday ways:

As you consider various ways to display the gospel to others, read—and pray that God will help you believe and rest in—this truth: “This is our calling. Show the world the love of the Father, the healing and reconciling power of the Spirit, and the sacrificial servanthood of The Son in how you live. Show them what God is like.” Write out your thoughts as you consider these ideas and turn them into 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?