

GROW

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

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Every local church should be engaged in the kind of discipleship and mentoring that aims to grow leaders who become fruitful ministers. That's what this short course aims to help you establish. GROW will give you something tangible that will allow you to put your people on a reliable, Gospel-centered, Holy Spirit-empowered journey toward becoming a godly leader in the local church. This isn't a formula that produces the same results each time, but it is a framework that will help your church plot a course for equipping men and women for fruitful ministry.

GROW

G*ospel, first and always.* We start here, and we never stop coming back here. The good news of Jesus Christ is the centerpiece of who we are and who we are becoming in Christ.

R*realize your identity.* Identity is a core issue of every human. Who am I? What is my purpose? Understanding your identity in Christ changes how we view everything.

O*perate in the Holy Spirit.* The Gospel and our identity in Christ will wield little power in our journey if we aren't walking with the Holy Spirit.

W*orship is life.* It's no overstatement to say that spiritual warfare is all about worship. Satan's objective is to take for himself the praise that God deserves. Whatever he can do in us to divert our worship away from God is a win for him.

- What is being done about what happened? (Is there a solution that affects me?)
- What can we expect in the future? (How will this affect my future?)

The Gospel is the same. Jesus dying on the cross and rising from the grave is only the middle part of the news. Telling someone the middle without the beginning and end leaves your story without any context. It doesn't tell anyone why it should matter or how it will affect their future. We must tell people the full Gospel, the entire message so that they can understand and feel the weight of the news! They won't know how good it is unless you tell them why it's so good!

What we're going to do in this session is remind ourselves of the full Gospel, and then we can start to understand why in leadership it must be *first and always* in everything.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The core essentials of the Gospel can be captured in these words: *God, Man, Christ, Response*. *God* created man for a loving relationship. As His creation, man is accountable to Him. *Man* sinned against God, severing the relationship we had with Him. The wages of sin is death, so God sent *Christ*, His unique Son, to die as a substitute in our place and rise from the grave so that we can be restored to loving relationship with Him. Man's *response* to Christ's work is to believe that Jesus is Lord, and repent from our sins, or be held accountable for our sins. Any "gospel" that adds to or takes away from those essentials is not *the Gospel*.



The Gospel is nestled inside a larger story. The Bible contains four big pictures that make up the metanarrative.³ These big pictures are *Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration*. Together, these big pictures form one unified, cohesive narrative for the Bible. These big pictures form the framework that connects Adam and Eve to Noah and the Flood to Abraham and Isaac to David and Goliath to Jesus Christ to us. Let's briefly look at each big picture.

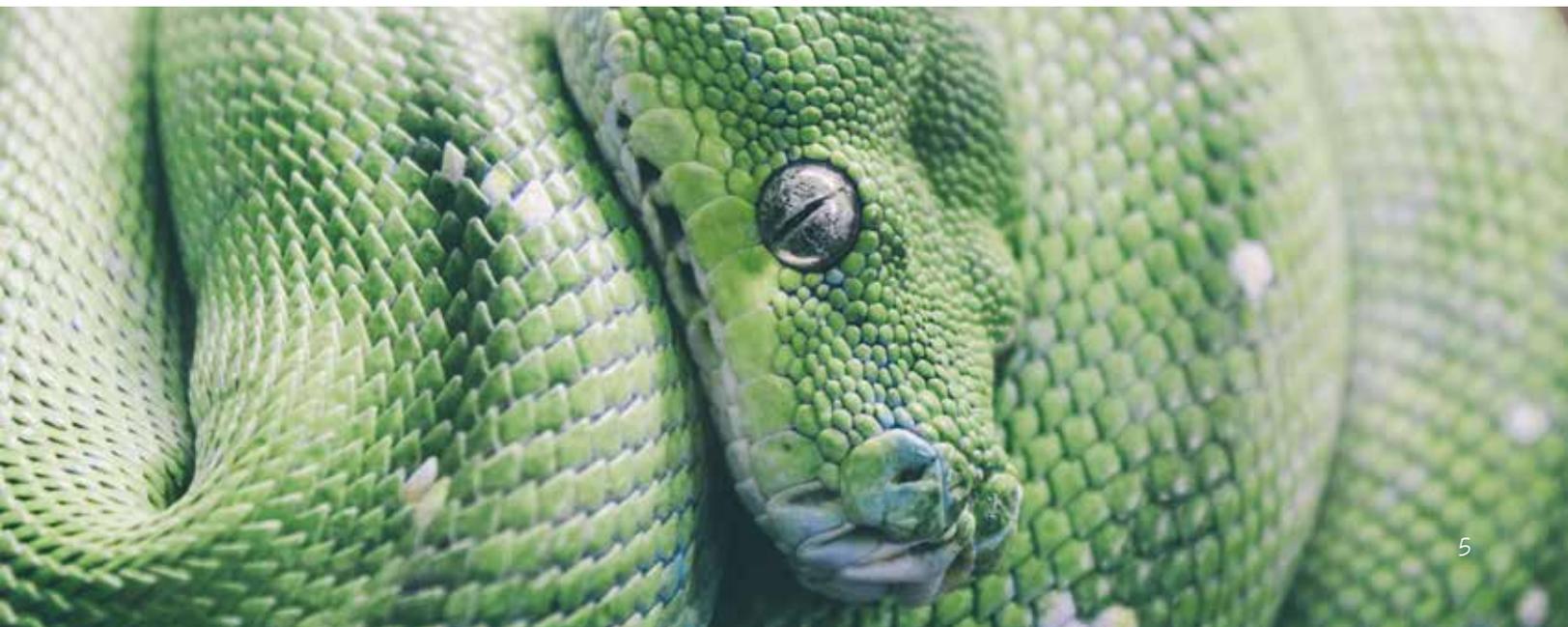
Creation

This is super simple. Our God created everything, seen and unseen.⁴ He created every spiritual being in the spirit realm and every physical being in the physical realm. He created intelligent spirit beings in Heaven, and he created human beings on Earth. His desire was (and is) for the spirit beings to represent him in Heaven and for humans to represent him on Earth.⁵ Eden was the place where Heaven and Earth came together, and God ruled them both from there. And God said everything was *very good*.⁶

Fall

But one spiritual being rebelled. Satan, anointed guardian cherub, desired to be worshiped like God and was cast down from his position for his sin.⁷ Satan's fall made him the first rebel and marked the beginning of a spiritual war. God removed him, and his next act of rebellion was to entice Adam and Eve to also rebel. And he succeeded.⁸ Satan's successful temptation of Adam and Eve brought his rebellion in Heaven to the Earth and dragged humanity into a war that they did not start.

If God is Creator,
how does that define
our relationship
to Him?





How was the nature of man's relationship to God changed when Adam sinned?

Adam and Eve didn't start this conflict, but they were now full participants in the rebellion, which brought a curse. Adam's actions imputed sin and death to all of humanity.⁹ Also, the curse went farther and affected the Earth itself.¹⁰ And that curse on the ground would make work and life difficult for humanity by bringing forth "thorns and thistles."

But even in this moment of loss, God's grace is both promised and demonstrated. When God is cursing the serpent, He promises future grace in that the offspring of the woman would one day crush him.¹¹ This promise is called the *protoevangelium*, which means the first or earliest declaration of the Gospel.¹² Then God demonstrates immediate grace by killing an animal and covering Adam and Eve with garments of its skin. This act of clothing is both the shedding of blood, which provides forgiveness¹³ and covering, which foreshadows how God will clothe His people with His righteousness.¹⁴

From here, everything in human history has unfolded. And every human ever since has been born in Adam's rebellion. Adam is the head of the human race, which is why ever since his sin has been imputed to every person born. You and I are born sinners because we are born beneath Adam's headship of humanity. The Apostle Paul says that the Earth itself is groaning because of the curse Adam's sin brought.¹⁵ Earthquakes? Tornadoes? Typhoons? Floods? Drought? Disease? All of these are fruits of that curse. A fallen, broken world produces brokenness.

Redemption

We've already spoken about the first declaration of the Gospel in Genesis 3:15. This promise was the earliest promise of redemption: "*he shall bruise*



your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Then we see God clothing Adam and Eve with the skin of an animal – the shedding of blood and covering of shame – which foreshadows how God will ultimately deal with sin through salvation in Christ by the shedding of his blood and our clothing with his righteousness. But redemption is a constant theme of both the Old and New Testaments through God’s ongoing covenants with people.

There is the initial covenant in Genesis 3; then, God makes a covenant with Noah to never destroy the Earth again by flood.¹⁶ Then there is a covenant with Abraham to turn his family into a nation that cannot be numbered, through whom the whole Earth would be blessed, give him a son, and a land.¹⁷ This covenant gets reinforced with Isaac and then again with Jacob.¹⁸ Then God gives Israel the Law through Moses, which is his covenant with the entire nation that if they obey his Law, they would be blessed, and if not, they would be cursed.¹⁹ And later, God establishes a covenant with King David that Israel would always have a king from his family.²⁰

All these covenants were promises that God initiated and kept. That’s important because a covenant is greater than a contract. Contracts are reciprocal by nature. In other words, a contract says *if you do your part, I’ll do my part, and if you don’t do your part, I won’t do my part*. Covenants are different. God initiates covenants with humanity because they say, *I’ll do my part, even if you don’t do your part*. Israel was blatantly unfaithful to the Lord, and yet God loves her and continues pursuing her. The book of the Prophet Hosea describes in vivid terms the unfaithfulness of Israel and God’s relentless faithfulness to her regardless.

How does Jesus Christ alter the relationship of man to the Father?



Every Old Testament covenant was pointing to a greater promise. In Jesus Christ, we have not only the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15 and every covenant that followed but the establishment of a new and final covenant. Jesus Christ, the greater High Priest, the greater Temple, the one who secured eternal redemption through the sacrifice of his blood, is the founder and perfecter of our God's ultimate covenant with humanity.²¹ Redemption is found in Jesus Christ through faith alone.²² If by faith, you believe that Jesus died on the cross *in your place*, resurrected, is alive right now, and confess that he is Lord, you will be saved.²³ This is the ultimate expression of God's grace: that sinners who don't deserve salvation can have it through faith alone in Christ alone.

Restoration

In some ways, restoration begins from the moment a person is born again. Jesus calls salvation being born again.²⁴ New birth means there's a new person born, and the New Testament contains volumes of teachings

about how believers are supposed to build up, nourish, renew, and every day choose to put on this new man.²⁵ And as we engage in this daily renewal, we fulfill our Kingdom purposes on Earth.²⁶ (We'll discuss this more in a moment)

How does the promise of resurrection shape my relationship with God today?

But as much change as a person may undergo in this life, it is not the fullest expression of restoration. When Christ returns to Earth, he will execute final judgment, and he will usher in the final and eternal manifestation of the Kingdom of God. When Jesus comes again, the ultimate restoration of God's family, Heaven, and Earth will happen.²⁷

First, every born-again person will receive a new body that will never experience corruption and last eternally.²⁸ Then the old Heaven and old Earth will *pass away* and are reborn as a new Heaven and a new Earth, free of the Genesis 3 curse. In this new creation, Heaven and Earth are no longer separate places, but they become a single realm of existence where God rules from a new Jerusalem on the new Earth.²⁹ And we live, work, and play in a world where there is no more separation between God and his creation for the rest of eternity.³⁰

There's good news and bad news. This entire story is good news for God's people who have by faith believed in Christ Jesus and repented from their sins. The bad news is that people who do not believe and repent will remain in their sins and spend eternity separated in what Revelation 20:15 calls the Lake of Fire. They are justly sent there as co-rebels with the first rebel, and sin will be eternally separated from the new creation and forever stopped from ruining God's family again.

How do these big pictures affect your understanding of the Gospel?

This is the big story which gives the Gospel its context: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. Anyone the church identifies as a leader should be trained to be well versed in how to communicate the fullness of the Gospel story.

THE GOSPEL FIRST

Now that we've defined the Gospel, let's look at why the Gospel should be first. Before he ascended, some of Christ's final words to the disciples was a command to spread the Gospel all over the world.³¹ So the primary mandate of the church is to spread the Gospel. Therefore, each believer is to use their gifts and talents to ensure that the Gospel is spreading. But what does it mean to share the Gospel with someone?

At the core, it is the act of verbally telling another person the good news of Jesus Christ. If a Christian is not sharing the Gospel with their mouths, then it isn't being shared at all. That may sound a bit harsh, but in a world where many religions perform good deeds, Christians cannot rely on a *life witness* alone.³² For the Christian, a life of right living must be accompanied by a verbal sharing of the Gospel, or else your life is not distinguishable from any other works-based religion.

However, it works the other way as well. When we share the Gospel verbally, our lives must also be a witness to the power of God. The Apostle Paul said to the Corinthian church, "*and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.*"³³ The Spirit-empowered life of a believer is irreplaceable support to the verbal testimony of the Gospel.

Sharing the Gospel means your actions and words are coherent. There's evidence in how you live that the message of the Gospel has the power to save and transform. Therefore, when we say the Gospel should be *first*, that means it should be higher than being the first priority of many. Instead, it is the defining story of your life, which determines every priority you may have. This should be true for all believers, but especially for the leaders who lead the ministries of their local church.

THE GOSPEL ALWAYS

Here is a common complaint from *church attenders* and *some believers*. The preaching from their pastors always talks about the Gospel. These people want to move on to other, *more profound* issues in the Bible. Some or even many of these complaints may have some legitimacy. Their pastors may not be equipped or skilled enough to preach deeply. However, the idea that we should move on from the preaching of the Gospel to deeper things comes from a serious misunderstanding.

The Gospel isn't just the gateway where we enter to receive eternal life. The Gospel is the gateway, the path, and the power to endure trials and tribulations as we journey. It's also the source of purpose, the reason for our hope, the source of abundance in this life, and the promise of restoration in the coming age! That means that we can never *move on* from the Gospel. Instead, we *dive deeper* into the Gospel.



Think about what happens. Christ's death on the cross provides forgiveness for our sins. That covers every sin we had done up until we were born again, every sin that currently entangles us, and every sin that we engage with in the future. That's astounding! We know this because not only did he die for us while we were still sinners, but he also promises to finish the saving work that he begins in us.³⁴

This forgiveness is extended to us, not because we have worked hard to earn it, but simply because we trust Jesus for salvation. The Father extends grace, forgiveness, and righteousness to us in and through Christ's merit, not ours. With the burden of earning our salvation effectively removed, the Gospel has moved us into a freedom that we never had as men and women under Adam. Christ becomes our head, replacing Adam, and as our head, we receive what everything Jesus has, even becoming co-heirs of his rule and inheritance from the Father.³⁵

That isn't all. Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection. The Bible calls Jesus the *first fruits* of those who sleep, which just means

If you have fully believed this Gospel, how does it transform your words and deeds every day?

he's the first one to resurrect from the dead of all who've died.³⁶ So if you belong to Jesus, his resurrection is the promise that you will also resurrect as he has. Again, if we are under his headship, we receive everything he has from the Father – including a resurrection to a new body.

That resurrection has already begun, even in the present moment. The fact that you are born again means that you have a resurrected spirit! The Prophet Ezekiel prophesied in two places about a new spirit that God's people would receive. He says God is going to give his people a new heart, a new spirit, and the Holy Spirit.³⁷ Elsewhere, Ezekiel has a vision called the Valley of Dry Bones, where God breathes new life into a valley of dead people.³⁸ Both of these are pictures of salvation where people who were spiritually dead are raised to new life. Every believer has a resurrected, new spirit, or as the New Testament puts it, a new self.³⁹ And that new self is shaped and molded by the Holy Spirit, who takes residence within each believer.⁴⁰ Then when Jesus returns, our resurrected spirit will be united with a resurrected body, and our redemption and restoration will be complete!

Taken together, these things – the cross and the resurrection – will give every believer what they need to endure all things in this life. There is no relational issue between people that the Gospel cannot heal. There is no injustice the Gospel cannot rectify. Every curse, every sickness, all tears will be no more because of the Gospel! We couldn't move on from it if we tried for a thousand years. The power of the Gospel is stronger than our sin, higher than our intellects, deeper than our hurts, and overcomes every obstacle for the one who will believe!

That is why we say the Gospel is always. Therefore, the importance of training our leaders to think this way becomes evident. Leaders within the church should grasp the Gospel first and always. It's not a perfect grasp of every possible theological point or practical application, but rather an understanding that the power of the Gospel is what moves us along the journey, grows us in wisdom, increases our worship, and empowers our ministries. If we're not centering ourselves in the Gospel, we're trusting the good news of our works, our little kingdoms... of ourselves. That isn't good news at all.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Ephesians 4:11-12
- 2 Harris, W. H., III. (2010). *The Lexham Greek-English Interlinear New Testament: SBL Edition* (Ro 1:16). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.
- 3 Metanarrative means the *story about the stories*. The metanarrative of the Bible is the framework narrative that stitches all the individual stories into one account with coherent meaning.
- 4 Genesis 1:1
- 5 This is evident from many places in the Bible. Unfallen spirit beings are depicted serving God as a council of spirits to whom God delegates responsibilities, as divine messengers to humans, as the unseen armies of Heaven that fight for Israel, and as ministering spirits who help in time of need. Humans were made to represent God in on Earth in that the Genesis 1 mandate to humanity was to spread the image of God by multiplying and subduing the entire Earth.
- 6 Genesis 1:31
- 7 Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:13-17
- 8 Genesis 3:1-7
- 9 Romans 5:12
- 10 Genesis 3:17, “*cursed is the ground because of you,*”; Romans 8:20
- 11 Genesis 3:15
- 12 *Pocket dictionary of biblical studies* (p. 96). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- 13 Hebrews 9:22
- 14 Isaiah 61:10; Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10
- 15 Romans 8:22
- 16 Genesis 9:8-17
- 17 Genesis 12:1-2, 15:1-21
- 18 Genesis 26:1-5, 28:10-17
- 19 Deuteronomy 28
- 20 2 Samuel 7:1-17
- 21 Hebrews 9:11-28, 12:2
- 22 Ephesians 2:8
- 23 Romans 10:9-10
- 24 John 3:3
- 25 Romans 6:12-14, 12:2; 2 Corinthians 4:16, Philippians 2:12, 4:8-9; Colossians 3:1-17; *among many others*
- 26 Ephesians 2:10
- 27 1 Corinthians 15; Revelation 19-22; for our purposes, we are not examining the various ideas about the timing of the return of Christ or the nature of the 1000 years. We will simply state that Christ’s return triggers the final judgment of sin and the final restoration of all believers, Heaven, and Earth, which is agreed upon by almost all Christians in history.
- 28 1 Corinthians 15:35-49
- 29 Revelation 21:1-8
- 30 Revelation 22:1-5
- 31 Matthew 28:18-20
- 32 A common phrase for people who say they share the Gospel through how they live. It’s rooted in the statement often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, “Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words.”
- 33 1 Corinthians 2:4
- 34 Romans 5:8; Philippians 1:6
- 35 Romans 5:17, 8:17; 2 Timothy 2:12
- 36 1 Corinthians 15:20
- 37 Ezekiel 36:26-27
- 38 Ezekiel 37:1-14
- 39 Ephesians 4:24
- 40 Romans 8:16





REALIZE YOUR IDENTITY

Many leadership failures are traceable to a detrimental lack of self-awareness. People who are zealous, charismatic, and full of ambition can overestimate their ability to see things through to completion. It helps to be honest about your strengths and weaknesses and have accountability from people who will be brutally honest if necessary. But in the end, even the most honest accountability and the best level of self-awareness won't substitute for understanding your identity in Christ.

In this session, we will look at the *R* in our **GROW** acronym. **Realize** your identity. Every believer has a *reborn* identity, but many are unsure of it or unaware altogether. It's more than an awareness of your salvation. When we view the Christian life as little more than a choice that changes your eternal destination – a get-out-of-hell ticket – there isn't much motivation to move beyond.

People who've been *saved* for many years, but their testimony doesn't go much farther than the day they gave their lives to Christ may be unaware of their new identity. Apart from the moment they were saved and baptized, not a whole lot has changed. They might've stopped cussing, and may have become a faithful church attendee, but apart from that, they're just a nicer version of who they were before salvation.

Jesus didn't die for us to become nicer versions of ourselves. He died to make us into someone new, not an upgraded revision of our old selves. *The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*¹ The reborn identity is a person who *couldn't* exist before salvation and is the person the Holy Spirit is transforming every day. Godly leaders invest in working with

If your name and picture were in Webster's Dictionary, what would the description say?

the Holy Spirit's efforts to transform their new selves. They lead by example in surrender to the Spirit's sanctifying work.

We hope that this session will lead you to a greater understanding of your identity in Christ. Your leadership capacity will increase in step with how well you understand your reborn identity. To understand who we are, we also need to understand who we were. So, let's begin with a brief look at who we were without Jesus.

SINNER IN ADAM

"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."

Romans 5:12 (ESV)

You cannot embrace the Gospel of Jesus Christ without a basic understanding that you are a sinner. It is square one, and we're all born into this identity. Every human being ever born was born under the headship of Adam. He is the head of the human race. Because God made him the head of the human race, we inherit everything that Adam has to offer us. Adam was created in the image of God.² Adam was given intelligence and free will.³ Every human being ever born has inherited these things from Adam. But because Adam exercised his free will to rebel, he became a sinner.⁴ And every human being ever born has also inherited Adam's sin. Sin brought death into the world. Therefore, death has been a part of human existence ever since sin entered our nature.

The implications of this are all around us, and not only because the mortality rate of human beings is 100%. Sin brought physical and



spiritual death. Physical death may take seven or eight decades to manifest for many humans fully, but spiritual death is a stillbirth from the start. Every human is born with a *dead spirit* because of the sin they inherited from Adam.⁵ Our dead spirit is what cuts us off from the life-giving relationship we had with God in Eden. Because we are severed from our source of life, we turn to other things for fulfillment.

From the moment a child can understand that a lie will fulfill his desires for food or a toy or simply preserve his hind parts from the pain of a spanking, he or she will choose a lie instead of the truth. And they will continue to do that until it becomes clear that their lies aren't profitable; i.e., they receive discipline that is weightier than the benefits of lying. But the discipline never cures the sin. It only makes the sinner more sophisticated in their sinning. A four-year-old is much more skilled at lying than a two-year-old. Our sophistication in sinning increases in proportion to the discipline we receive. In other words, we don't sin less with age and discipline; we just get better at justifying and hiding it. The Apostle Paul says to the Corinthian church...

*"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you."
1 Corinthians 6:9-11a (ESV)*

The longer a person lives, the more time he or she has to develop and nurture their sins. And we do this because we have a dead spirit, unconnected with God, the source of all life. The only thing we have

Why is it hard to admit that we are broken sinners?

How can spiritual disciplines make you a better sinner?



to guide us is our flesh, and it is broken by sin as well. Those little four-year-old lies are power grabs for satisfying the desires of four-year-old flesh. As we age, our sin goes from four-year-old lies to forty-year-old drunkenness, swindling, sexual immorality, and greed. The sins change, but the motivation doesn't. Our broken flesh is still steering the ship, making power grabs to satisfy its desires because your spirit was dead on arrival, the moment you were born.

The identity we were born with is that of a rebel. Adam was a rebel, and so we are born into his identity. That means many things, but primarily it means that every breath we took from the moment we were born until we met Jesus was taken defiantly as cosmic rebels on the losing side of a spiritual war. That is who we *were*: "And such were some of you." But we cannot thrive as leaders by continuing to identify with a *former* identity.

SAINT IN JESUS

"For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ." Romans 5:17 (ESV)

If Adam brought a curse, a dead spirit, and death to humanity, Jesus reverses each of those things we inherit, but the Scripture says that *much more* we will receive *abundance* from Jesus Christ. Jesus came to finish the work that Adam failed to do. He is the head of His people.⁶ So, just like those who are under Adam's headship inherit from Adam, those who are under Christ's headship inherit from Christ! Part of the good news of the Gospel is that we inherit *far more* from Christ than we did from Adam. Here's a small list to prime our thinking.

Do you believe that you ARE the finished work of Christ?

(Also, does this question make you uncomfortable?)





- Broken curse (Galatians 3:13)
- Resurrected spirit (Ephesians 2:4-5)
- Physical resurrection (Philippians 3:21)
- Inheritance (Romans 8:17)
- Authority (Matthew 28:18; Luke 10:19; Galatians 2:20)
- Divine purpose (Ephesians 2:10)
- The Holy Spirit (John 14:26)

Let's briefly address these one at a time.

Jesus breaks the curse. In His death, He became the curse for us, and when He died, the curse died with Him. Galatians calls it the *curse of the Law*. That isn't to imply that the Law was somehow evil or imperfect. On the contrary, the Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.⁷ But the Law was also given to highlight that we are sinners⁸ and in doing that, it reveals the curse, and even amplifies the curse's work in us through sin.⁹

However, because the curse died with Jesus on the cross, its power is broken. The Law no longer amplifies sin in our lives. But now, through Jesus, we become walking and talking fulfilments of the Law! And the Law that we find ourselves fulfilling is what Jesus taught us would fulfill every other Law: love God and love your neighbor as yourself.¹⁰ Because the curse is broken, you are now free from the power of sin and free to choose a life-giving relationship with the Father through Jesus!

You have a resurrected spirit. In salvation, the part of you that communes with God, your spirit, is made alive for the first time! This resurrection

What implications are present in the reality that your resurrection has already begun?

is the new birth of which Jesus told Nicodemus in John chapter three. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”¹¹ Notice the upper *and* lower case use of the word spirit in this verse. The Holy Spirit (upper) gives life to our dead spirit (lower) in the new birth. The resurrection begins at salvation with a resurrected spirit! So very literally, if you are born again, your resurrection has already begun!

You will receive a physical resurrection. Part two of our resurrection will happen when Jesus returns. Philippians 3:21 plainly says when He comes again, *our lowly bodies will become like his glorious body.* The Apostle John echoes the same idea that when Christ appears, we will become completely like Him.¹² Paul gives a much longer discussion about this subject in 1 Corinthians chapter fifteen. The New Testament is full of promises that those who are born again into His kingdom will resurrect like Jesus.

We receive the same inheritance as Jesus from the Father. Romans chapter eight contains the strongest discussion about this topic, calling us fellow heirs with Christ. We receive this because we have been adopted into God’s family as *firstborn sons*.¹³ As firstborns, we will receive the same inheritance as Jesus the Firstborn of all creation¹⁴ because He is our elder Brother in the family¹⁵ and will share all things with us. If we are going to inherit all things that Jesus inherits, then in God’s kingdom, there is no such thing as a pauper, there is no poverty, there will be no want. As such, while we wait for the ultimate fulfillment of the kingdom to arrive, we have inherited every spiritual blessing through Christ¹⁶ because He has resurrected our spirits for an abundant life here as we wait.

We receive His authority. We should be cautious with this because many have built an over-realized theology surrounding this truth. Some have taken this truth to an extreme, believing that because we have authority over all things, then in Jesus' name, we can usher in a Christian utopia before Christ comes again. That's foolish because the Bible doesn't teach that at all.

But, as believers, the authority that Christ shares with us does indeed push back the darkness and advance the Gospel across the entire world. It does give us authority over the powers of darkness, but only as much as it is not I who lives, but Christ who lives in me.¹⁷ Christ's authority in His people is only as evident as His people are denying themselves and taking up their cross every day. That's why James says it's the prayers of righteous men that are powerful to bring healing to the sick.¹⁸ How can men be righteous except that it isn't them who lives, but Christ who lives through them? His authority manifests in us as He lives through us.

We have a divine purpose. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul very clearly says that as His workmanship, we all have good works to do, which the Father prepared for us to do in advance. That needs very little explanation, except to say this. There has never been, there currently isn't, and neither will there ever be a believer who doesn't have a calling and spiritual gifts to accomplish their calling. Believers unsure of what to do with their lives have a problem. They haven't been asking the right questions of the right Person or searching in the right places for their answers.

What does it look like for a believer to live in Christ's authority?





We have the Holy Spirit. This is certainly not last or least important. It's the MOST important. He is who makes our union with the Father and the Son possible. He is the power who raised Christ from the dead who lives within us.¹⁹ He is the one who is the transforming Person who sanctifies us.²⁰ He is the seal of our salvation, which means He's the proof that we are members of God's family.²¹ He is the one who guarantees we will endure to the end.²² He is our helper.²³ He gives us the gifts we need to fulfill our ministry.²⁴ Without the Holy Spirit, we would still be lost in our sin because He's the one who initiates our new birth!²⁵

So! Take a deep breath and breathe in these truths! This is just the beginning of who you are in Christ! You have received far more from Jesus than you have from Adam. Your identity in Christ is greater than any you could forge for yourself. Adam gave you death. Jesus gives you life. Adam gave you sin. Jesus gives you righteousness. Adam gave you a curse. Jesus gives you freedom. In Christ, you are a new creation!²⁶ Quite literally, in Christ, you are a person who didn't exist before the new birth! It is our responsibility as believers to discover who was born the day that we were born again!

PUT ON THE NEW SELF

*"Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator."
Colossians 3:9-10 (ESV)*

These verses in Colossians talk about putting on the *new self*. Of course, the new self is the new creation who was born when you received

Christ. Your identity *is* the new self. But Paul speaks as if the new self is something that we can choose or not choose to be on any given day. Leader, herein is the wrestle. If you are leading people while choosing to identify with your *old self*, you are reproducing the qualities of your old self in the people who follow you.

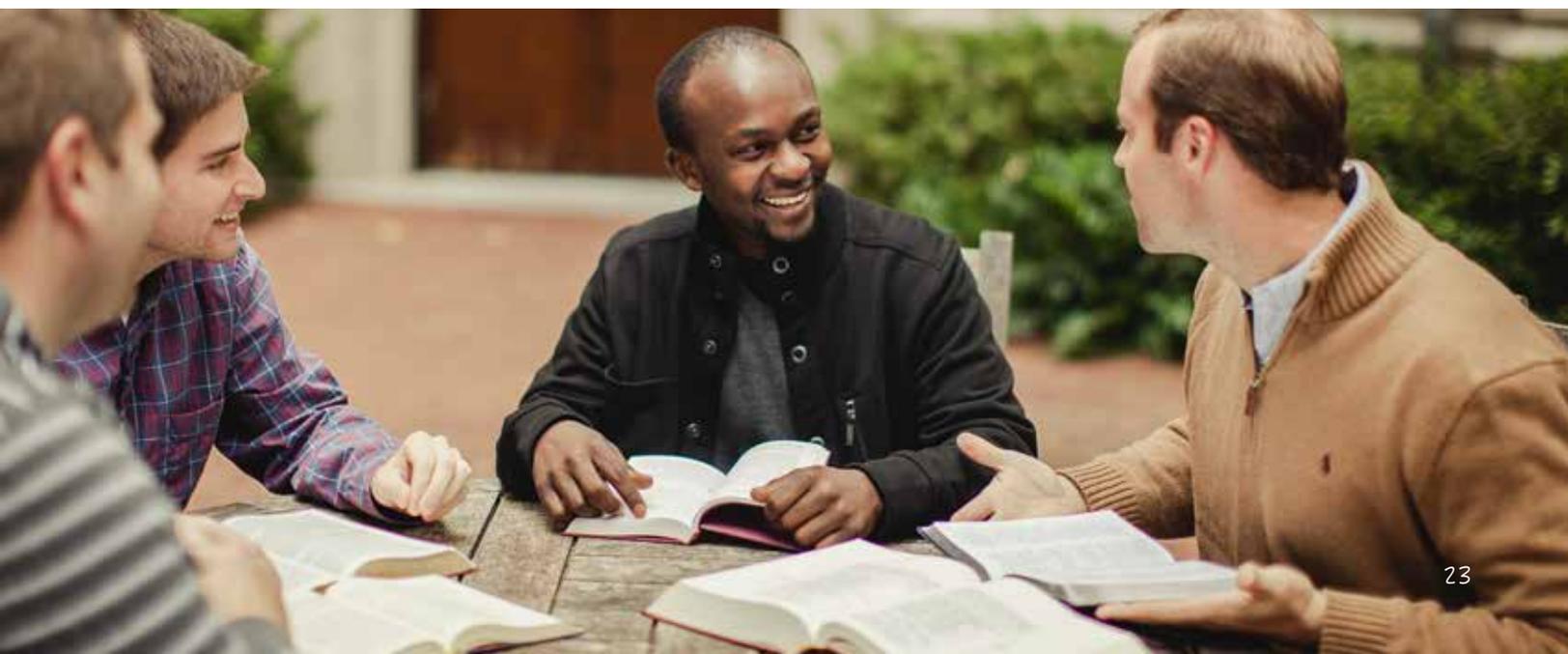
The *old self* is always a choice. We may have resurrected spirits, but we still have corrupted flesh. Because of that, we have our feet in two worlds. On the one hand, we have our flesh that is corrupt and dying whose desires are tempted and entice us to sin. And on the other, we have our resurrected spirit who communes with the Holy Spirit and is continuously renewed as we pray, read the Scripture, and fellowship with other believers. The old self lies in the flesh, and the new self lies in the Spirit.²⁷ And many times every day, we choose which one gets to steer the ship. Which identity will win the day?

Putting on the new self, your reborn identity, is also an intentional choice. There's nothing about the Christian life that runs on autopilot. Autopilot is a myth. So, let's highlight a few leadership thoughts that will capture why putting on the new self is critical for leaders.

HABITS BECOME CHARACTER

Spiritual disciplines are the things that form our character. Romans 12:2 says that we are to be transformed through mind renewal. That simply means prayer, study, and fellowship are indispensable elements of spiritual formation. Those habits change our thinking, which, in turn, transforms our character.

How have spiritual disciplines assisted your transformation?





CHARACTER BECOMES CULTURE

Whether in your home, your small group, or the church, your character contributes to the culture of your environment. If your character is becoming Christlike, then you'll contribute to a more Christlike culture forming in your spheres of influence. Jesus calls us the salt of the earth.²⁸ That isn't just a reference to the flavor. Salt is a preservative. As we transform the culture around us, we are also acting as a preservative. Remember, God would have spared Sodom and Gomorrah if only ten righteous people had been found among them.²⁹ Our character will transform the culture around us.

CULTURE BECOMES DNA

The culture that your leadership produces will become foundational to the fabric of your family, small group, or church. It will be quickly evident to the people who walk through your doors for the first time. Whatever culture your character helped create, it sets the tone for everything within reach of your influence. It becomes part of the DNA of your people and how they are known in the broader community. Acts 11:26 tells us that the followers of Jesus were first called Christians in Antioch. The culture among the believers was so Christlike that the people in the city of Antioch named them Christians!

DNA REPRODUCES

Whatever your DNA is gets reproduced. The culture that becomes the DNA of your home, small group, or church gets exported. It comes out in how your people share the Gospel. It comes out in how passionate they are for evangelism and missions. Your church's DNA will reproduce itself in the members, in how they do business, in how they raise their

*What are you
reproducing?*



families, in how they study the Scriptures. Look at what your people value and reproduce in their spheres of influence, and you'll get a glimpse at the DNA your leadership has exported. Now, you cannot take full responsibility for every decision, good or bad, that the people under your leadership make. But it does offer some insights into the fruit of how you've led them.

Leaders, you cannot afford to be cavalier with your identity. Live from the new self. Nurture the new self. Take care to put the old self to death at every opportunity. Whoever you are becoming in Christ will impact others in how they discover their identity in Christ. After Jesus, your identity in Christ, your new self, is probably the most important person you need to get to know on this Earth. It will seismically shift the way you lead others and forever alter their lives toward Kingdom living.

(Endnotes)

1 2 Corinthians 5:17

2 Genesis 1:26-27

3 These are evident from his choices but are not proof of being created in God's image. If intelligence and free will are proof of being created in God's image, can we say that the severely mentally disabled, who have little to no intellect and cannot make their own choices, are image-bearers? Likewise, would we say that animals who demonstrate high intelligence are also image-bearers? Image bearing is a status independent of intelligence and free will; otherwise, the unborn and those who cannot exercise intellect and free will wouldn't qualify. This has societal implications that reach far into the ethical issues of abortion and euthanasia. If the image of God depends on qualities that some humans cannot demonstrate, then not all humans are image bearers and become disposable.

4 Genesis 3:17

5 Ephesians 2:1-2

6 Ephesians 1:22

7 Psalm 19:7

8 Galatians 3:24

9 Romans 5:20

- 10 Matthew 22:37-40
- 11 John 3:6
- 12 1 John 3:2
- 13 Exodus 4:22; Romans 8:15, 23; 11:17; Hebrews 12:23
- 14 Colossians 1:15
- 15 Romans 8:29
- 16 Ephesians 1:3
- 17 Galatians 2:20
- 18 James 5:16
- 19 Romans 8:11
- 20 1 Peter 1:2
- 21 Romans 8:15-16
- 22 Ezekiel 36:27; Philippians 1:6
- 23 John 14:6,26; 15:26
- 24 1 Corinthians 12:11
- 25 John 3:6
- 26 2 Corinthians 5:17
- 27 Romans 8:5
- 28 Matthew 5:13
- 29 Genesis 19:32

First, Jesus places the Holy Spirit on an equal level with the Father and the Son.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,”
Matthew 28:19 (ESV)

This verse may not seem like the nail in the coffin on this issue until you understand what Jesus meant by *the name*. There’s something powerful at work in how he phrased this sentence. Take these Old Testament passages as examples.

Since the Holy Spirit is equal with the Father and the Son, why do so many churches teach so little about Him?

“Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay careful attention to him and obey his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression, for my name is in him.” Exodus 23:20-21 (ESV)

“May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob protect you...
Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.”
Psalm 20:1,7 (ESV)

“The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.”
Proverbs 18:10 (ESV)

“Behold, the name of the Lord comes from afar, burning with his anger, and in thick rising smoke; his lips are full of fury,” Isaiah 30:27 (ESV)





For the Jew, the name – *ha-shem* – is often used as a substitute for the divine name, *Yahweh*, and is even personified in places with human characteristics. In other words, the name is a *Person*.² Taken with that understanding, *in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit* should be understood like this: *in Yahweh, the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit*. This statement alone elevates the Holy Spirit to one of three Persons of God.

Now we can look into historical accounts and Apostolic letters. In Acts chapter five, Peter equates lying to the Holy Spirit with lying to God.³ Paul says that our bodies are temples where God himself – His Spirit – resides.⁴ And in a trifacta, Paul affirms the person of the Holy Spirit and puts the Spirit on equal ground with the Father and Jesus the Son, calling Him *the Spirit, the Spirit of God, and the Spirit of Christ* in one verse.⁵ Also, take note that the Bible never refers to the Holy Spirit with gender neutrality. The Holy Spirit is always referred to with the male personal pronouns, *He, Him, and His*. We could keep going, but these examples provide a solid foundation for the Holy Spirit's identity as a Person of God's three-in-one nature.

HIS ACTIVITY

The first place we see the Holy Spirit doing anything is in Genesis 1:2.

"The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." (ESV)



He Restrains Evil

The formless, void and dark waters mentioned in this verse represent something to the ancient mind. The ancients thought the sea was an unpredictable evil, full of chaos. This is pictured well in Daniel's vision of the four great beasts that came up out of the sea.⁶ You can also see this in Revelation 13, where the great beast rises out of the sea.⁷ The Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters would have been a picture of sovereignty. In the Word, the Holy Spirit is immediately depicted as a restrainer of evil and chaos. This fits well with Paul's description of the *restrainer* who keeps lawlessness at bay until the appointed time for the lawless one to appear.⁸

Since the Holy Spirit empowers every believer, why do we not trust Him in every situation?

He Empowers

His power is shown in many ways, but we can encase all of them under two broad categories. First, the Holy Spirit supports life.

"When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground."
Psalm 104:30 (ESV)

If God decided to take back his Holy Spirit from creation, everything would return to the dust from which it was created.⁹ But His life-sustaining power doesn't stop in the physical realm. He also regenerates our hearts and resurrects our spirits in salvation.¹⁰ And in a ministry that is exclusively for believers, He gives life to our mortal bodies both in this life and in His final act of recreation when He resurrects our bodies to their eternal existence.¹¹

Second, the Holy Spirit gives power for service. Both the Old Testament and the New Testament are overflowing with examples. Bezalel was



filled with the Holy Spirit to grant him the artistic skill to construct the Tabernacle.¹² The Spirit of God filled Othniel, Gideon, and Samson to judge Israel.¹³ When Samuel anointed David as king, the Holy Spirit *rushed* upon him and never departed.¹⁴ In Luke and Acts, we see first John the Baptist, and then the Apostles in multiple places were filled with the Holy Spirit for ministry.¹⁵ But most importantly, the Word shows us that Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit. Isaiah foretold it.

*“And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the
Lord.” Isaiah 11:2 (ESV)*

Then when He was baptized, the Spirit descended upon Him.¹⁶ And throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus relied on the power of the Holy Spirit to minister.¹⁷ Jesus even made this clear to us by quoting Isaiah in Luke 4:18, *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.”*

He Purifies

Regarding salvation, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit convicts the world regarding sin, righteousness, and judgment.¹⁸ Paul teaches that the Holy Spirit is the active cleansing agent in our salvation.¹⁹ His role in the regeneration of our hearts and the resurrection of our spirits means that He does an initial cleansing work in us, making a decisive break with the patterns of sin that were in our lives before.²⁰

Concerning our ongoing journey, he continually forms the character of Christ within us.²¹ This is evidenced in us by the increasing presence of the *fruit of the Spirit* - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

*Describe a time when
the Spirit intervened
in a situation where
you intended to sin.*

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.²² He also manifests spiritual gifts within each believer, which are for building up the Body of Christ.²³ 2 Peter 1:3-5 gives us a concise summary of the Holy Spirit's (*His divine power*) ongoing role for every believer.

Describe a time when
the Holy Spirit
restored you after
He corrected you.

"His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire." (ESV)

He Reveals

The ministry of revelation needs some explanation. In one sense, the Holy Spirit revealed God's Word to the Old Testament Prophets and the New Testament Apostles.

"For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."
2 Peter 1:21 (ESV)

This kind of revelation has ceased because the Holy Spirit is giving no new Scriptures since Jesus Christ is the final revelation of God's Word.²⁴ Revelation chapter 22:18-19 also offers a warning to those who would add to or take away from God's Word and is itself a final restatement of earlier warnings in the Old Testament.²⁵ Man cannot add to or take away from the Word of God. Therefore, we reject the *new* revelations of Joseph Smith, Muhammed, or any other self-proclaimed prophet who seeks to alter the revealed Word we have received from the Prophets and

Apostles. It's why we also reject *rewritten* versions of the Bible produced by Jehovah's Witnesses through the Watchtower or any other *translation* of Scripture that was altered to change the doctrines handed to us by the Prophets and Apostles.

However, the Holy Spirit also has a continuing ministry of revelation in that He reveals the will of God. In one sense, the will of God is revealed through the Word of God, but we also see Him at work immediately after Christ's baptism, leading Jesus into the desert to be tempted by Satan.²⁶ He speaks directly to Philip to approach the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch, and He also transports Philip away after baptizing him.²⁷ He speaks directly to the believers in Antioch when they set apart Paul and Barnabas for mission work.²⁸ And more generally, he leads every believer in day-to-day guidance.²⁹

As another ministry of revelation, Jesus also told us that the Holy Spirit would *declare to you the things that are to come*.³⁰ In one way, this ministry is complete through the prophetic writings of the Apostles, specifically in the book of Revelation. But we also see it at work in believers in the book of Acts who were not Apostles. A believer named Agabus prophesied twice, once warning of a famine that was coming, and another time warning Paul that imprisonment and affliction awaited him in Jerusalem.³¹ The question that commonly arises when it comes to men and women who prophesy is whether it is genuinely from the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Paul instructs us not to despise prophecies, test everything, and hold on to what is good.³²





Why is it important to be unified in the Holy Spirit with other believers, even those with whom we disagree?

He Unifies

The unifying ministry of the Holy Spirit cannot be understated. Because the breadth of God’s people crosses generations, gender, ethnicity, economics, social status, politics, geographic boundaries, unity is precious. We see the unifying effects of the Holy Spirit immediately in the newly born church.

“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

Acts 2:44-45 (ESV)

The Spirit’s presence in unity is also expressed poetically in Psalm 133, as He is the overflowing oil that runs down the beard of Aaron and onto his garments.³³ Paul highlights the Holy Spirit’s role in the removal of the hostile wall that divided Jews and Gentiles because both have *access in one Spirit to the Father* and that they are built together into a new dwelling place for God *by the Spirit*.³⁴ Believers who are sensitive and responsive to the Holy Spirit’s presence and leading will be unified in harmony and serve as a testimony to the community of the power of the Gospel.

HIS PRIORITY

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8

Jesus placed a heavy emphasis upon the Holy Spirit on the night before His crucifixion. Around the table that night, He mentioned that the Holy

Spirit was coming no less than four times.³⁵ Then before He ascended, twice, Jesus reminded the disciples of the Holy Spirit.³⁶

After Pentecost, being filled with the Holy Spirit is heavily emphasized.³⁷ The book of Acts mentions numerous men who were filled with the Holy Spirit.³⁸ What then does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit?

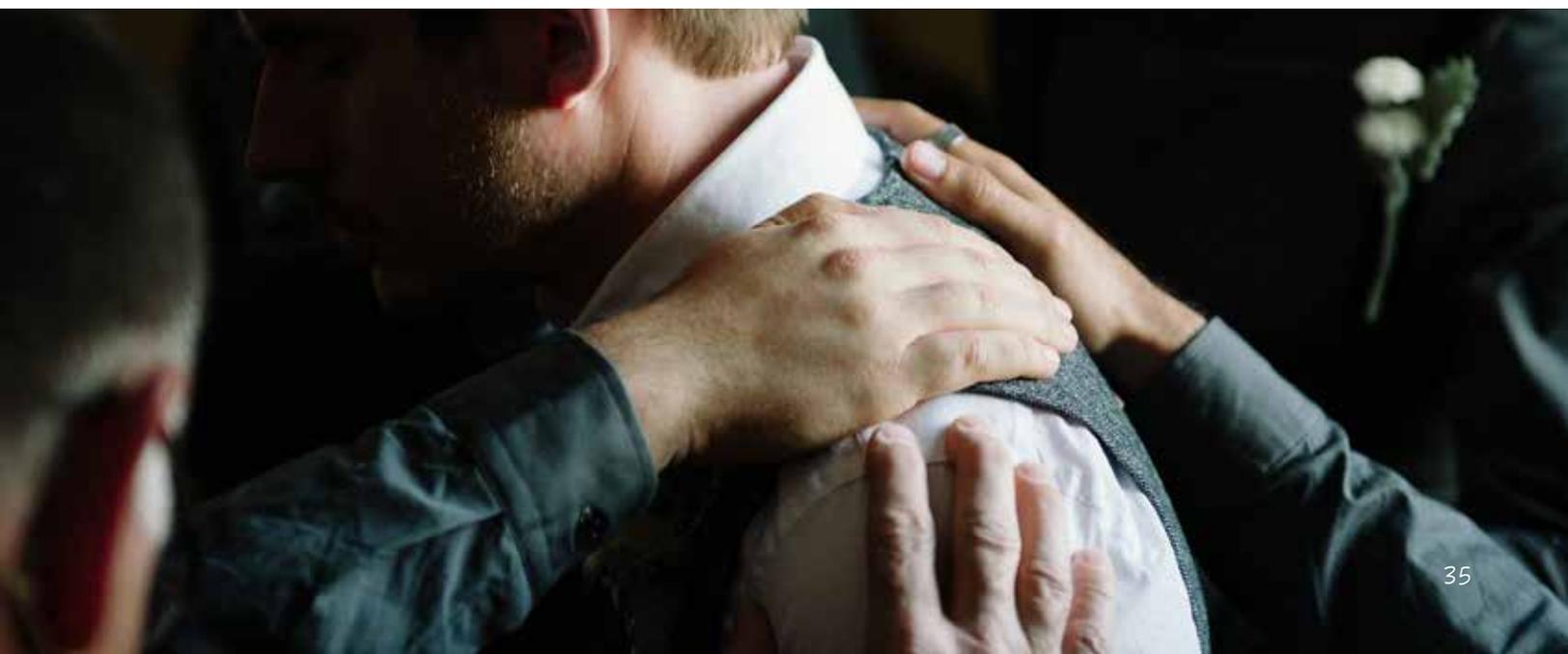
Simply put, it means that God's presence fills you completely. At that moment, you will be in tune with His will, His feelings, His desires, and your mind will be aligned with His so that what you say and do is what He would say and do. We know this because that's what happens with Spirit-filled men and women in the Bible.

The need to be filled with the Spirit is the paramount issue of Christian living. If we are not walking in the Spirit, then we're walking by the desires of our flesh.³⁹ The Bible leaves no room for a middle ground.

BEING SPIRIT-EMPOWERED

Herein is the place where everyone gets a little crazy one way or the other. The errors that people fall into with living a Spirit-empowered life fall into two categories of error. The first category of error is an experience-driven faith. You cannot escape that the Holy Spirit brings experiences. Apart from Genesis 1:2, when the Holy Spirit shows up with people, something happens. But the error of the experience-driven believer is that he or she doesn't believe the Holy Spirit is present in power unless there is a dramatic demonstration of His power and presence. They appeal to Christ's miracles and the book of Acts for the strength of their

What are some issues in your life that may hinder the filling of the Holy Spirit?





position because the Gospels and Acts are brimming with big displays of the Holy Spirit's power.

But if you look at the Apostolic letters, and take in the instructions that are given, for the most part, they're very practical. They target the person who needs the Holy Spirit's power in overcoming sin, reconciling relationships, and sharing the Gospel. It doesn't eliminate the possibility or need for powerful demonstrations of the Holy Spirit. Still, the New Testament is weighted heavier with appeals for believers to remain faithful through opposition, love one another, and forgive as Christ has forgiven us. These kinds of issues need Holy Spirit power as well, but the sensationalism that seekers of experiences desire won't show up.

How can we avoid falling into extreme beliefs and/or practices about the Holy Spirit's work?

The other category of error is to shun all experiences. Many times this is motivated by a fear of the abuses from experience-driven believers. This camp of people typically believes that the dramatic demonstrations of the Holy Spirit's power ceased not long after the end of the first century. When the Apostles had all died, the Holy Spirit stopped working through signs and wonders and began working exclusively through the written Word. And pushing this error even farther, the extremists of this error maintain that the Holy Spirit no longer speaks to individual believers in an internal voice, but that all instruction from the Spirit will come from reading the Word.

However, if we're to trust the Scriptures as a model for what we should expect in a typical believer's life, then we can expect the Holy Spirit to speak to us, to do amazing things, and show up in power to demonstrate His presence.



Friendship with the Holy Spirit

The answer, of course, doesn't lie in these extremes. It lies in cultivating a friendship with the Holy Spirit. We've already established that the Holy Spirit is a person. With personhood comes the ability to be befriended. How do we know this? Paul famously says that we shouldn't grieve the Holy Spirit.⁴⁰ It stands to reason that if the Holy Spirit can be grieved, then He can also be made glad. In other words, He has emotions. If he feels, then he has desires. What is His desire? It is for you to know Him.⁴¹ He knows you, but do you know Him?

Leaders, you must cultivate friendship with the Holy Spirit. Why? Because through that friendship will come the power that you need, not just to live a holy life, but to equip and lead a holy people. Practically speaking, we can identify three personal disciplines from 1 Thessalonians 5 that will help us develop a vibrant friendship with Him.

*First, pray without ceasing.*⁴² Don't over-spiritualize this. What that means is let's bring prayer down to the street level. Prayer is a privilege that we have as members of God's family. It is something we should cherish and plan so that we can have more profound times of fellowship with God. But it's also a simple conversation. It doesn't need to be flowery or eloquent. Think about the casual nature of how you speak with your spouse or best friend. That's how we should feel free to talk with the Holy Spirit. But it's not just the tone or the type of speech; it's also the frequency. Speak with Him as often or more as you would your spouse or best friend. Here's an example.

Is friendship with the Holy Spirit something you've ever pursued?

The next time you are speaking with someone, at the same time, have a second conversation running with the Holy Spirit. Ask Him if there's any way you can encourage this person, or if they have any hurts that need healing. Or, just pray for them as you speak that a door for the Gospel would open. As you learn to engage in these kinds of three-way conversations, and you learn to discern the voice of the Holy Spirit and obey His leading, you'll be surprised at how your conversations with people will begin to go. And you'll be surprised at how the Holy Spirit's power can show up in the very ordinary things of life.

*Next, give thanks in all circumstances.*⁴³ This ties in well to pray without ceasing because it reminds us to include thanksgiving in our conversations with the Spirit at all times. A thankful heart is one that is mindful of God's provision each day. When we forget His provision, we easily drift into thinking that somehow we have provided our own needs by our talents and strengths. Thanksgiving is humbling ourselves, and the one who humbles himself, the Lord will uplift.⁴⁴

*Finally, rejoice always.*⁴⁵ In 1 Thessalonians 5, this comes before praying without ceasing, but the order of these disciplines isn't the point. Unceasing prayer and thanksgiving will create a gladness of heart that enables us to rejoice always. This one is the one that will get the attention of others. You could say that many people pray continually, but not many people are rejoicing in every situation. The person who suffers a tragedy, yet can still rejoice, will get the attention of the lost who are in despair. This ties to our friendship with the Holy Spirit in a very intimate way.



See, if we're praying without ceasing and giving thanks in all circumstances, we're exposing ourselves to the intensely personal ministry of renewal of the Spirit. Here is where the fullness of the being renewed day by day comes to fruit.⁴⁶ The daily renewal of the Spirit gives us an inexhaustible reason to rejoice, even if hell is breaking loose all around us. It's almost like you and the Holy Spirit can have parties that no one else can understand. Don't confuse this kind of rejoicing with having a perpetual bubbly cheerfulness. Even Jesus wept when he was sad. However, rejoicing always means the Holy Spirit has changed your nature toward celebration because of His goodness and faithfulness. A deep friendship with the Holy Spirit won't lead you anywhere else. Jesus may have wept and may have gotten angry on occasion, but people primarily accused him of partying too much.⁴⁷

Learning and developing this takes time. Without fail, this is the most common question: *How do I distinguish the Holy Spirit's voice from my own, or any others?* The answer is simple. Know the Word. Think of it like this.

Imagine standing in the middle of an open field. The field goes all the way to the horizon as far as you can see in all directions. You have a compass, and to get home, you need to head due north, but there are two complications. The field is littered with landmines and various obstacles that you must navigate, AND you're wearing blinders that only allow you to see the immediate ground where you stand. Fortunately, there is a guide who can see everything and knows the location of every landmine. You can try to navigate this by yourself, seeing only your compass and what is directly beneath your feet, or you can take instruction from the guide.

Why do we struggle to maintain a vibrant prayer life with the Holy Spirit?



Ask the Holy Spirit about your friendship with Him. How can it improve?

Anyone who values their life and safety would choose to listen to the guide instead of only relying on their compass and reduced visibility. Well, that's how we navigate the spiritual battle. We cannot see the spiritual realm. We have enemies in that realm who wish to do us harm. The Word of God is the compass that points us due north. The Holy Spirit is our guide who keeps us heading due north but tells us when to duck, when to leap, when to drop, when to stand still, when to sprint, when to crawl, etc. Our guide tells us everything our compass alone cannot.

How do you know it's the Holy Spirit telling you to do this or that? Check the compass. Are you still heading true north? Check the Word. If you're not heading toward Jesus – true north – then you're listening to a different spirit.

Operating in the Spirit is not a mechanical process with steps that, if executed, will lead to Holy Spirit results. It is a deep relationship with the Spirit of God within you where you know His voice, and you trust Him enough to do what He says. The church needs leaders who operate like this. Families need fathers who operate like this. The Father wants all His kids to operate like this. This friendship is how the power of the Gospel becomes evident to a dying world. It's how we have a life that is unexplainable without the Holy Spirit.

(Endnotes)

- 1 John 14:26; 15:26; 16:7
- 2 The Unseen Realm, Michael S. Heiser, p. 144
- 3 Acts 5:3-4
- 4 1 Corinthians 3:6
- 5 Romans 8:9
- 6 Daniel 7:3
- 7 Revelation 13:1
- 8 2 Thessalonians 2:7-8
- 9 Job 34:14-15
- 10 Ezekiel 36:26-27; John 3:6-8
- 11 Romans 8:11
- 12 Exodus 31:3
- 13 Judges 3:10; 6:34; 13:25
- 14 1 Samuel 16:13
- 15 Luke 1:15; Acts 1:8; 4:8, 31; 7:55; 13:9;
- 16 Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22
- 17 Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:14; 5:17
- 18 John 16:8
- 19 1 Corinthians 6:11; Titus 3:5
- 20 Grudem's Systematic Theology, chapter 30
- 21 2 Corinthians 3:18



entire conflict. Surprisingly, he didn't plan his rebellion in a dark room, somewhere away from the eyes of the Lord (as if that were possible). His rebellion began in the very presence of God's brilliant glory, perhaps only a few cubits away from His throne. Satan was an *anointed guardian cherub*.³ His position gave him charge of guarding the throne of God. It was there in the shining presence of Yahweh that Satan became vain. He was, after all, the signet of perfection and the most gloriously beautiful of all God's creations.⁴ It was in his vanity that he began to steal worship in his heart. The Bible calls this theft *trade* or *merchandising*.⁵ In essence, as he heard songs and praises offered to God by his fellow cherubim and angels, inwardly, he began receiving them for himself, trading God's glory for his vanity. For this, he was cast down from his position.

Who is receiving your worship?

Fast forward to Matthew, chapter four, and the raw heart of the spiritual war is revealed again in Satan's temptation to Jesus:

"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.'" Matthew 4:8-9 (ESV)

Territorial principalities, generational curses, demon possessions, and unclean spirits aren't at the center of the war. It centers on our worship. For sure, the unseen principalities and powers of darkness are at work, but if you boil it down to the essential issue, it is worship. Who is receiving your worship? The full answer is complicated because of the deceptions employed by spiritual darkness.⁶ But, the simple answer is that we have divided hearts.



A divided heart creates tension, so our natural response is to begin drawing lines of distinction between sacred and secular. Those false boundaries give us false peace because they enable us to worship many gods at once instead of exclusively worshiping the Living God. Our false peace crumbles when confronted by the Word, so the more we separate sacred and secular, the less we tend to renew our minds with the Word. Consequently, our sacred category gets smaller and smaller, and we grow less and less interested in a deep, thriving relationship with Jesus.

Here is the punch. Here we may discover the true nature of our faith. As the genuine believer strays farther into this kind of rebellion, what often happens is the Holy Spirit will *yank the chain*. Like a dog who runs out to the length of their chain and is snapped back, believers will have a similar experience. They will find that their rebellion can only go so far before the Lord chastises.⁷ But the person who runs and runs and runs and experiences no snapback... perhaps they were never tethered. Maybe their profession of faith was never a possession of faith.⁸

Therefore, worshiping Jesus is as much an act of war as it is an act of love. By destroying the secular categories in our lives, we engage in combat on the deceptions of spiritual darkness. We rob the spiritual darkness of opportunities to steal our worship. And there it is. *Every division you create for secular categories is a redirection of worship that belongs to Yahweh to the spiritual beings who deceived you.* Wrap your mind around that. Every time we move something from sacred to secular, it's an act of worship to a lesser god. Conversely, every time we move something from secular to sacred, it's tearing down the strongholds of those lesser gods.

Are there areas of your life you view as secular or sacred?





In this war, how is your worship being stolen?

Worship is not only *the* core issue of spiritual war but also the way we wage spiritual war.

This is why the Word places such a high value on worship. Worship is the reason we're at war. In earthly terms, worship is the natural resource over which the kingdom of darkness wars against the Kingdom of Heaven. Worship is the attention that belongs to Jesus, but Satan desperately wants for himself. So, he will lie, cheat, scheme, connive, and kill to get it with no regard for the harm his methods cause us. And make no mistake, he is out to kill us.

"Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." 1 Peter 5:8 (ESV)

WORSHIP IS IMAGING

How do you define imaging God?

Why is Satan out to destroy us? Again, taking it down to the essential answer, there is one reason foundational to all others. We *image* our Creator God.

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the Earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the Earth.'" Genesis 1:26 (ESV)

Let's talk about imaging. What does it mean to be an *imager* of God? The beginning of that answer is in Genesis 1:26. After God says, "Let us make man in our image," the first imaging quality he gives us is *dominion*. The definition of dominion is to *rule over, dominate, lead, control, and govern.*⁹

Dominion is sovereignty. What God gives humanity is sovereignty over the Earth and its creatures. Sovereignty is part of being one of God's imagers. God's command to Adam and Eve to multiply and subdue the Earth is the outworking of the sovereignty He had given them.¹⁰ We were meant to make the whole Earth like Eden. Adam and Eve's mandate was to multiply and rule as God's vice-regents by spreading and representing His Kingdom over the entire Earth. Look at how the Psalmist describes humanity.

"...what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor."
Psalm 8:4-5 (ESV)

God crowned humanity with glory and honor. That is an expression of the royal purpose He has in mind for humans. We were created with physical bodies, making us lower – or less powerful – than the heavenly beings. And yet, we were also given dominion, or sovereignty, to rule over the Earth as God's co-rulers in creation.

The other part of the answer to *what is an imager of God* is in the word *image*. Very simply, to be an imager of God means that we are reflections of Him. We were given sovereignty because God is also sovereign. One reason we were given freedom, or free will because God has freedom. It shouldn't surprise us when in creating beings who can freely have a relationship with Him, that He would fill us with His characteristics. It's no different than how our own children look like and act like us. We were created to look and act like Him.



As co-ruling, shining images of Yahweh, Adam, and Eve drew the fire of Satan, the first rebel. He desires to destroy the image of Yahweh anywhere he can see it. And as we know, he successfully tempted them and drew them into his rebellion against God.

Now, here's the interesting thing about imaging and dominion. Despite Adam and Eve's sin, they did not cease to be imagers. The imaging role of Adam and Eve continued and continues to be humanity's role to this day. Also, the dominion mandate given to Adam and Eve is still ours. We are still imaging sovereigns over the Earth. The problem is because we are born into Adam's rebellion, we are separated from our Creator. Because the domain of sin and death entered the world, Satan became its spiritual authority. Therefore, broken humanity, though we remain imagers of God, reflect like broken mirrors. We put off a distorted reflection that shows the world a distorted image of God. And though we remain sovereigns over the Earth, we rule it apart from our Creator, under the spiritual influence of a kingdom of darkness. Therefore, Paul could say:

What distortions of God do we seem to reflect most?

"For we do not wrestle 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." Ephesians 6:12 (ESV)

So, we are supposed to image God. Yet, because we're born spiritually dead, we're cut off from the light and life of the Creator we were meant to reflect, and we rule the Earth separated from His authority. Therefore, the connection between imaging and worship goes like this: whatever you are worshiping, you are also imaging. We are imagers, and in that,



WORSHIP IS TRANSFORMING

The value of our worship is, hopefully, becoming clear. We reflect who we worship. That means when we are worshipping Jesus, tearing down secular strongholds, and embracing all of life as sacred, we become shining beacons of God's glory amid deep darkness.

Describe a time when you were changed, delivered, or healed because you worshiped through your pain.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." Matthew 5:14 (ESV)

This makes worship an act of spiritual war. Why? Because wherever there is light, darkness is pushed back.

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." John 1:4-5 (ESV)

In Ephesians chapter six, Paul wrote his famous discussion about the whole armor of God: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shoes of the Gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit.¹¹ He makes one other mention of this armor in all of his writings, but he calls it by a different name: the armor of light.¹² That illustrates the same idea a little differently. Light dispels darkness, and when we wear the armor of light, everywhere we go, darkness is forced away.

Now, let's connect that to our personal worship.

- In 1 Samuel 16:23, when young David worship with his instrument, the evil spirit which tormented King Saul would depart.
- In 2 Chronicles 20:20-22, King Jehoshaphat sent out a choir of



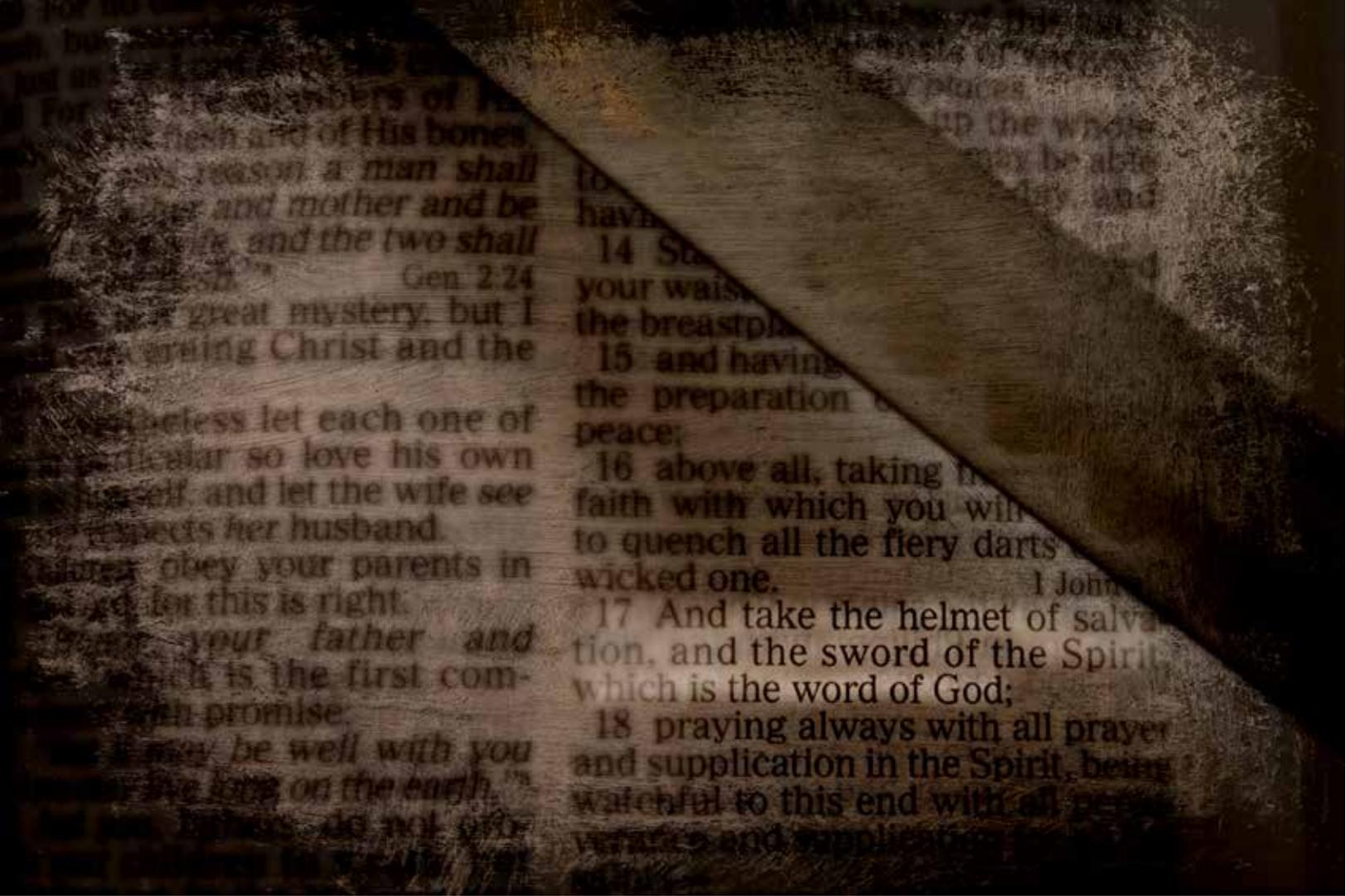
singers and musicians ahead of Judah's armies and their enemies were defeated before soldiers ever arrived.

- In Ephesians 5:17-21, Paul closely ties being filled with the Holy Spirit with worship through music with songs of praise.
- Psalm 137 presents to us a lesson that refusing to worship during hard times invites despair and bitterness.
- The very existence of the Psalms proves that personal and gathered worship among God's people is not only essential but expected and indispensable.

What can we gather from this? Our worship can cast out evil, defeat enemies, and it accommodates the filling of the Holy Spirit. Our worship can protect us from deep despair and bitterness. Worship is an active sanctifying agent in our journeys!

You cannot understate the importance of worship – individual and gathered – among God's people. It is the thing for which our enemy is desperately fighting. But when offered to the Lord, it transforms us into men and women who are more and more like Jesus Christ! And the more we become like Jesus, the more of His victory over the darkness we will walk in and experience. When we become like Jesus, we defy the efforts of the spiritual forces of evil and fulfill Christ's statement to Peter that the gates of Hell will not prevail against His church.¹³

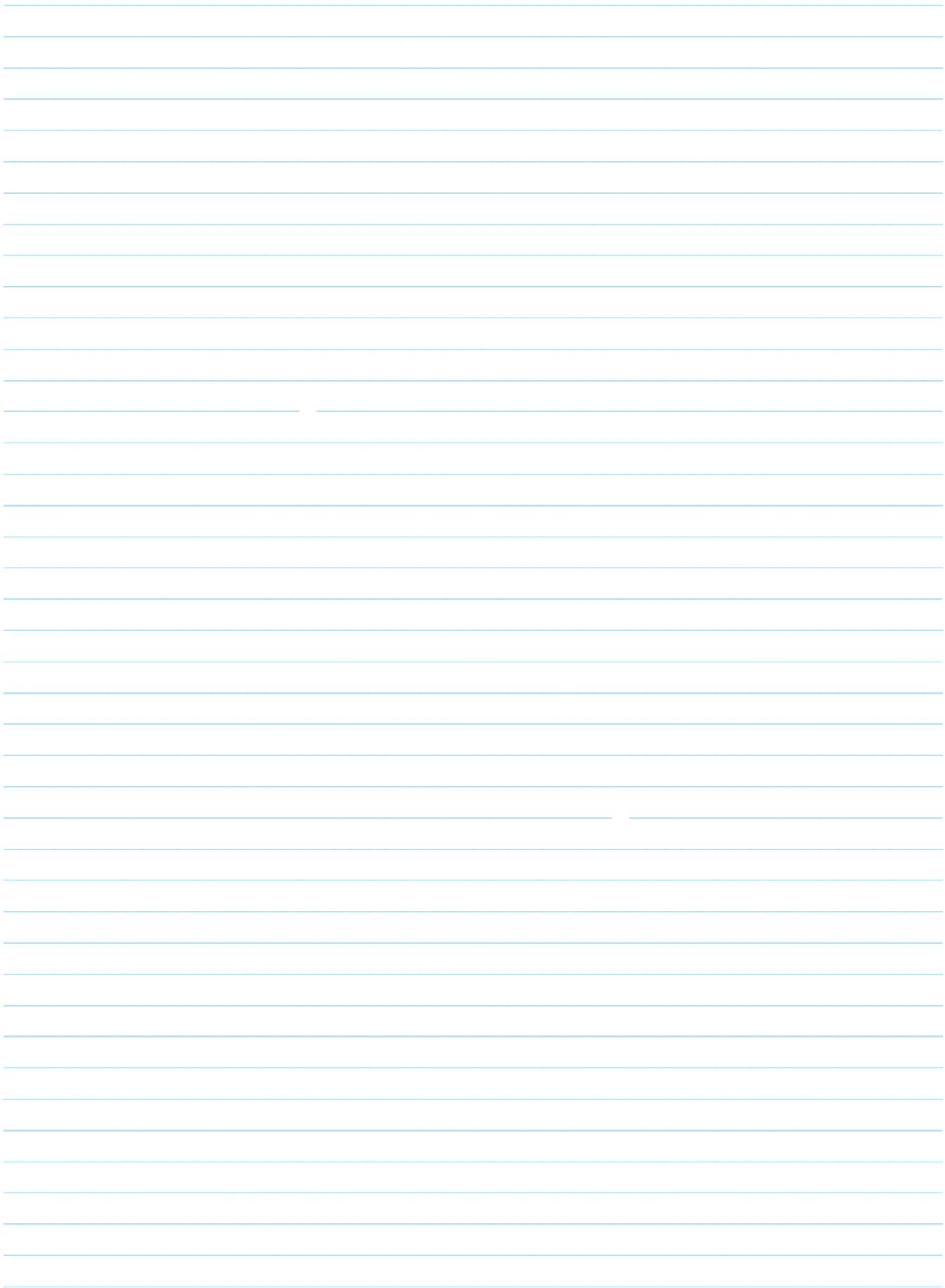
Leaders, you must be engaged in the war with your worship. As we lead the church, our worship will push back the darkness in our own lives and in the lives of those we lead. Our lives must declare the Gospel! Our songs must be pregnant with Truth. Our words and actions must lead



Since worship is life-giving, is your worship giving life to you, your family, your church, and your community?

people toward Jesus. When we worship, we destroy strongholds, we tear down fortresses, and we make straight paths to the cross of Christ! If you're a preacher, fight with your sermons! If you're a worship leader, fight with your singing! If you're a deacon, fight through serving! These aren't merely well-constructed homilies, beautiful voices, and sacrificial service. They are weapons useful for demolishing strongholds and tearing down every lofty opinion that raises itself against the knowledge of Christ.¹⁴ We started this session by saying *worship is life*. Worship is life; it gives life, it preserves life, and given to the wrong person, it can also take life. Leader, make sure your worship is going to the Giver of Life, and your life will grow abundantly and make the lives of those you serve more abundant as well.

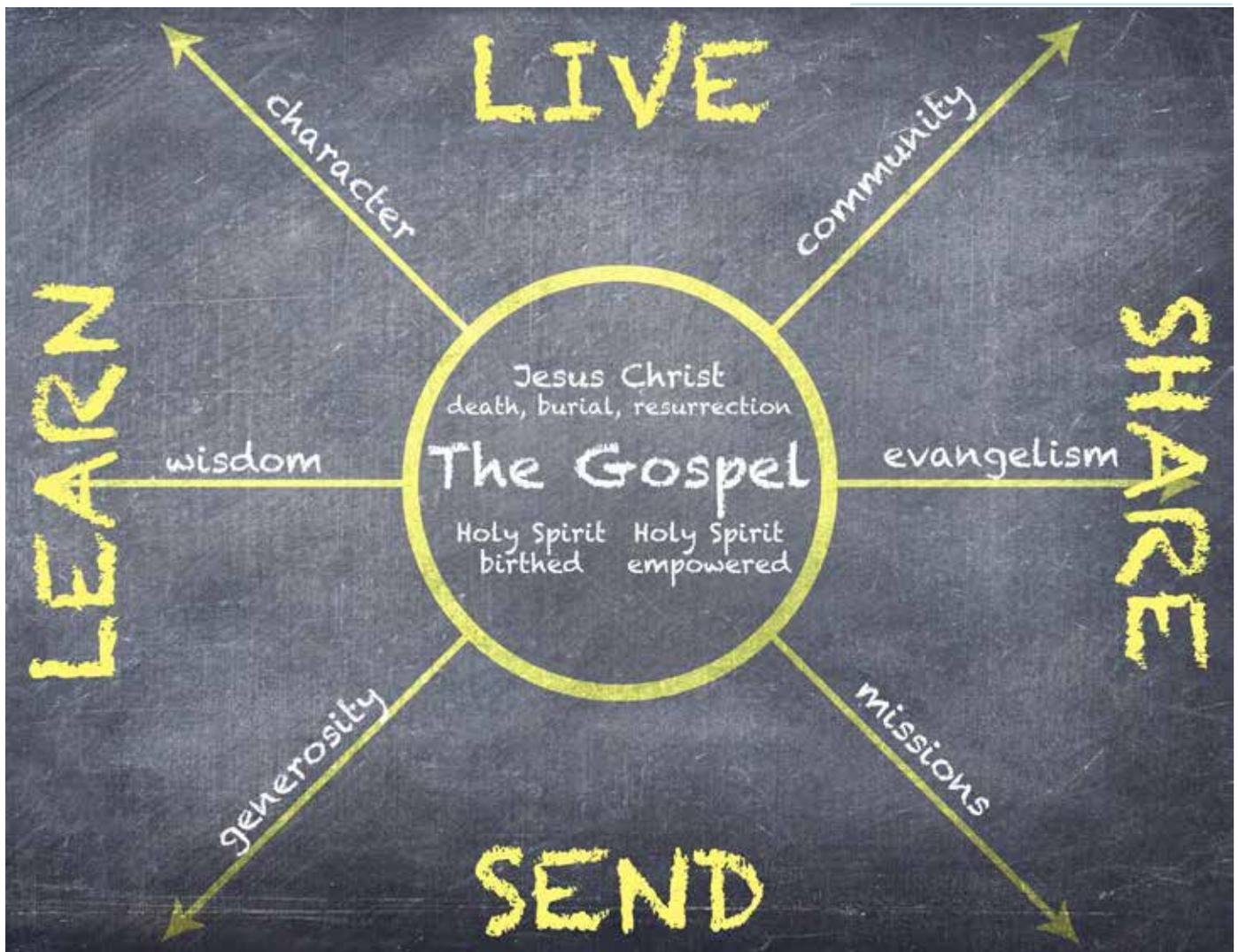
(Endnotes)
1 1 Samuel 15:22
2 John 14:15
3 Ezekiel 28:14
4 Ezekiel 28:12b-13
5 Ezekiel 28:16
6 2 Corinthians 4:4
7 Hebrews 12:6



APPENDIX

What follows here are two helpful tools that assist the leadership in our church. We use both of them to simplify our approach to equipping and serving our people. Neither of these tools were our ideas. We saw other ministries using these, and we have adapted them for our own use. If you think they would be useful, we encourage you to adapt them for your church.

THE GOSPEL WHEEL



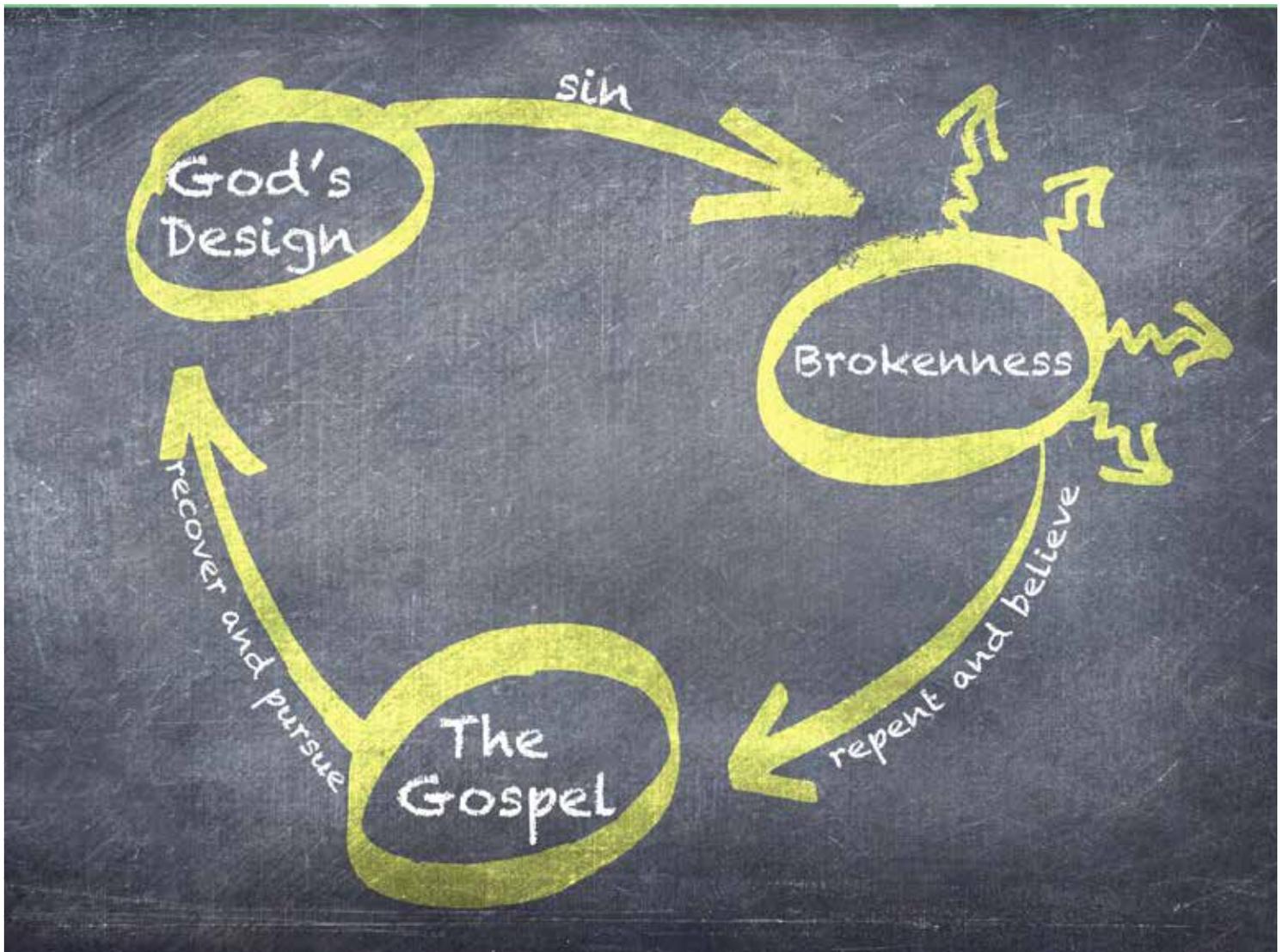
We believe the power to live the Christian life springs from the Gospel. The power of the Gospel comes from the Holy Spirit, and He continually grows us in *wisdom, character, community, evangelism, missions, and generosity*. A healthy Christian life will see consistent outward growth in these. The perimeter words, *LEARN, LIVE, SHARE, SEND* are four

actions that encompass what we are supposed to be doing as the Spirit grows us. At New Harmony, we have developed a mission statement from these words. *We exist to learn, live, share, and send the Gospel.*

The Gospel Wheel is a teaching tool. As often as possible, we draw attention to it when we teach and preach in the hope that our people will use it a simple metric for evaluating their spiritual lives.

We also use it as a filter for deciding how we plan events. If an event idea doesn't fulfill one or more of the areas of growth on the Gospel Wheel, we don't do it. This protects us from pouring energy and resources into events that don't have clear, identifiable Kingdom goals.

THE THREE CIRCLES



The Three Circles is a diagram that helps people share a simple Gospel presentation.

God's Design

- God designed us for fellowship with Him
- Our sin prevents us from having that fellowship.

Brokenness

- Because our fellowship with God is broken by sin, we turn to broken things to find satisfaction for our souls
- The solution to our brokenness is through belief in the Gospel and repentance from our sin.

The Gospel

- The Gospel, Christ crucified and resurrected, leads back to God's design for fellowship with Him as we pursue a meaningful relationship with Him in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit.

This diagram is simple enough to be memorized and can easily be drawn out on a napkin over coffee when an opportunity arises to share our faith. We've seen people come to faith through a simple conversation with these circles. Or, they can provide a doorway to a larger explanation of the full Gospel.

You can learn more about the Three Circles and get more resources at <http://lifeonmissionbook.com/conversation-guide>

We hope this is helpful. If it is, please use it, edit it, change it, and make it your own so that they can serve you as they have served us.



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