



MERCY  
CHURCH



# THE GOSPEL WHEEL



**The Gospel Wheel is a tool to help you follow Jesus in your daily life. The wheel has five parts:**



**The center of the wheel is the gospel.**

Discipleship is centered on the gospel. The gospel is not just the front door into Christianity; it's also the house. Progressing in the Christian life means growing in the knowledge of God's love for us and staying grounded in that love (Colossians 1:21-23; Ephesians 3:16-19).



**The rim of the wheel is Christlikeness.**

As you follow Jesus and remain centered on the gospel, we will become more and more like him. Because Jesus is full of grace, he will take you in as you are. Because Jesus is full of power, he will not leave you there. Jesus' followers become more like him, leaving behind sin and embracing his character.



**The spokes of the wheel are devotion, community, mission.**

In between the gospel and Christlikeness are three gospel disciplines that we practice as disciples of Jesus to become more like him: devotion, community, and mission. These come from the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-39) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), which call us to love God (devotion), love each other (community), and love our world (mission).

# THE GOSPEL WHEEL

**All together, the wheel is a model of a faithful disciple of Jesus.**

The wheel shows the essentials of following Jesus. If any part of the wheel is missing from your life, then you may be swerving from faithful discipleship.

- If you have devotion and community without mission, then you're in danger of comfortable Christianity. You are trying to enjoy God's presence and people without engaging in God's mission.
- If you have devotion and mission without community, then you're in danger of lone-ranger Christianity. You are trying to love Jesus without loving his bride.
- If you have community and mission without devotion, then you're in danger of outward-only Christianity. You are trying to act like a disciple without knowing who you are following.

We all are prone to swerve (Isaiah 53:6). We need to be reminded of who Jesus is and what he calls us to do. The wheel is designed to do just that, bringing you back to the source of discipleship, the gospel, and helping you turn back to faithfully following Jesus.

# HOW TO USE THE WHEEL

You can use the wheel to guide your discipleship, evaluate your discipleship, and teach others how to follow Jesus.

## **GUIDE YOUR DISCIPLESHIP**

You can walk through this material to learn how to faithfully follow Jesus. Each part of the wheel contains questions to help you evaluate your discipleship. The three spokes of the wheel each feature a tool for application, an easy way to begin applying the gospel discipline to your life. Go through each part of the wheel on your own or with a group, week by week, in a five-week study.

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## **EVALUATE YOUR DISCIPLESHIP**

This tool is intended to be a resource you can revisit to evaluate and recalibrate your discipleship. In this way, the wheel is designed both for new and longtime followers of Christ. You can work through the evaluation questions in each section, or you can create a new plan for discipleship using the Gospel Wheel worksheet every year.

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## **TEACH OTHERS HOW TO FOLLOW JESUS**

Jesus calls his disciples to make more disciples. This material is designed to help you teach a new believer how to follow Jesus. This is why the material ends with mission: by the time you finish working through The Gospel Wheel, you will be equipped to go through it again with someone else and teach them how to follow Jesus.

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# HOW TO USE THE WHEEL

## GETTING STARTED

Start working through The Gospel Wheel by going to The Gospel section. As you learn how to follow Christ, it is essential that you first understand the gospel of Christ.

You can work through each part of the wheel as follows, watching the videos, reading the material, and answering the evaluation questions:

**The Gospel**  
**Christlikeness**  
**Devotion**  
**Community**  
**Mission**



At the end of your study, complete The Gospel Wheel worksheet and start putting the tool into action throughout your life. Our ultimate prayer is that The Gospel Wheel helps you behold the beauty of the One who looks at you and says, “Follow Me.”

# THE GOSPEL †

If you want to follow Jesus, you need to know why he came. Jesus didn't come primarily as a good man so that you could follow his example. He didn't come primarily as a teacher so that you could follow his rules. Jesus came as a Savior <sup>1</sup>, so that through faith in him, you would follow him out of death into new life (Romans 6:4-11).

Discipleship begins with hearing and believing the message of salvation, the gospel. Following Jesus is not for spiritual athletes who have enough religious fitness to keep up with him. Following Jesus is for the spiritually paralyzed, those who know they cannot keep up with Jesus and desperately call out to him for salvation. The apostle Paul writes, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). The gospel is the only way into discipleship.

The gospel isn't just the front door to Christianity; it's also the house. Believing in the gospel is how you begin and grow in discipleship. Paul tells the Colossians that they will grow more like Jesus if they "continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard" (Colossians 1:22-23). The only way to move forward in Christ is to stand firm in the gospel.

This is why the gospel is the center of the wheel. You can only love God in devotion because he has loved you first in Christ Jesus. You can only love each other in community because he has made you his sons and daughters by grace. You can only love the world through mission because he left heaven on a mission to save you. And the only way to become like Jesus in Christlikeness is to remember that Jesus became like you on the cross.

Since the gospel is the center of discipleship, it's crucial that you understand it. A simple way to understand the gospel is with four words: Jesus in my place. When you believe in the gospel, Jesus stands in your place in payment, perfection, and power.

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<sup>1</sup> See Luke 19:10; John 3:17, 12:47.

# PAYMENT

Even though God created you in his image to worship and obey Him, you turned against him and sinned by disobeying his Word. The prophet Isaiah says, “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned--every one--to his own way ...” (53:6a). Because of your sin, you deserve God’s wrath and eternal punishment in hell.

Left to your sin, you were without hope (Ephesians 2:12). But God lovingly intervened. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world to live a perfect life of obedience and pay the penalty for your sins on the cross in your place. Over seven hundred years before Jesus’ death, Isaiah told the people that he was coming: “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (53:5).

When you turn from sin and trust in Jesus for salvation, you are saved from the wrath of God that you deserve for your sins. There is no penalty left to be paid for your sins because Jesus paid it in full on the cross (John 19:30). So you can say with confidence: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1).





# PERFECTION

Jesus doesn't just pay for our sins and hope that we make our second chance count through good works. Many people say that Jesus saved them, but really, they are stuck in the never-ending quest of paying Jesus back through good works. The gospel offers freedom from this cycle of bondage.

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus doesn't just take away our sin. He also gives us his perfect righteousness as a gift. Jesus doesn't just wipe away our sinful record. He also gives us his perfect record instead (Romans 3:22). Paul writes, "For our sake he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). This is called the "Great Exchange." By grace through faith, Jesus takes our sin, and we receive his righteousness.

This is the only way to receive righteousness. Paul talks about the way he has been saved: "not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith" (Philippians 3:8-9). Those who try to earn their own righteousness before God are rejecting God's gracious gift, as Paul writes, "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose" (Galatians 3:21).

# POWER

The gospel is not a mere transaction. Jesus does not simply take our sin, give us his righteousness, and call it a day. When we believe in the gospel, we are reconciled to God, filled with the Spirit, and given new life. And with this new life comes a new power for change.

Jesus saves us from sin through his sinless perfection and his sin-payment. Tim Keller summarizes the gospel this way: “Jesus Christ came to earth, lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died.” But Jesus’ death means so much precisely because he did not remain dead. On the third day, Jesus rose from the grave, paving the way for spiritually dead sinners to have eternal life through him (Ephesians 2:1, 6; 1 Peter 1:3; Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:5). Those who believe in Jesus not only receive his perfect righteousness in life and his forgiveness of sins on the cross; they also receive his death-defying power through his resurrection.

The gospel is the “power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). When we become a disciple, we are made a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) and filled with the Holy Spirit, who renews our desires (Titus 3:5), reminds us of God’s love (Romans 5:5), gives us gifts to be used for the church (1 Corinthians 12:7), and empowers us to obey God (Galatians 5:16).

It is impossible to receive the gospel and be unchanged by the gospel. Jesus lived, died, and rose again so that we could be transformed by his power (Colossians 1:22). The gospel is not just a message that we believe. It is a power that changes us (1 Corinthians 1:18).

# EVALUATING THE GOSPEL IN YOUR LIFE

## **PAYMENT**

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- *When you sin, do you go to God quickly for forgiveness, or does it take a long time for you to return to God?*
- *After you confess your sin, do you feel like you need to pay God back, or are you able to fully enjoy him?*
- *Whenever you remember past confessed sins, does your heart move into shame because of your actions or thanksgiving because of Jesus' forgiveness?*

## **PERFECTION**

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- *Think about your level of joy at the end of the day. When you feel like you haven't done enough good, do you lose your joy? Or are you able to rejoice in the sufficiency of Jesus on your behalf?*
- *Do you struggle with believing your works will be enough for heaven? Or are you assured that Jesus' perfect and sufficient righteousness will stand in your place?*
- *Do you find it difficult or embarrassing to confess your sins to others? Or has Jesus' perfection freed you from the need to keep up your self-image?*

# EVALUATING THE GOSPEL IN YOUR LIFE

## POWER

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- *How do you react whenever you face a commandment that appears difficult to obey?*
- *Do you plead for God's power to help you obey it?*
- *Do you despair because you're not able to obey it?*
- *Do you excuse yourself from obedience because Jesus' grace will cover you?*
- *Write out ten ways that God has transformed you by his gospel.*
- *Does the power of the Holy Spirit seem like a distant idea to you? Or have you experienced the Spirit's power in renewing your mind and transforming your desires?*



# CHRISTLIKENESS



To follow Jesus is to become like Jesus. When Jesus called Peter, he was ambitious, yet timid. After years of following Jesus, Peter became humble and bold. When Jesus called Paul, he was violent and self-righteous. After years of following Jesus, he became gentle and self-denying. As you follow Jesus, hear his Word, speak to him, and obey him, you will become more and more like him.

Christlikeness is at the core of God's eternal purpose for you: "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son ..." (Romans 8:29). Titus 2:14 tells us that Jesus "gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works." Because Jesus is full of grace, he will take you in as you are. Because Jesus is full of power, he will not leave you there. Jesus' followers become more like him as they pursue him, leaving behind sin and reflecting his character.

Growth in Christlikeness is also a key sign that you're really following Jesus. John tells us, "Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked" (1 John 2:6). Although we never reach perfect Christlikeness on this earth, we ought to grow more and more into his image as we follow him. We call this "sanctification," the process of progressively conforming into Christlikeness.

# CHRISTLIKENESS

Those who are truly justified (made righteous through faith) will increasingly be sanctified (walking in righteousness throughout their life). Paul says that Jesus has taught us to “put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life ... and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-24).

True Christlikeness is always rooted in the gospel. You can only become like Jesus in your character when you have first seen how Jesus became like you on the cross. Because Jesus took on your sin on the cross and gave you his perfect righteousness as a gift, you are empowered by the Spirit to take on his character. The gospel tells us that the pursuit of Christlikeness is simply the pursuit of who you already are in Christ. Because you are a holy child of God, God calls you to walk in holiness (Colossians 3:12-13). Because you have been filled with the Spirit, God calls you to walk by the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25). Because you have been re-created in the likeness of Christ, God calls you to walk in Christlikeness (Ephesians 4:24).

What is involved in Christlikeness? Paul lists out nine “fruit of the Spirit,” or evidences of God’s work within us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). As you follow Jesus, this fruit will characterize your life more and more . We can summarize the three components of Christlikeness as love, joy, and holiness.

# LOVE

As we follow Jesus, we ought to cultivate a genuine love for God and for others. The apostle John puts it simply: “The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love” (1 John 4:8). Paul gives us a picture of our love-less lives before Jesus when he says, “For we ourselves were once foolish ... passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another” (Titus 3:3). Sin causes us to be self-focused. We hate those who get in our way, and others hate us when we get in their way. Envy, malice, and hatred are the fruit of those who have not encountered the love of Christ.

But the love of Christ satisfies our starving hearts and enables us to shift our focus toward others. “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:10-11). Instead of seeing others as pawns for our selfish gain or obstacles in our path, we see them as fellow image-bearers in need of God’s love.

Because God’s love for us was expressed through action (John 3:16), true love is active: “Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18). Love for others certainly includes feelings of affection (Romans 12:10), but true affection is always accompanied by works. We long to do good to all people, just as the Father is merciful to all. But we especially long to do good works to our church, as Paul writes, “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

Over time, demonstrating the love of Christ makes us become more like him: “May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ... so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness ...” (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13).

# JOY

Becoming more like Jesus also means that we will have steadfast joy throughout all of life. This is the second fruit of the Spirit that Paul lists in Galatians 5:22. While worldly happiness rises and falls with the highs and lows of life, the joy that Christ gives remains steady because it is fixed on God's unchangeable character and not our fleeting circumstances. Paul tells us to "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Philippians 4:4). We can always have joy when our joy is always set on the God who is always faithful.

Everyone in the world has a kind of joy when life is going well. But Christians are distinct in that we rejoice even in the worst of situations:

*"... we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to you"*

*(Romans 5:2-3-5).*

Growing in Christlikeness means we stop allowing our joy to go up and down with our circumstances. Instead, in every season, we display the joy of Christ, which cannot be shaken by the world. As Jesus told his disciples: "Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (John 16:22).



# HOLINESS

God saves us so that we will be holy. “He chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him” (Ephesians 1:4). In light of this grand purpose, Peter commands us, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘Be holy, because I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:14-16).

As we follow Jesus, we ought to grow in moral purity, leaving behind the sin that God hates and embracing the righteous character that God loves. We ought to become less like the sinful world and more like our holy God. Paul writes, “Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:1-2).

Paul also warns us that those who disregard holiness and walk in unrepentant sin should not deceive themselves into believing that they are disciples (1 Corinthians 6:9-10). True disciples will always progress in holiness, which is why the author of Hebrews can say, “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (13:1). This doesn’t mean that our holiness earns our salvation; instead, those who have truly been saved will always grow in holiness.

God wants you to be holy: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). God also wants you to have joy: “Rejoice always ... for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). These desires are not contradictory, instead, they fuel one another. As you pursue joy in Christ, you want to reflect his holiness, and as you pursue the holiness of Christ, you experience the joy of being like him. “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love ... These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:10-11).

# EVALUATING CHRIST-LIKENESS IN YOUR LIFE

## LOVE

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- *Are you harboring envy, pride, or animosity toward anyone? Or do you have a heart of love toward everyone around you?*
- *Think about the people nearest to you. Has your love for them been expressed merely through words, or have you loved them through action?*
- *Are your good works of love motivated by God's love for you or something else (manipulation, feeling good about yourself, earning approval, etc.)?*

## JOY

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- *Do you often have mood swings based on the events of the day, or is your joy steady in Christ?*
- *How do you react when suffering or trials come: do you lose your joy, or do you rejoice in Christ even through difficult times?*
- *Would others say that you are an especially joyful person? Why or why not?*

## HOLINESS

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- *Are you earnestly pursuing purity in your thoughts, desires, and actions? Or are you merely assuming that growth in holiness will come?*
  - *Over the past year, have you become more sensitive to sin (not able to do the sinful things you used to do) or less sensitive to sin (able to do the sinful things you could not do)?*
  - *Is there any area of your conduct (sinful habits, ungodly speech, impure media consumption, etc.) that is out of line with the holiness to which God calls you?*
  - *What are you doing to pursue Jesus and flee from unholiness in this area?*
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# DEVOTION



Jesus called his followers so that they would be with him: “And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him ...” (Mark 3:14). Because Jesus loved them and brought them near, they were changed forever. The Great Commandment, which once seemed impossible to obey, became a natural response to Jesus’ love for them: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matthew 22:37). The single call, “Follow me,” led to a lifetime of devotion to God.

After Jesus ascended to the Father, his followers continued in their devotion to him. “and they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul ...” (Acts 2:42-43). The apostles were singled out for having been with Jesus: “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

Since then, all followers of Jesus have been marked by devotion to God. Christians aren’t primarily devoted to an idea or to a philosophy of life. They are devoted to a person: Jesus Christ. Absolute devotion to Jesus is required of all who follow him, as he said, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37-38). True followers of Jesus are devoted to him above everything else because they have discovered that Jesus is more precious than everything else (Philippians 3:8).

We express devotion to God through the Word, through prayer, and through obedience. In the Word, we hear God’s voice; in prayer, God hears our voice; and in obedience, we respond to what God has said. As we love God by talking with him and obeying him, as we walk with him hour-by-hour -- just like the disciples -- we become more like the Savior who loved us first. Devotion to God is not reserved for a fifteen-minute “quiet time.” Devotion to God demands all of your life. Remember the “all’s” of the Great Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind.” Because God gave his all for you, devotion to him demands all of you.

# WORD

God has given us his Word so that we may know who he is and become like him. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Scriptures, comprised by the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, are “breathed out by God.” This means the words of the Bible are God’s words. As we read and meditate upon God’s Word with a heart of devotion toward him, we become trained “in righteousness.” We leave behind our old unrighteous ways, and we take on our new character in Christ.

This is why Peter writes, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Peter 2:2). Just like a baby grows through regular feedings on milk, you grow up into Christlikeness through regular reading and meditation on God’s Word. And just as babies suffer malnutrition when deprived of milk, your growth as a disciple is hindered when deprived of the Word.

As the Word grows us into Christlikeness, it also defends us against spiritual attack from the enemy. In the midst of spiritual warfare, Paul tells us to “take up ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God ...” (Ephesians 6:16-17). God’s Word is a strong weapon against the lies and temptations of the enemy. Indeed, this is how Jesus fended off spiritual attack in the wilderness. When Satan tempted him, he did not respond with miracles or superior intellect. Instead, he simply responded with God’s Word: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4).

Following Jesus transforms our view of the Bible. It is no longer a mere historical artifact or one of many religious texts. As followers of Jesus, the Word is the way we hear our Master. As Jesus said, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). Disciples of Jesus read the Word not to get insight into an old ancient text, but to an encounter the living God. “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword ...” (Hebrews 4:12).

# PRAYER

In the Word, we listen to God's voice, and in prayer, God listens to our voice. Prayer involves praising God, making requests of God, pouring out our hearts to him, and interceding for others. On our own, we should not be allowed to enter the presence of God. In our sin, we should not have God's ear. But through his blood, Jesus has opened a way for us to enter the presence of God: "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16).

Jesus not only paves the way for prayer, he also provides a perfect model for a praying life. While he was on earth, Jesus constantly withdrew from the crowds and went to his Father in prayer (Luke 5:16, 9:28, 22:41, etc.). His prayerfulness demonstrated his constant dependence on the help of the Father. If Jesus was constant in prayer, how much more do we need to pray as his disciples? That's why Paul instructs us to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). We should pray as often as we need God, and we need God always. Developing such a constant prayer life requires steadfastness through our wavering circumstances and feelings: "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 4:2).

As we behold Jesus in prayer, day by day, we become more and more like him. "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another" (2 Corinthians 3:17).



# OBEDIENCE

The Word and prayer are vital to the Christian life. But if these disciplines do not produce a transformed life, they are futile. You cannot listen to Jesus as Lord in the Word and come to Jesus as Lord in prayer without obeying Jesus as Lord in your life. Jesus rebuked his listeners who loved to hear him but did not obey him: “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46). Jesus puts it simply: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Devotion without obedience is no devotion at all.

The apostle James confirms that, as followers of Jesus, we must not only read his Word, we must also obey it. “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). Followers of Jesus who read the Bible and pray to God without obeying God deceive themselves. They think that they are progressing in the Christian life, but they are failing to actually obey Jesus as Lord.

When we read the Word and pray to God with an aim to obey him, God works powerfully within us and makes us more like himself. “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12). Obedience to God, from a heart transformed by the gospel, makes us more like Jesus, who obeyed God to the fullest. “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8).

# EVALUATING DEVOTION IN YOUR LIFE

## WORD

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- *Do you enjoy reading the Bible? Or does it feel like drudgery to open God's Word?*
- *Are you reading through breadth of God's Word, in both the Old and New Testament? Or are you only choosing to read the parts that interest you?*
- *Are you soaking in the depths of the Word? Or are you merely skimming over it?*

## PRAYER

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- *Are you motivated to pray more by guilt or by love for God?*
- *If you were teaching someone how to follow Jesus, and they could learn how to pray only by observing your prayer life, what would they conclude about prayer?*
- *When you do pray, what fills up your time more: worshipping God with gratitude, or asking God for things?*

## OBEDIENCE

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- *When you read the Bible, do you look for ways to obey God and apply the Word to your life?*
- *When is the last time you did something you didn't want to do out of obedience and submission to God?*

# COMMUNITY



You were made to follow Jesus. But you were not made to follow Jesus alone.

The Father loved you so much that he sent his Son to die for you, rescue you, adopt you, fill you with his Spirit, and make you like himself. When the Author of Life brought you into his story, you realized that he was what your heart was longing for all along. Following Jesus means that you find your life by losing it (Matthew 10:39) and enter into the life you were made for -- a life of community with others.

Most major religions begin with a prophet or monk who wanders off into the wilderness, receives a message, and brings it back to his followers. Guatama Buddha ignited Buddhism through his religious quest of asceticism, Muhammad founded Islam after claiming to receive an angelic vision, and Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon about his isolated encounter with the angel Moroni. These religions all began with one pious individual and then spread to a community of believers.

Unlike most major religions, Christianity was never an individualistic movement. The spread of the gospel began when 120 witnesses of Jesus' resurrection and ascension gathered to pray (Acts 1:15, 2:1-4). They were filled with the promised Holy Spirit and immediately began to follow Jesus together. They gathered daily, listened to the apostles' teaching, prayed together, ate together, and shared their possessions with one another (Acts 2:42-47). From this small community, the gospel spread to the masses throughout Jerusalem and to the ends of the earth.



The gospel not only offers us eternal reconciliation with the Father; it also invites us into eternal community with others (Ephesians 2:13-14). Following Jesus means walking with other followers (Philippians 1:27), loving the Father requires loving brothers and sisters (1 John 4:21), and becoming like Christ involves belonging to a church (Ephesians 4:4-16).

It is only in community with other Christians that we are able to obey the “one anothers” of the New Testament. God calls us to love one another (John 13:34, Romans 12:10, 1 Peter 1:22, etc.), honor one another (Romans 12:10), comfort one another (2 Corinthians 13:11), serve one another (Galatians 5:13), bear one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2), admonish one another (Colossians 3:16), and encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

As with every part of the Gospel Wheel, Christian community is not a take-it-or-leave-it appendage to your walk with Jesus, rather, it is essential to your discipleship. J.I. Packer writes,

*“We should not ... think of our fellowship with other Christians as a spiritual luxury, an optional addition to the exercises of private devotion. We should recognize rather that such fellowship is a spiritual necessity, for God has made us in such a way that our fellowship with himself is fed by our fellowship with fellow Christians ...”<sup>1</sup>*

So how do we pursue such fellowship? We can begin by observing the practices of the very first disciples in Acts 2:42-47. The early church was a powerful force in the first-century world. Even the officials who sought to suppress the advance of the gospel admitted that the church was full of “men who have turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). Such world-turning power came through a community of people who had been transformed by the gospel. As they gathered together, devoted themselves to Jesus, and loved one another, they proved through their community that the gospel was not just another religious idea -- it was the only hope for the world (Acts 4:12).

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<sup>1</sup>J.I. Packer, *God's Words: Studies of Key Bible Themes* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 193.

# REGULAR GATHERING

The first component of community is regular gathering. The early church was a “day by day” community, integrating their daily lives and going out of their way to gather regularly -- not just during formal worship services but also in their homes. “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts ...” (Acts 2:46).

The practice of regular gathering was not just for first-century Christians who did not have to deal with the busyness of twenty-first century life. Regular gathering is commanded of all Christians in every age in every place. The author of Hebrews writes, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25). The same author assumes that Christians will meet daily when he writes, “But exhort one another every day ... that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13).

Regular gathering flies in the face of our individualistic culture and digital world. Because our culture says the use of time is the private choice of the individual, we tend to only gather when we want to. Because our smartphones allow us to “talk” through text messaging, we tend to choose light and brief interactions through our screens rather than the hard work of getting together and practicing community.

The gospel demands more than this. As Robert Coleman writes, “There is simply no substitute for getting with people, and it is ridiculous to imagine that anything less ... can produce strong [discipleship].”<sup>2</sup> When we understand our desperate need for gospel encouragement from others, we will not neglect to meet together (Hebrews 10:25).

Regular gathering puts you in a position to give and receive love, comfort, prayers, and encouragement within your community.

# SHARED DEVOTION

While regular gathering is an essential component of community, it isn't unique to Christianity. Social cliques, book clubs, and support groups gather regularly, too. What makes Christian community distinct is not our gathering but what we do when we gather.

Luke tells us that the early church “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ...” (Acts 2:42). When the church came together, they listened to the word of God together and prayed together. Thus, the second component of community is shared devotion.

Christian community involves reading the Bible together, praying together, and obeying together. Christians shouldn't just have shared devotion during formal small group gatherings and Bible studies. Shared devotion should always flow through our time together, as Paul writes,

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:16-17).*

Of course, reading the Bible, praying, and obeying together isn't all that we do in Christian community. There's room for small talk and informal recreation when we gather. But what makes Christian community distinct is this: whether we read the Bible together, play golf together, watch a movie together, or go on a mission trip together, our aim is always to encourage one another in the Lord (1 Corinthians 10:31; 14:12, 26; 1 Thessalonians 5:11). For this reason, when you gather with Christians, you should look for ways to share the Word, pray with one another, and obey Jesus together.

# SACRIFICIAL LOVE

If you want to be more like Jesus, immerse yourself in Christian community. It's only in the context of real relationships with other Christians that you can truly understand the depth of God's love for you. Paul writes, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). Because Jesus was kind to you when you deserved wrath, you show kindness to those who don't deserve it. Because Jesus has been tender to you when you stumbled, you are tender with struggling brothers and sisters. Because Jesus forgave your immeasurable debt against him, you forgive those who sin against you. Practicing sacrificial love in community gives you a taste of the love Jesus demonstrated on the cross.

Since Jesus loved us with sacrificial action, love for your community will likely cost something - your time, your energy, your comfort, to name a few. That's why the apostle John writes, "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Jesus says this kind of love is how the world will know that we belong to him. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

Apart from the gospel, Christian community is impossible. You can only sacrificially love your community because Jesus first sacrificially loved you: "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). You can only encourage one another with hope because Jesus has given us hope in his resurrection from the dead (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). Christian community can't be earned through your good works. Like your salvation, Christian community is a gift of God's grace.

Since Christian community is a gift of God's grace, it needs to be stewarded well. Following Jesus means that we reject individualism and give ourselves to regular gathering. We reject spending our time together foolishly and focus on encouragement through shared devotion. We reject a selfish approach to community and give ourselves to sacrificial love.

# EVALUATING COMMUNITY IN YOUR LIFE

## REGULAR GATHERING

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- *Do you gather with fellow Christians only when it is convenient? Or do you make community gatherings a non-negotiable in your life?*
- *Looking at your weekly schedule, are you putting yourself in a position to be regularly encouraged in the gospel? Or are you cutting yourself off from those who could speak life into you?*
- *Do you regularly invite your community into your home? Or are you only comfortable around fellow Christians in formal environments, like a church service?*

## SHARED DEVOTION

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- *When you gather with other Christians, is your conversation dominated more by small talk or by “God talk” (discussions around the gospel, discipleship, and the Word)?*
- *How often do you read the Bible and pray with other Christians? Is your devotional life only private, only communal, or both?*
- *Can you name three people who hold you accountable to obey God?*

## SACRIFICIAL LOVE

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- *Do you serve your community only when it's convenient? Or do you go out of your way to serve -- even when it's costly?*
- *Are you in community only with people who have a similar background and personality to you? Or are you in community with some people who are very different than you?*

# MISSION



You are a disciple because the first disciples obeyed Jesus' mission. The gospel spread from a small group of 120 people in Jerusalem to millions across the earth. Over the course of centuries, the gospel continued to advance with unstoppable power until, at just the right time, the gospel reached you.

Jesus was sent to the earth on a mission: "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God ... for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43). By living a perfect life of obedience, dying a sinners' death in our place, and raising from the grave, Jesus fulfilled his calling. But the work is not over. Just as the Father sent Jesus on a mission, Jesus sends his disciples on a mission: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you ..." (Matthew 28:18-20). As a disciple of Jesus, this is your mission: to make disciples of all nations by declaring and displaying the gospel.

So what is involved in the mission of God? Each component of mission involves giving away something God has given you for the advancement of his kingdom. This is what it means to be a faithful steward: investing in the world what God has entrusted to you. As a part of God's mission, you love the world through generosity (stewarding your treasure), evangelism (stewarding the gospel), and service (stewarding your gifts).

This mission isn't optional for disciples of Jesus. Those who have received the gospel are required to give the gospel to the world. But this requirement isn't a burden. As Jesus calls you into his mission, he also provides the power and presence you need to fulfill it. "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). Because Jesus is with you, you can enter this mission confidently. You can give away your money, you can give away the gospel, and you can give away your gifts with joy because the ultimate gift, Jesus' love, has been freely given to you and will never be taken away (Romans 8:38-39).

# GENEROSITY

God's mission changes the way we view money. Whereas money is seen by the world as a tool for securing personal welfare, comfort, and happiness, Jesus calls his disciples to find welfare, comfort, and happiness in his invaluable love. Once you set your hope fully on Jesus, you are freed from the empty promises of wealth. These two perspectives on money leave you with a decision to make. Jesus says, "No one can serve two masters ... You cannot serve God and money" (Matthew 6:24). Where you give your money reveals what master you serve, as Jesus says, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:21). You must choose who you will serve, God or money.

Practicing generosity for God's mission doesn't mean you can't buy things. Guilt has no place in gospel-fueled generosity, since "God ... richly provides us with everything to enjoy." God's mission shouldn't keep you from enjoying good gifts. But the mission of God should compel you to give away your money so that others can enjoy the best gift, the gospel. Practicing generosity for God's mission means that you prioritize investing in God's kingdom over investing in your own. You "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," trusting that God will take care of your needs (Matthew 6:33).

In Leviticus 27:30, God commands his people to give away ten percent of everything they earn back to the Lord. While this was required of Israel in the Old Testament, it is not explicitly mentioned in the New Testament as a standard for the church. Disciples of Jesus are commanded to "give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7). However, the church has never seen the absence of a New Testament tithing command as an excuse for giving less than ten percent back to the Lord. The gospel ought to compel us to give away more than this. This is why faithful disciples of Christ view the tithe, giving ten percent of income back to the local church, as a baseline for generosity.

Those who have found the treasure of the gospel are eager to give their treasure away for the gospel. Disciples don't give as a way to earn something from God, but as a response to what God has given them. Paul writes, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Cheerful generosity flows from looking first to Jesus, who became poor to give you the riches of his grace.

# EVANGELISM

Disciples of Jesus are called to make disciples, and the only way to make a disciple is through evangelism, or sharing the gospel (Matthew 28:18-19). Just as you were saved and became a follower of Jesus through faith in the gospel message, others must also hear this message in order to be saved and follow Jesus. “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). When you declare the gospel, you give people the opportunity to turn from their sin, believe in the gospel, and follow Jesus. Good works may open a door for the gospel, but good works cannot save anyone. People are saved only by hearing and believing in the gospel message. God’s mission advances when his people declare his message in his power.

It’s tempting to think that evangelism is only for church leaders and trained ministry “professionals,” but evangelism has always been the calling for all disciples of Jesus. After Stephen was martyred, mass persecution broke out against the early church in Jerusalem, causing God’s people to scatter. As they went, they preached the word (Acts 8:4). Luke, the author of Acts, notes that those who were scattered did not include the apostles (Acts 8:1). Therefore, the gospel advanced throughout the land through non-apostles, ordinary Christians who simply loved Jesus and wanted to get his message out to the world.

All you need to evangelize is love for Jesus and love for people. As a child of God, you are hardwired to tell others about him: “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 Peter 2:9). Evangelism is simply telling others about the beauty of the One who called you, just as Philip told Nathanael, “Come and see” (John 1:46). God gave you the gift of the gospel. And just like any gift from God, he calls you to steward it faithfully by declaring it to your neighbors and the nations.



# SERVICE

Encountering the love of Jesus causes you to turn away from living for yourself and to begin living for God. Paul writes, “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Living for God means using everything you have to serve his purposes instead of your own, and one of the best ways you can serve God is through your gifts.

While all people are formed by God with unique skills and characteristics (Psalm 139:14), disciples of Jesus receive unique gifts reserved for his people -- the gifts of the Spirit. Like all gifts from God, spiritual gifts are not meant to be used selfishly but in service to God and for his glory. Peter writes, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace ... in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:10-11). Jesus calls you to leverage your spiritual gifts for the advancement of his glory.

God has given you gifts so that you can serve the church and the world. Whether you have the gift of teaching, serving, leading, or evangelism, your gift is not for your acclaim, but for others’ encouragement and God’s glory. Serving the church advances God’s mission because the church is God’s vehicle for accomplishing his mission. The early church knew this, so as the gospel spread rapidly throughout the land, they appointed gifted servant-leaders to care for the needs of the church (Acts 6:1-7). This is why Paul writes, “Let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith” (Galatians 6:10).

You are called to serve because Jesus first served you. When Jesus’ disciples were jockeying for a high status in the kingdom, he said to them, “But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:43-45). In evangelism, we declare the gospel. In service, we display the gospel. Jesus calls us to do both: to speak the message of the gospel and show lives transformed by the gospel.

# EVALUATING MISSION IN YOUR LIFE

## GENEROSITY

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- *Imagine someone could learn about you only by looking at your budget or spending habits. What would they conclude you value most?*
- *Which of the following consumes more of your thoughts throughout the day:  
How you can invest in savings, retirement, or assets?  
How you can invest in the kingdom?*
- *Would you say that giving to God is more burdensome or exciting to you? Why?*
- *Do you look for opportunities to give to others, or do you tense up when you hear that someone has a financial or material need?*
- *Does your current habit of giving prioritize God's mission? Are you giving regularly and sacrificially to the local church and making other investments in God's kingdom?*

## EVANGELISM

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- *Can you articulate the gospel clearly in less than three minutes?*
- *If not, join up with another Christian and practice sharing together.*
- *Do you have any longtime non-Christian friends (known longer than two years) with whom you have not shared the gospel? What has kept you from sharing with them?*

# EVALUATING MISSION IN YOUR LIFE

## EVANGELISM (cont.)

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- *Would you say that evangelism happens rarely, occasionally, or regularly in your life? What life habits have caused this pattern?*
- *Does the topic of evangelism stir up guilt, nervousness, or excitement in you? Why?*
- *Have you ever led anyone to Christ by sharing the gospel? If not, why? Is this more because of people's response to your sharing or your failure to share?*

## SERVICE

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- *Write down the natural skills, abilities, or passions God has given you. In what ways are you using these for God's glory and mission? In what ways are you using these selfishly?*
- *Are able to identify your spiritual gifts? If so, what are they? How are you using these to build up the church? If not, ask the Christians closest to you what they think it is.*
- *What would it look like for you to be a faithful steward of your gifts?*





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