



# **Discipleship Framework**

**Cross of Grace Church  
Revised Aug 2022**

**Introduction – Page 2**

## **Lessons**

- 1) STORY – Page 4**
- 2) WORD – Page 6**
- 3) RELIGION – Page 10**
- 4) GOSPEL – Page 13**
- 5) NEW LIFE – Page 16**
- 6) IDENTITY – Page 19**
- 7) CHANGE – Page 22**
- 8) HEART – Page 25**
- 9) COMMUNITY – Page 28**

**Next Steps – Page 31**

## Introduction

### Why do we have discipleship groups?

The simplest answer is this: to make disciples.

Read what Matthew 28:16–20 itself says: Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (ESV)

Our call as Christians is to be disciples of Jesus and make disciples of Jesus (18-20). That involves following all Jesus and the Bible calls us to do and seeing every area of life progressively changed to look more like Jesus.

All our ministry at the church involves the work of disciple-making.

- Sunday gatherings are where we gather to worship God and hear “all that Jesus commanded” through the preached word (Matt 28:18-20) and worship together.
- Community Groups are where the church begins to feel like a family of disciples as we have meals together, pray for one another, and encourage one another.
- Outreach groups and life in our city and community are where we go out and seek to introduce people to Jesus and make new disciples of Jesus

But as we’ve sought to make disciples it’s often helpful to have a regular rhythm of personal discipleship where we can get into the specific details of our lives and what it looks like to follow Jesus in those areas. This is where we target life change on a deeper level. That’s where our discipleship groups come in.

### Why join a discipleship Group (D-Group)?

We’re not called to live the Christian life alone but with others.

*We need others //* We need the help of others to walk the Christian walk. At different times we will need others to challenge us, to encourage us, to care for us, and to help us. Every Christian is called to be discipled – which means to allow others to help us look more like Jesus.

*Others need us//* Those around you need your help and encouragement as well. Every Christian is called to make disciples – which means to point others to Jesus and help them grow to look more like Jesus.

### What is a Discipleship Group?

A discipleship group is simply a group of 2-4 people of the same gender who meet together regularly to learn to follow Jesus in all areas of life. Those in the group commit together to a

regular meeting (such as “Saturday at 7am”) for at least a season (such as “September - December”). That’s it.

## How do I use the curriculum?

In the curriculum itself you’ll find:

- **Directions** to be read to yourself
- **READ** sections meant to be read together in your group
- **ASK** sections that are discussion questions to answer in your group

In each lesson there are three sections

- **Head** // Growing our knowledge of the Bible and understanding of its teaching and call on our lives.
- **Heart** // Seeing real change on the deepest level of our being (emotions, identity, etc.) especially as we apply the gospel to our lives
- **Hands** // Pursuing practical life changes that help us look more like Jesus and live as disciples of Jesus in every area

## What do I do and what does the church do?

### Your Part

- Invite someone to start a group – look for people in your life, your community group, your service team willing to start a group together
- Commit to meet regularly and fully participate in the material and Bible reading
- Commit to be discipled and allow others into your life
- Commit to disciple others and seek to help others with their lives
- Let us know you’re starting a group! We want to help (see below)

### The Church’s Part

- If you can’t find someone to start a group with, or perhaps are brand new, no problem. Reach out to the church office and we’ll help get you connected.
- We as a church will make sure there are some trustworthy coaches that can help you get started if you’re new at this
- We as a church will also make sure to be available for ongoing support such as if there is a major need in the group, a problem in group, or the group gets stuck
- We’ll also provide starter discipleship group material (such as the document you’re reading) to help guide you

## **Lesson 1: STORY**

### **Headline**

*We must understand the Bible as all one story and come to see how we are part of that story.*

### **Head**

*Read the following together, or summarize the material in your own words:*

### **READ TOGETHER**

The Bible is made up of 66 books and hundreds of thousands of words but tells one story from start to finish. You can think of the Bible's story as having four parts to it.

Creation// In the beginning God made all things (Gen 1). God was sovereign and eternal, righteous and loving. Every part of creation bears his design and shines out his glory (Psalm 19). God made humanity – men and women – uniquely to reflect his image (Gen 2). The goodness of God can still be seen in creation around us and in the human beings around us made in God's image.

Fall// Humanity rebelled against God by refusing to follow God's just decrees and instead seeking to replace God as sovereign ruler (Gen 3). As a result both creation and humanity were profoundly broken. Creation's brokenness can be seen in everything from thorns and frustrating labor, to sickness and natural disaster. Humanity's brokenness went even deeper – destroying relationship with God and one another. Humanity also came under God's just judgment for sin, leading both to physical death and eternal justice. Humanity also became warped from God's original design, pursuing sin, hurting others, and being hurt by others (Rom 3).

Salvation// The story of the Bible from Genesis 3 onward is the story of God's plan of salvation for humanity. This story is seen in God's promise to one day reverse the damage of the fall (Gen 3), in God's promise to call a people to himself, to save them, and through them to reach the world. From Abraham to David, from the kingdom of Israel to exile in Babylon, the story of the Old Testament is the story of God working a plan for salvation. The failures of God's people and laws and sacrifices point to their need for a savior outside them. The bright spots of success foreshadow a greater salvation yet to come.

Ultimately, that plan for salvation culminates in the coming of Jesus Christ. When Jesus came to earth he came fully as a human and yet fully as God. He came to "seek and save the lost" (Lk 19:10). He came as a passover lamb to die for the sins of his people (Isaiah 53). This he did on the cross when he died in the place of his people (1 Peter 3:18).

Restoration// The coming of Christ made possible the restoration of all things. When we come to Jesus in faith and repentance that restoration begins in our hearts. While we are in a moment saved and given eternal life, this moment begins a process of looking more and more like Jesus through God's power. As this happens our lives are restored to God's design for us, leading to

God's glory and our joy. This process continues until one day we stand before God. In the end Jesus will return and restore all things, putting away death and sin and brokenness forever and bringing a new creation.

While we learn more and more about God's story and as each individual book and section fills out our understanding, all of it is part of this one great story. While our own individual stories are important, we're not trying to fit God or the Bible into our story. Instead, we're learning how our stories fit into the great story of the Bible.

## Heart

*Now that we've seen God's story let's connect our stories to his story.*

### ANSWER TOGETHER

What's YOUR own story? What would some of the key spiritual moments of your life be?

(Especially including salvation) Consider including:

- A brief account of your early life and where you came from
- Any places of difficulty/sin/suffering that shaped you
- When you became a Christian and/or when you truly began to understand the gospel and live life in light of the gospel
- Where God has done, or is doing, the work of restoration in your life

This can take anywhere from 5-15 minutes per person. Don't rush it. It's important to know one another.

## Hands

### READ TOGETHER

In every lesson we're going to do two important things that we'll begin doing this week:

- **Highs and Lows** // We'll ask at the beginning of each meeting what one "highlight" has been, and what one "low" has been. This helps us just get a sense of what's going on in one another's lives. Share one highlight and one low from the last week or so as a way of moving from your life story to your day to day life.
- **Prayer** // We'll always end with prayer for one another.

### ANSWER TOGETHER

- What was one "high" point of the week for you? What was a "low" point of the week?

### DO TOGETHER

- Pray for any needs the group brought out either through sharing stories or answer the "highs and lows" question.

## Lesson 2: WORD

### Highs and Lows

Each week we'll share one "highlight" and one "low" from the last week or so. This helps us just briefly catch up with one another before we dive into the lesson.

### Headline

*Learn and apply a simple format for reading the Bible together*

### Head

*As we saw last time all of Scripture is one story and as we understand the story of God better we understand ourselves and our lives better. In this lesson the READ TOGETHER section is a bit longer than most as we try to establish a new way of reading the Bible.*

### READ TOGETHER

Here are some common pitfalls we may fall into when we read the Bible:

- *Reading that starts and ends with ourselves:* When we only look for things in Scripture that seem to benefit us or be about us we'll miss much and have a distorted view of the Scripture.
- *Reading only for knowledge and not change:* While it's good to grow in understanding Scripture better, that knowledge must always be applied to ourselves.
- *Reading only for other people and not ourselves:* We can all fall into reading a text and seeing how someone else should change, rather than first allowing the text to change us.

Instead we'll learn to ask four key questions as we read the Bible: 1) What does the passage say about God? 2) What does the passage say about us? 3) How does the passage point to Jesus? 4) How does this passage change me?

#### 1) What does this passage say about God?

The Bible begins not with us but with God: "In the beginning, God..." (Gen 1:1). It's only when we understand God that we can truly understand the world or ourselves.

Who is God in this passage? (Ex: We may learn about God's *nature* as eternal, all-powerful, always present, etc.)

What is God like in this passage? (Ex: We may learn about his *character* as loving, justly angry, merciful, etc.)

What does God do in this passage (Ex: We may learn about him as we see him saving, judging, etc.)

In some parts of the Bible what we learn about God is clear and stated plainly. Other times in stories and narratives we look for what God's actions or words imply about God.

## 2) What does this passage say about us?

The Bible is utterly honest about humanity – the good, the bad, and the ugly. Many times as we see the way characters or humanity act we see reflections of ourselves. Scripture is called a mirror, held up to help us see ourselves better (REF).

Where might characters reflect God well? Where do their sins and failures contrast with God? What is said about humanity explicitly by God or others? What does the Old Testament prophet or New Testament writer say about human beings?

What is said or implied about God's people?

And we must beware trying to see ourselves only as heroes in the stories. In contrast to other religious texts the Bible is open about the failures of even its "heroes."

## 3) How does this passage point to Jesus?

The story, start to finish, is about Jesus. From the law, to the books of kings, to the prophets, to the gospels, to the letters, it's all about Jesus (see Luke REF). Ultimately, he is the hero of the story and we see him reflected on each page.

How does this text illustrate our need for Jesus? Are there failures or sins or evils that point to a deep need for salvation and rescue?

How does this text illustrate the character of Jesus? Does God show mercy or save? Does a character point to the character of Jesus?

What does this text say about the work of Jesus? As the Old Testament points to the passover lamb (REF) or suffering servant (Is 53) we see the work of Jesus. As the New Testament points back to the cross and resurrection we marvel at the work of Jesus.

## 4) How does this passage change me?

When we encounter the word we should always come away changed.

- *Head change*: How does the text change our understanding of the world? How does it change how I understand God, or myself? How does it inform me or grow my understanding and knowledge of God and his purposes?
- *Heart change*: How does the text change my heart? Does it help move me from discouragement to encouragement? Does it move me from apathy to worship? Does it convict me and lead me to desire change?
- *Hands change*: What practical things should change in light of this? Is there something I'm not doing God calls me to do (such as regard and care for the vulnerable) or something I am doing God calls me not to do (such as sexual or relational sin)? Does this need to change my calendar or relationships or stewardship of what God has given me?

Sometimes a text will clearly have all three elements, other times it may emphasize one.

## Heart

### ANSWER TOGETHER

Are there any “pitfalls” you see yourself falling into as you read the Bible?

Is this different or similar to how you’ve read the Bible before?

Of the three areas of head, heart, and hands, which do you most often in your personality gravitate towards? (i.e. learning new things, responding experientially, looking for “something I can use today”, etc.)

What are some of the most common obstacles that keep you from engaging in God’s Word regularly? (may be head/knowledge, heart/emotion, hands/practical, or a combination)

## Hands

### DO TOGETHER

Read 1 Peter 1:1-16 and answer the following questions:

- What does the passage say about God?
- What does the passage say about us?
- How does the passage point us to Jesus?
- How does the passage change us?

>Take time to pray for any current needs as well as for God’s help with starting the Bible reading plan

### NOTE: Bible Reading Plan

This week we start our Bible reading plan together. If you’ve tried to read the Bible yourself but struggled to be consistent there are two specific things that help:

- *A specific plan:* Write down where and when you will read the Bible and for how long. That simple action gives you a much better chance at consistency.
  - Example: I will read the Bible for [length of time] at [place] and [time]
- *An encouraging friend:* Commit to reading with others and gathering regularly so they can encourage you, and commit to encouraging others in your group.

We recommend reading the Bible together with the [5 x 5 x 5 Bible reading plan](#). The first set of readings for this week are:

- Mark 1
- Mark 2
- Mark 3

- Mark 4
- Mark 5

## Lesson 3: RELIGION

### Highs and Lows

Each week we'll share one "highlight" and one "low" from the last week or so. What are your highs and lows?

### Headline

*There is an important difference between the good news of the gospel and man-made religion. Not everything "religious" or even "Christian" is what the Bible calls the gospel of Jesus.*

### Head

#### READ TOGETHER

Luke 15:11-32

*[11] And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. [12] And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. [13] Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. [14] And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. [15] So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. [16] And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.*

*[17] "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! [18] I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. [19] I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."' [20] And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. [21] And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' [22] But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. [23] And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. [24] For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.*

*[25] "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. [26] And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. [27] And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' [28] But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, [29] but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young*

*goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. [30] But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' [31] And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. [32] It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"* (ESV)

Jesus tells this parable to expose the hearts of those around him. In the parable the son represents God the Father. And while many think of this parable as the parable of the "prodigal son" there are actually two sons and both represent different ways to rebel against the Father.

The first son was openly rebellious against his father. He immediately asks his father for his inheritance – equivalent to saying he wishes his father were dead and that he only cares about money. He wanted to pursue the good life by open sin and scandalous living.

But there is also a second son in the parable. At first this son seems like the "good" son. He seems to always obey his father. He pursues the good life through obedience. But his true heart gets revealed when he doesn't want to celebrate that his brother has returned and further by complaining that he hadn't been sufficiently rewarded for all his good deeds.

Both sons are more similar than they first appear. Both want the good life but go about it in different ways. Both appear to want what the father gives more than the father himself.

## **Heart**

### **ANSWER TOGETHER**

How does the father react to each son? What is his reaction to the repentance and return of the first son? What is his gracious appeal to the second son even in the face of his selfishness?

How is this parable a picture of the gospel?

Which son do you tend to be more like? Why do you see yourself in that character?

If you identify with the older brother – what needs to change this week in the way you approach life and your relationship with God?

If you identify with the younger brother – what needs to change this week in the way you approach life and your relationship with God?

If you need to change, how will the Father respond to you when you return to him? How does knowing what his reaction will be change how we return?

## **Hands**

### **DO TOGETHER**

### Bible Reading Follow-Up

Last week we started a Bible reading plan together. How did everyone do with reading on their own? Last week we chose a specific time and place to read – how did that go and does anything need to be adjusted or changed this week?

### Note: Recommended Reading

One great follow up to this discussion is to dig further into the difference between gospel religion and self-made religion by [reading the chapter RELIGION from \*Better News\*](#). That is especially crucial if someone in the group is new to the difference between gospel and “self-made religion.” If one or more people are new to these things, brand new to Christianity, or exploring whether they are a Christian, it may be a good idea to even pause the Discipleship Curriculum and walk through the Better News book together. [The book is available free here](#) for reading on your phone, tablet, Kindle, etc. at [alwaysbetternews.org](http://alwaysbetternews.org)

### **Prayer**

Pray for any needs in the group this week.

### **Bible Reading Plan**

We recommend reading the Bible together with the [5 x 5 x 5 Bible reading plan](#). Readings for this week:

- Mark 6
- Mark 7
- Mark 8
- Mark 9
- Mark 10

## Lesson 4: GOSPEL

### Highs and Lows

By now the highs and lows should be a rhythm in your meetings. Ask each person for one “highlight” and one “low” from the week, but don’t spend lengthy time here unless there’s a critical need.

### Headline

*The gospel of Jesus is the good news about Jesus dying to save us that we might be saved from sin and live for him*

### Head

*Today we’ll read together a powerful and deep passage from the book of Romans. If you’re new to Bible reading some of the terms may be new or unfamiliar but we’ll walk through it together.*

### READ TOGETHER

Romans 3:9–31

*[9] What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, [10] as it is written:*

*“None is righteous, no, not one;*

*[11] no one understands;  
no one seeks for God.*

*[12] All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;  
no one does good,  
not even one.”*

*[13] “Their throat is an open grave;  
they use their tongues to deceive.”*

*“The venom of asps is under their lips.”*

*[14] “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.”*

*[15] “Their feet are swift to shed blood;*

*[16] in their paths are ruin and misery,*

*[17] and the way of peace they have not known.”*

*[18] “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”*

*[19] Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. [20] For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.*

*[21] But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—[22] the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the*

*glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. [26] It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

*[27] Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. [28] For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. [29] Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, [30] since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. [31] Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. (ESV)*

Last week we talked about how some rebel against God openly while others seem to obey while rebelling inwardly. Verses 10-18 quote various parts of the Old Testament to summarize the state of humanity before God. How bad is the situation? What stands out to you from the list of verses there?

The concept of "righteousness" is key to this passage. God is holy and just and good and has no evil or corruption or sin. One way to summarize that is to say he is "righteous." But the dilemma is that no one among humanity is righteous.

There are four key components to the gospel of Jesus laid out in Romans 1-3 that occur throughout the Bible:

- God – God is good and just and holy
- Humanity – Humanity chose sin and therefore is unrighteous and under judgment
- Jesus – Jesus was God in the flesh, lived a perfect life, and died in our place
- Response – We respond by faith in Jesus (i.e. believing he is the son of God and that he died in your place, repenting of our sins, and turning to follow him)

## **Heart**

### **READ TOGETHER**

Jesus dies for our sins that we might be saved. There are several key terms in this passage that are pictures or images of salvation:

- "Justified" (v. 24) – This is a legal term. It means that in the court of heaven we are counted as "not guilty" and instead as "righteous" because of Jesus.
- "Redeemed" (v. 24) – This is a marketplace term. It means that something is "bought back" to its original owner instead of being lost.
- "Propitiation" (v. 25) – This is a temple term. It means an offering made in the temple to atone for a sin committed.

### **ANSWER TOGETHER**

Which picture is the most vivid to you? How do these pictures affect you on a heart level – do you feel apathetic, humbled, grateful, shocked, or something else?

If this is what Jesus has done, how can we *receive* it? (see verse 22) Why is that so radical and different from even other religious traditions?

Paul says our “boasting” is excluded. That means we can’t take credit for any of this or do anything to earn this salvation. How would understanding that change the way you approach your relationship with God?

## **Hands**

This week if these concepts are new to you or unfamiliar to you read the chapters JESUS, CROSS, and RESPONSE from *Better News*. [Read them free here](#).

In 1 Cor 15:1 Paul says “Now I would remind you brothers of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved...”

### **ANSWER TOGETHER**

Why would Paul need to “remind” people of the gospel they already knew? Do you think we need similar reminders in our own lives?

Paul says later in 1 Cor 15 that the gospel is of “first importance” meaning out of everything in Scripture it’s most important. Why would he say that?

### **DO TOGETHER**

Write yourself a reminder of the gospel this week and what God has done for you. It can be a note, a lockscreen on your phone, or something else. What will you do this week? Share it with the group.

## **Bible Reading**

We recommend reading the Bible together with the [5 x 5 x 5 Bible reading plan](#).

- Mark 11
- Mark 12
- Mark 13
- Mark 14
- Mark 15

This week the readings focus on Jesus entering Jerusalem and heading toward the cross – a beautiful week of gospel reminders built into the reading plan.

## Lesson 5: NEW LIFE

### Highs and Lows

Briefly share one highlight and one low from the last week to reconnect.

### Headline

*The gospel of Jesus reshapes our identity and this reshapes everything about us*

### Head

*This week we'll cover a crucial implication of the gospel – that when we come to Christ we begin to change to look more like Christ.*

### READ TOGETHER

In Ephesians Paul preaches the beautiful truth of the grace of God in Jesus for three chapters (1-3). Then for the next three chapters he shows the church how the grace of God changes them to look more like Jesus. He says in 4:[1] “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called...” We have been called to Christ as Christians and saved by grace, now we seek to walk in a worthy manner of that calling – not so that we might be saved but because we *have* been saved.

Ephesians 4 gives us a variety of examples of what this looks like:

[17] Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. [18] They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. [19] They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. [20] But that is not the way you learned Christ!—[21] assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, [22] to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, [23] and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, [24] and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

[25] Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. [26] Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, [27] and give no opportunity to the devil. [28] Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. [29] Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. [30] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31] Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. [32] Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (ESV)

Paul speaks of an “old self” (who we were before Christ) and a “new self” (who we are now in Christ). It’s important to remember that when we come to Christ the Spirit of God comes into our hearts to help us change and look more like Jesus. But we still have a calling. What are we called to do in each of these three verses

- Verse 22 \_\_\_\_\_
- Verse 23 \_\_\_\_\_
- Verse 24 \_\_\_\_\_

## Heart

Why are each of the three things in verses 22-24 important? Why isn’t any single one enough?

In the passage there are a variety of examples of the kind of gospel change that should be taking place. What stands out to you from that list? Is there a particular area you’re aware you need to work on?

In verse 32 there is a clear connection between what we are called to do and what God has done for us. How is that connection important?

## Hands

*We’re going to walk through identifying one specific place in life we want to see life change. Walk through the questions together. Feel free to discuss this in any way that ultimate gets you to identifying one specific area you want to see change in.*

*Remember that we’re identifying one area in ourselves we want to work on changing. While we might want to change our spouse or family member, or while we might want to change our circumstances, we’re focusing here on changing ourselves.*

## DO TOGETHER

What is one area of your life you’d like to change? What is God bringing to mind right now?

- *Nothing coming to mind?* Pause and pray. Look at Ephesians 4 – is there an area there? Or is there something outside there that is affecting your life?
- *Several areas coming to mind?* Narrow it down to one. While there may be multiple areas you want to work on, start with one specific area for now.
- *Area of hidden sin coming to mind?* There may be an area no one else really knows about. If God is bringing that to mind, share it and get help rather than dealing with it alone. If significant additional help is needed, reach out to a pastor as well.

Put that area of change into the format of Ephesians 4:

- What needs to be “put off” and stopped?
- What needs to change in your thinking according to the Bible?
- What needs to be “put on” and started?

In that change area, apply what we've learned the last few weeks:

- How can we make sure our change in that area is not "self-made religion" that we think will save us or get us into God's grace?
- How can remembering the truth of the gospel and Jesus redeeming and saving us encourage us even while we struggle?

## **Prayer**

Make sure to pray specifically for the areas of change identified today.

## **Bible Reading**

We recommend reading the Bible together with the [5 x 5 x 5 Bible reading plan](#).

- Mark 16
- Acts 1
- Acts 2
- Acts 3
- Acts 4

You'll see in the readings this week how the gospel changed a whole community when they came to Christ. Note especially how different their lives were in chapters 2-4 of Acts and how they "put off" some things and "put on" new things.

## Lesson 6: IDENTITY

### Highs and Lows

Briefly share one highlight and one low from the last week to reconnect.

### Headline

*When we believe in Christ we are then “in Christ” and our identity changes in a powerful and life-transforming way*

### Head

*One of the phrases that occurs through the New Testament letters is the simple phrase “in Christ” or “in Him.” That means that when we come to Christ we are united with Christ and our very identity changes.*

### READ TOGETHER

In Ephesians 1:3–14 we see a beautiful run-on sentence of blessings for every Christian in Christ. In the following list underline every time you see the phrase “in Christ” or “in him” and note what blessing comes to us through being united with Christ.

[3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, [4] even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love [5] he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, [6] to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. [7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, [8] which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight [9] making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ [10] as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

[11] In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, [12] so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. [13] In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, [14] who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. (ESV)

The list doesn't end there. Some other examples:

- 2 Corinthians 5:[17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (ESV)
- Galatians 4:[4] But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, [5] to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. [6] And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit

of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” [7] So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (ESV)

- Romans 8:[1] There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (ESV)
- Romans 8:[35] Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [36] As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” [37] No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (ESV)

## Heart

*Every person is shaped in a powerful and profound way by their identity. Here are some things that tend to shape us:*

- *Our family and upbringing*
- *Our abilities and skills*
- *Our body, ethnicity, and looks*
- *Our relationships to others such as a spouse or family or close friends*
- *Our suffering or trials or difficult circumstances*
- *Our jobs or vocations or career*
- *Our accomplishments or failures in life*

*It can be anything that you look at yourself and think “This is who I am.” But when we come to Christ we receive a new identity in Christ that reshapes how we view ourselves and our lives. We go from thinking “This is who I am” to “This is who I am in Christ.”*

## ANSWER TOGETHER

What are some of the most powerful things that have shaped your identity (apart from Christ)? Use the list above as a starting place.

From the list of things true about us in Christ, which truth jumps out at you?

From the list of things true about us in Christ, which is hardest for you to believe?

Why do you think there is sometimes a disconnect between the way we view ourselves and what is true of us in Christ?

If these things are true of us in Christ, does that make us slower or more reluctant to change and grow?

## Hands

*Today we’ll focus on creating “In Christ, I am \_\_\_\_\_” statements. The goal is to walk away with specific reminders that will make a difference in your life.*

## DO TOGETHER

Write down 1-3 key statements about your identity with Christ that you want to remember this week, along with where that truth is found in Scripture. Take those truths and keep them in your Bible, on your bathroom mirror, or somewhere else you'll see them often. Then seek to live out that identity in Christ.

## **Prayer**

Pray as you are led – either for something shared in the “lows” section earlier, something in the lesson, or for someone struggling to see their identity in Christ.

## **Bible Reading Plan**

We recommend reading the Bible together with the [5 x 5 x 5 Bible reading plan](#).

- Acts 5
- Acts 6
- Acts 7
- Acts 8
- Acts 9

This week we'll see how various people, including the Apostle Paul, came to be Christians. Note how coming to Christ changes their life, their identity, and their purpose.

## Lesson 7: CHANGE

### Highs and Lows

Briefly share one highlight and one low from the last week to reconnect.

### Headline

*Living as a Christian means being committed to change, with the power of the Spirit*

### Head

*In other lessons we've looked at the call to grow in Christ, live out our identity in Christ, and look more like Jesus. Philippians 2 helps us connect our resolve to grow in Christ to God's power to help us grow:*

### READ TOGETHER

Philippians 2:[12] 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 own salvation with fear and trembling, [13] for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (ESV)

When we're called here to "work out our salvation" it doesn't mean to work to create our salvation, rather it calls us to work out the implications of our salvation into life. And the hope is that God works in us to help us change.

This is accomplished through the power of the Holy Spirit coming into our hearts and lives.

In the Old Testament there is a beautiful passage illustrating our hearts being changed by God and his Spirit:

Ezekiel 36:22–27 [22] "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. [23] And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. [24] I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. [25] I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. [26] And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (ESV)

This change is what happens when someone believes in Christ and the Spirit changes their heart. Paul summarizes this truth in Romans 8:[11] If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the

dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. (ESV)

This is where we see the beauty of the trinity of Father, Son, and Spirit in salvation. The Father sent Jesus the Son. Then, Jesus the Son lived a perfect life and died for our sins. And the Spirit reawakens our hearts and gives us the power to grow in Christ.

## **Heart**

### **ANSWER TOGETHER**

What is the picture in Ezekiel 36 of a heart of stone and heart of flesh communicating?

Do you think knowing that God is at work in us would make us more or less likely to try to do the hard work of trying to look more like Jesus?

Despite God's work in our lives change is still not always easy. What are some areas where change often seems difficult?

How can these truths help when you're struggling with feeling hopeless and like you'll never "really" change?

When you do successfully change and see growth, how can these truths help you not to become proud or conceited about your progress?

## **Hands**

### **DO TOGETHER**

A few weeks ago you each decided on a particular area to try to grow in. This is a great place to pause and check in with how everyone is doing. Celebrate the wins and rejoice that God is at work in people. And where there have been losses or difficulties, encourage one another that the power to change is still there in Christ.

The truths about our identity in Christ and the power of the Spirit at work in us help "bookend" the area we want to change in.

- Who are in Christ
  - The area of change
- The power of the Spirit

For example, if you're seeking to grow in patience and not being sinfully angry it might look like this:

- "In Christ, I am loved and accepted even when I sin in anger"
  - "I will put off sinful anger and put on patience as I follow Jesus"
- "And I will trust the power of the Spirit to help me change"

What are the "bookends" you need this week to help you continue pursuing change in that area?

Take time to write out the “bookends” for the area you’re seeking to change in.

## **Prayer**

Ask for God’s help in your gospel change projects and for any other needs.

## **Bible Reading Plan**

We recommend reading the Bible together with the [5 x 5 x 5 Bible reading plan](#).

- Acts 10
- Acts 11
- Acts 12
- Acts 13
- Acts 14

This week in your reading notice the thread of the Holy Spirit’s power through all of Acts so far. These ordinary disciples have been used by God to do extraordinary things *through the power of the Spirit*. Let that encourage you that you have the same holy spirit at work in you (Romans 8:11).

## Lesson 8: HEART

### Highs and Lows

Briefly share one highlight and one low from the last week to reconnect.

### Headline

*When we are seeking to follow Jesus what's going on in our hearts is key and is our target for change*

### Head

*In Jesus' day the assumption was that people were defiled from the outside in. But instead, Jesus said that it is what comes from inside us that defiles.*

### READ TOGETHER

Mark 7:[18] And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, [19] since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) [20] And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. [21] For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, [22] coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. [23] All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person." (ESV)

In other words, our sin problem and change problem aren't simply a matter of fixing our external circumstances, but rather fixing our hearts. The problem is that our heart wants something it shouldn't. The category Scripture uses here is called "idolatry."

**Pause here and read the short blog post below "Idol Worshipers" by Paul Tripp:**

[Post can be found here: <https://www.paultripp.com/wednesdays-word/posts/idol-worshippers>]

*Many years ago I traveled to Northern India and was staying in one of the high and holy cities of Hinduism. It was my first time ministering there, so my hosts took me on a four-day introduction tour of the religion.*

*During the tour, we entered a temple that housed the most horrific idol I ever saw. I had no idea that things like this existed. It was a huge, maybe 20-foot-high, image of a male sexual organ. Filling the temple were Hindu pilgrims, who had made their way with excitement and celebration to worship this idol. Many of them laid down flat on their stomachs before it; they kissed its base. It was one of the darkest spiritual scenes I ever experienced, and all I wanted to do was get out of the building.*

*As we left the temple and made our way back to the vehicle, I kept saying to myself, "Thank God I'm not like these people! Thank God I'm not like these people!" Then it hit me: I am like those people.*

*I have my idols, too. Just because they're not housed in a temple, and they aren't made out of bronze, and they're not the product of formal religion doesn't mean they don't exist. In fact, my idols may be even more dangerous, because they're so subtle and disguised among my everyday activities.*

*What is an idol? It's something in creation that claims the place in my heart that only God should have. Romans 1:25 says that we "exchange the truth about God for a lie and worship and served the created things rather than the Creator."*

*It's much easier for us to see where others, and our culture, worships idols. But when it comes to our own idol worship, we're blind and deceived. We convince ourselves and others that what we're actually worshiping isn't wrong, that it's something we need to exist, and that just a little more won't hurt us.*

*John counsels us, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). There is no greater argument for our need for grace than the ease with which our hearts fall under the rule of things other than God.*

*But that grace is yours for the taking. Cry out for it, then live empowered by it. Resist and run from the idols that challenge God's place in your heart.*

The Bible summarizes things this way:

- We were made to worship God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. When we do this we find God's glory and our joy.
- Sin is choosing to worship something else other than God with our hearts. When something like lust is what we worship we sin in adultery, with pornography, etc. or When being
- Idolatry may seem satisfying at first but it always leads to consequences and even to bondage to sin.
- All sin is not just breaking God's law, it's idolatry (breaking the first commandment).
- When we turn to follow Jesus our hearts are renewed by Jesus, but we still struggle with idolatry.
- Following Jesus is a process of being freed from idolatry by replacing the worship of other things with the worship of God. When we return to God we not only glorify God but find ourselves full of joy because we live out God's design.

## **Heart**

### **ANSWER TOGETHER**

Often when people are struggling in life they will only try to fix the circumstances around them, rather than addressing the heart issue. What are some ways people can blame or try to fix their circumstances that don't result in real change?

Other times people will tell themselves to simply "stop sinning!" and find that it's not effective. Or they try to "pull themselves up by their bootstraps." Why isn't that enough?

Let's try to put this together: Imagine a Christian friend comes to you and shares that they often find themselves full of envy for what other people have. This happens especially when they feel lonely. They find themselves shopping and turning to "retail therapy" to feel better. You could

certainly encourage your friend to have a budget, or try some financial tips or tricks here. But how could understanding that the heart is ultimately what needs to be addressed help here?

## **Hands**

### **ANSWER TOGETHER**

As you are working on your gospel change project, how does the area you're working on relate to the heart?

Are there any ways you can incorporate a greater understanding of the heart into this gospel change project?

Where can you help change your heart by worshiping God rightly in that area?

While all of life is worship, there is an element in which worshiping God out loud through singing actually helps change our hearts on a deep and fundamental level. In light of what we've discussed today, why do you think the Bible so frequently calls God's people to sing? (see Psalms)

## **Prayer**

Take a moment to pray together and ask God to draw your hearts upward in worship [If you're really bold and not in a crowded coffeeshop we dare you to sing a hymn together before breaking]

## **Bible Reading Plan**

We recommend reading the Bible together with the [5 x 5 x 5 Bible reading plan](#).

As you read this week you'll find in Acts 16 a particularly memorable occasion of worship that takes place in a jail cell. How does it seem Paul and Silas' hearts and their orientation of worship sustains them even through trials?

- Acts 15
- Acts 16
- Acts 17
- Acts 18
- Acts 19

## Lesson 9: COMMUNITY

### Highs and Lows

Briefly share one highlight and one low from the last week to reconnect.

### Headline

*As we follow Jesus we're called to follow Jesus not just as individuals but together.*

### Head

#### READ TOGETHER

If you've been following along with the reading plan we've seen God do some amazing things through the book of Acts. But let's go back to the very beginning of the book in Acts 2. After the gospel of Jesus is preached and many believe we see something extraordinary happen. Rather than those who believe in Jesus simply going back to their lives as normal, they come together.

Acts 2:41–47

[41] So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. [42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (ESV)

As the new Christians turned to follow Jesus they turned to follow him together, not just individually. Often in America we view our Christian faith through an individual lens, but there's not way our Christianity can be separated from other Christians.

How much of life did it seem like the Christians lived together in Acts 2? What would that look like today translated to our time?

Ephesians 4 lays out the call to every Christian as we follow Jesus together:

[1] I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, [2] with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, [3] eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—[5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism, [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. [7] But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. [8] Therefore it says,

“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,  
and he gave gifts to men.”

[9] (In saying, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? [10] He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) [11] And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, [12] to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, [13] until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, [14] so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. [15] Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, [16] from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (ESV)

From that description of the church what stands out to you?

Is anything surprising? Strange? Unfamiliar?

Is anything encouraging?

If we are together in Christ does that mean we are all the same? What do we share in common and what do we not share in common?

Why does Paul say that we should be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit" with one another rather than *create* unity with one another?

## Heart

### Answer Together

Has it been a joy or a struggle for you personally to follow Jesus with our Christians? What has been your experience? (Note: May be appropriate to talk about your experience growing up, etc.)

Why do you think some Christians view participation with other Christians as optional rather than required? Why do we tend to drift away from other Christians at times?

The end of the Ephesians passage helps us see *why* we are together and *why* we need one another. Why has God brought us together? Why is being together necessary?

How would it change your view of other Christians to realize that you need them to mature and they need you to mature?"

## Hands

### Do Together

Let's take some time to encourage one another for what we've seen God do in their lives and how it has encouraged us over the past few weeks. Where have you seen God at work in them? How have the others in this group helped you follow Jesus through their example or encouragement? Take plenty of time to celebrate God's work and encourage each other.

If you haven't already discussed it, talk about where your group goes from here:

- You may want to continue on to the next discipleship study from the church, to studying a book of the Bible together, or another good book
- You may want to grab 1-2 others in your circle of relationships or small group and help them walk through the material
- You may want to take a short break due to life circumstances (just don't move away from making discipleship a priority throughout your life)

Not sure what to do? Feel free to talk to one of the pastors or deacons in the church for advice.

## NEXT STEPS

We will end right where we began, receiving the Great Commission from Jesus:

Matthew 28:16–20 [16] Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. [17] And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. [18] And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] 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, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (ESV)

The encouragement of the text:

- Jesus has all authority
- Jesus is with you, always

The call of the text:

- Make your Christian life an act of “going” not standing still
- Be discipled and help disciple others
- Stay close to God’s word which is where we find all he commands throughout the scriptures

Live this out as the church gathers on Sundays. Live this out in your Community Group. Live this out in an outreach group and in your daily life.

You are sent.