

GOSPEL EMPHASES FOR RHC

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For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. Romans 1:16-18 ESV

Paul knew that the good news of the Gospel was God's chosen means to put His power on display to offer salvation to everyone who would believe. While the good news of God is a simple truth that God saves sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus, it is in no way flat or simple. It's a multi-faceted diamond that never ceases to reflect the glory of God and has the power to conquer sin and death.

This resource aims to focus on four facets of this Gospel. And while the list could be endless, we felt these four would most edify your faith, and help you draw near to God and enjoy a richer, sweeter, and deeper relationship with your Creator. It is our prayer that as you take time to work through this resource, you would find yourself delighting in and enjoying the God who has worked all things to bring you back to Himself.

This resource is made up of four sessions:

Session 1: Good News, not Implications (pg2)

Session 2: Relating to a Person, not a Philosophy (pg11)

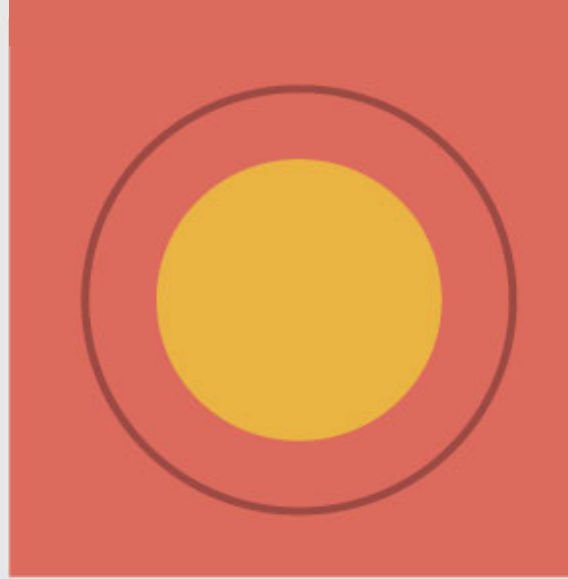
Session 3: The Gospel is rich and relevant (pg23)

Session 4: The Gospel changes us at a heart level (pg34)

Like the previous Gospel Renewal Resource, you are free to use this resource for your own devotional reading. However, this resource was originally designed to be read with another person, and so we encourage you to invite someone to read this resource with you. Open up the Bible and study the scriptural references, work through the case studies, and camp on the reflection sections. Tell each other what God is saying to you, and how He is desiring for you to grow, not just in your personal walk and holiness, but in your understanding and worship of the One who saved you for Himself.

It is our prayer that as you gaze into the multifaceted and beautiful Good News, the power of God would transform your hearts and minds, enabling you to enjoy your God and live a life that displays His surpassing worth.

1



GOOD NEWS NOT IMPLICATIONS

God saves sinners through
His work, not our own

Session 1 Key Ideas:

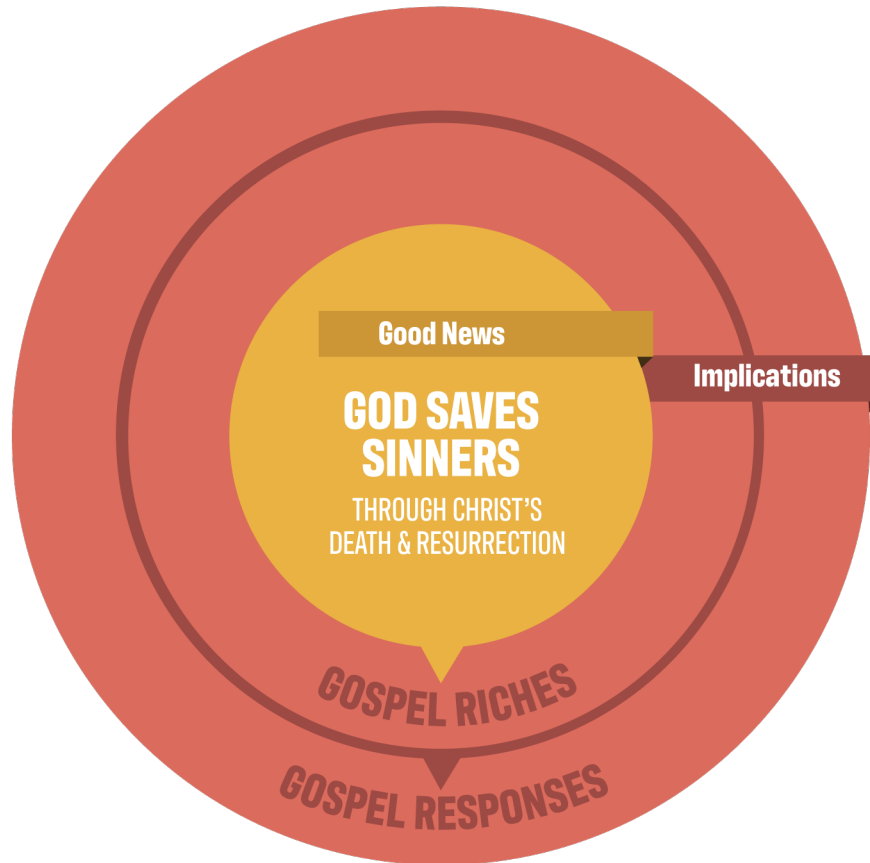
1. What is the gospel?
2. What are the implications of the gospel?
3. The dangers of confusing the gospel and its implications

The list below contains both descriptions of the Gospel and its implications. Check the boxes of those that describe only the GOSPEL.

- Inner peace
- Tithing
- Jesus died for sinners
- A life of love
- Secure in Jesus
- Good news of what God has done through Jesus
- No condemnation
- Holiness

The boxes that you ought to have checked are 'Jesus died for sinners' and 'Good news of what God has done through Jesus'. Did you struggle with the above activity?

Look at the diagram below:



At the centre of the diagram is the good news that 'God saves sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ'.¹ It is primarily a message about something that happened. The emphasis is on what God has done for sinners through His Son, Jesus. This is why 'good news' and 'Jesus died for sinners' are accurate descriptions of the gospel.

The gospel must not be confused with its 'riches' (e.g., 'inner peace', 'secure in Jesus', and 'no condemnation') nor its 'responses' (e.g., 'tithing', 'a life of love', or 'holiness'). Both 'riches' and 'responses' belong to the 'outer circles' because they are the results or implications of the gospel, but NOT the gospel itself.

What is the Gospel?

The gospel is the good news that God saves sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

1. J.I. Packer in his introductory essay to Owen's Death of Death in the Death of Christ, summarised the gospel as "God saves sinners". We co-opted this definition, but also 'sharpened' it with a minor addition.

Key idea 1:

What is the gospel?

The Greek word for 'gospel' is literally 'good news'. As 'news', it is a report to be proclaimed and to be believed in. It is 'good' because it is news of something that has happened, to rescue and deliver people from danger. In ancient days, the same Greek word was also used to refer to a General's victory over his enemies on behalf of his citizens.

Read 1 Cor 15:1-4

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand,² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.³ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

According to this passage, how else does the Bible describe the 'Gospel'?

- It is a message. Even though the word 'message' is not explicit in the text, it is hinted in v1 through the words 'preached' and 'received'.
- It concerns Christ and whatever happened to Him. V3, He died, was buried, and was raised on the third day.
- It is of first importance. All truths are important in the bible, but they are NOT of equal importance. The gospel is at the centre of our diagram, because it is of first importance. Every other truth radiates from the centre as an implication.
- It concerns us. V3, 'Christ died for our sins'. That is why the word 'gospel' means NOT just news, but good news?²

2. The fact that the gospel is 'good news' and not just news; or that Paul defines as 'Christ died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3)' shows that the gospel and its riches are very closely connected Scripturally. And yet, the goal of session 1, no doubt is to explore the distinction between the two, rather than their connection.

Let's return to our definition of the gospel and unpack each term briefly. The gospel is the good news that God saves sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

God. While we are saved primarily through Christ's death and resurrection, the rescue operation belongs to the Triune God. As regards our redemption, the Father planned, the Son accomplished, and the Spirit applied. While the Trinity is not the focus of this resource, it will be backgrounded in sessions 2-4.

Saves. No doubt, conversion comes to mind when we speak of being 'saved'. After all, it is a conscious experience of being made right with God for some of us. And yet, we are saved from first to last, from death in sin to life in glory, from being called to being glorified.

Sinners. All men are guilty, helpless, under the wrath of God, and unable to do His will. Sin may have felt consequences (e.g., psychological alienation, e.g., shame; social alienation, e.g., fights; and physical alienation, e.g., lack of harmony between Man and the created order). But it is first and foremost a vertical alienation from God because of our refusal to love and to worship Him as we were made to do so.

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Gospel does not just refer to the primary agency of God's work. Yes, God has taken the initiative to save. But He has acted in time, through an actual person, who completed a historical event: Jesus' death and resurrection were known to many eyewitnesses (1 Cor. 15:5-8). This is a one-off event that took place at a particular moment in history, indeed an event that cleaves history into two! All gospel riches are bought and secured by this central event.

What is the gospel?

It is the good news that God saves sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is of first importance. It must be proclaimed and received. It is good news because it speaks of the primary agency of God's saving work in space-time reality. The gospel is irreducibly historical. The Gospel is NOT its implications.

Key idea 2:

What are the implications of the gospel?

Recall that the outer 2 layers of the concentric-circles diagram are the results or implications of the gospel. If earlier we have been exploring what the gospel **is**, in this section, we will look at what the gospel **does**. While the Gospel and its implications are **distinct**, they are also **interconnected**.

Moving outward from the centre, 'gospel riches' means the saving benefits that we enjoy because we are united with Christ. One little phrase that we will repeatedly encounter in the New Testament is 'in Christ'. In a marital union, we enjoy not only our spouse, but all the benefits (e.g., my spouse's bank account!) that accompany the union. Likewise, we do not only enjoy Christ in our union, but all the spiritual blessings that Christ secured through his death and resurrection (Eph. 1:3-14). These salvation blessings, or 'gospel riches', include our 'adoption', 'sanctification', 'assurance', and so on. Gospel blessings, therefore, are results of the gospel.

Look at the two passages below and notice how the gospel and its riches are distinct but interconnected.

Romans 8:32

³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all (Gospel), how will he not also with him graciously give us all things (Riches)?

Romans 4:25-5:1

Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses (Gospel) and raised for our justification (Riches). 5 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith (Riches), we have peace with God (Riches) through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Moving to the outermost layer, 'Gospel Responses' are what we do as believers, in response to being saved by the Gospel. If 'Responses' flow out of having encountered the 'Gospel', then again the 'Gospel' must not be confused with its 'Responses'.

Look at the passages below and pay attention once more to how Gospel and 'Responses' are distinct but interconnected.

Gal. 2:14, 2:20

¹⁴ *But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel (Gospel response)...And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God (Gospel response), who loved me and gave himself for me (Gospel).*

Phil. 1:27, 2:8

²⁷ *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ (Gospel response)...*

⁸ *And being found in human form, [Christ] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Gospel).*


2 Cor. 8:9-11

⁹ *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor (Gospel)...*¹¹ *So now finish doing it as well, so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it out of what you have (Gospel response).*


In summary, the section aims to show that both 'Gospel riches' and 'Gospel responses' flow out of the gospel. They are the results of the gospel, but certainly not the gospel itself.


Key idea 3: The dangers of confusing the gospel and its implications

What are the dangers of confusing the Gospel with its riches?

 **First**, Jesus' person and work becomes less real. When we conflate the gospel with its riches, we end up emphasising the benefits that it brings to us, while sacrificing the historicity of the gospel event. For instance, when we wrongly confuse the Gospel (God saves sinners through Jesus' death and resurrection) with 'Gospel riches' (E.g., 'inner peace'), the historical person and work of Christ and His death for sinners becomes secondary. Ironically, when we unwittingly 'dehistoricise' Christ's person and work, He becomes 'less real', and 'less personal' to us!

Take Christmas as an example! Many in the Western world enjoy the personal benefits of Christmas (e.g., a time of giving and receiving, presents no less!), while de-personalising Christmas—Christ, God's ultimate gift, has been entirely removed from Christmas, as much as the term Christmas has been reduced to X-mas. To them, whether or not Christ was a real person, or whether he was born on a particular day of the month (not quite 25th Dec as we think!), is immaterial.³ This is equally true of other religions. Many religious people are less concerned with whether or not something really happened, as much as how it is of personal benefit. But the gospel is first and foremost a historical event. This explains why Paul can say, "14 And if Christ has not been raised, then...your faith is in vain." When we conflate the two, we depersonalise Jesus.

 **Second**, if the riches of the gospel are not anchored first and foremost in Christ's death and resurrection, we run into the danger of believing in 'cheap grace'. We forget that the saving benefits that are ours, come at a great cost of the death of God's Son. The gospel riches that we received are free, but not cheap.

 **Finally**, when we value gospel riches without first camping on the gospel, we are just one step away from preferring the abstract over the particular. What do I mean? What we ultimately believe in matters less than how we believe in something. It doesn't matter what you believe in as long as you do so with all your heart. Have we never heard our friends or ourselves register such a sentiment, "How can that person be rejected by God, if he's so staunch and fervent in his devotion?"

³When we downplay Christianity, we fall into a common error which we see repeatedly throughout church history: in 2nd-century Gnosticism, which values the immaterial and spiritual more than the material; in 19-century Christian theologies, which value Christianity as an abstract idea, more than a historical, local, and temporal reality.

What are the dangers of confusing the Gospel with its responses?



Christianity is no longer about what God does for us first and foremost (c.f., “God saves sinners...”), but primarily about what we can do for God. Have you ever attended churches who try to counteract consumerism (a good thing) with this teaching, “Ask not what God can do for you, but what you can do for Him” (a bad thing)? When we confuse the Gospel and its responses, believing the gospel is no longer about receiving something, but joining something. Haven’t we seen this error perpetuate itself both in church history (e.g., join the social gospel movement of changing the world), or in our own churches (join a ministry, because church is mainly about ‘serving God’, while forgetting that we have been ‘served by our Saviour in His death’, c.f., Mark 10:45)? To confuse the two, is to functionally subscribe to a subtle salvation-by-works system.



When the emphasis shifts from what God has done to what we must do, we either become proud or we despair. When we ‘live up’ to the Bible, we look down on those who cannot keep up. When we fail, we either put up a false front, or we shrink away from the community in shame. And yet, if we remember that ‘Gospel responses’ are as they are called, ‘responses’ to the saving work of God, then we will do well to read our Bibles daily, with an eye first and foremost to His promises to forgive and to enable, before we look out for commands to obey; we attend churches and come before God just as we are, with both our filth and with open hands, ready to receive forgiveness and empowerment all over again, instead of trying to appear all put together.

Make no mistake, the Bible contains imperatives and commands. A holy God places demands on His people. Godly affections, thinking, and behaviour are transformations that result from encountering the Gospel. And yet, any attempts to obey Him must stem from our hearts, minds, and imaginations being gripped by the glorious realities of the message that ‘God saves sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ’. Gospel riches and responses are necessary consequences and an overflow of the Gospel, but they are NOT the Gospel per se. Confuse them, and we find ourselves in all sorts of doctrinal and pastoral knots.

An anecdote

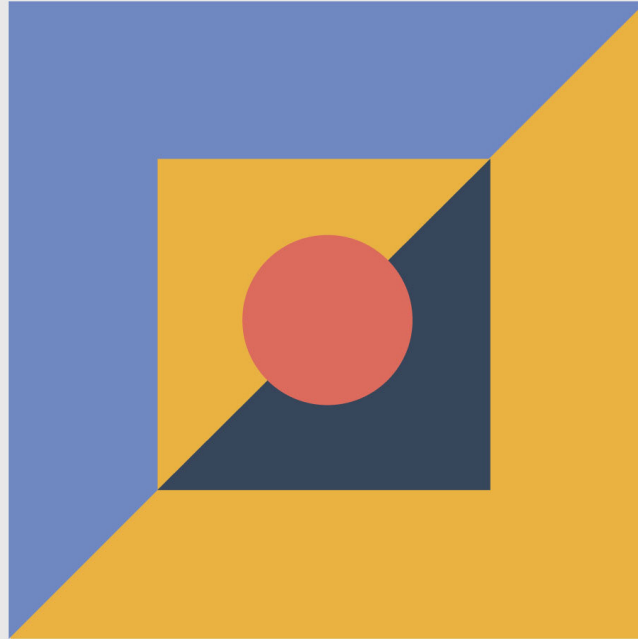
Martyn Lloyd-Jones, famously asked his congregants this question, "Are you now ready to say that you are a Christian"? Many would respond with "I do not feel that I am good enough". And to that response:

"At once I know that...they are still thinking in terms of themselves. Their idea still is that they have to make themselves good enough to be a Christian... it sounds very modest but it is the lie of the devil, a denial of the faith... you will never be good enough; nobody has even been good enough. The essence of the Christian salvation is to say that He is good enough and that I am in Him."

Reflection

1. What in the anecdote struck you?
2. Identify tendencies in your spiritual walk where you are likely to confuse the Gospel with Gospel responses, and discuss with your reading partner how knowing that the two are distinct can help you reframe the way you relate to God.

2



ABOUT A PERSON NOT A PHILOSOPHY

God saves sinners for Himself

Session 2 Key Ideas:

1. Exposing a philosophical Christianity
2. Discovering the beauty of the Father
3. Responding to such a Father

1. Exposing a philosophical Christianity

What is a philosophy?

Philosophy /fiˈlɒsəfi/ *noun* - a theory or attitude that acts as a guiding principle for behaviour

Case Study

Nicola dreamed of being a pilot but she had one problem—a fear of heights. She was determined not to let this stand in her way. She went to aviation school and studied everything there was to know about flying. She knew the aircraft and its engineering. She knew weather patterns and topography. She kept herself physically fit, logged hundreds of hours in a flight simulator, and graduated top of her class. But she had never actually gotten into a plane.

She had never felt the thrust of the engines as she pushed the throttle or turbulence as she passed through the clouds or the joy of watching the sunrise from the cockpit as she flew steadily toward the horizon. Nicola knew everything there was to know about flying and yet she did not ‘know’ about flying. What might the dangers be if she was entrusted with a passenger plane for her first trip? She might be fully qualified but do you think her passengers would feel safe? Why?

In many ways, Nicola only related to the plane as a philosophy. She loved the idea of flying but her fear of heights and desire to stay safe kept her feet on the ground. We too can be tempted to relate to God only on a philosophical level. We like to stay in control, keep our feet on the ground, and not risk the unknown. We love the idea of God, and are enthusiastic to even ready up on the ‘deep things of God’ but miss out on the fullness of our relationship with Him, because we fear where He may lead us.

The Gospel provides us with a beautiful worldview and robust framework for living our lives and facing any circumstance in it. However, the gospel must not simply be reduced to a philosophy, as knowing and applying the gospel should ultimately lead us to a vibrant, intimate, and emotionally satisfying relationship with God Himself. We are called to ‘soar’ with Christ, not just admire Him from below.

Reducing our faith to a philosophy happens when we use the Good News as a set of principles through which we understand the world and make decisions. Whilst this is a benefit of having an intellectually coherent faith, Jesus did not die only in order for us to be able to think better about the world, but rather in order to bring us into an intimate relationship with God Himself.

1.2 Identifying a philosophical Christianity in your own heart

Like Nicola, we too have a tendency to relate to God in a philosophical sense. Each of us has different reasons for why we do this, but learning to identify areas in our lives where we primarily relate to God as a philosophy and not a Person will help us take steps towards deepening our relationship with Him.

Consider your prayer life:

- How often do you pray? Daily / Weekly / Hardly ever?
- When you do pray, do you talk to God in repeated cliches or generalities? We know in our hearts that that's not how we talk to real people. We are specific, un-abstract, and personal in our communication. What does your communication with God tell you about whether you are engaging with God as a philosophy or a Person?

Consider which areas of your life you are unwilling to trust God with:

- Can you identify scenarios in which your Christianity feels like a mental exercise rather than a faith-filled response? This may reveal a philosophical Christianity in that particular area. List one or two.

E.g. When you are going through something hard, you may just feel resigned to accepting suffering in a somewhat stoic manner instead of wrestling with God in prayer.

E.g. Prayer is a Christian duty and I don't really expect God to answer or change the way I think about something, instead of expectantly approaching God in prayer, waiting for His Spirit to speak, correct, encourage, or convict

- What would a faith-filled response to your Heavenly Father look like instead?

Critical thinking is an essential skill that children are taught as they mature. We are taught to assess and analyse. We create check boxes that help us determine if we should buy that home, book a hotel room, or even enter a romantic relationship. We pride ourselves on being wise, prudent decision-makers, and aim to be logically and not emotionally driven. Pragmatism rules in Singapore. Once we find a philosophy that makes sense and see its outcomes as desirable, we adopt certain principles of living, (e.g., healthy eating, work-life balance, etc). Likewise, we can turn Christianity into a 'way of life' that doesn't make knowing and enjoying God the ultimate goal.

'Thinking well' is excellent but 'thinking' alone misses the point of the Gospel. The point of the Gospel is that sin separated us from our relationship with God and He has worked all things to restore us to the relationship with Him. He wants us to draw near to Him and Him to us. The point is reconciliation. We all have gaps between what we intellectually grasp and experientially live. This is partly due to the ongoing presence of sin in the world. However, when we make 'thinking' the pursuit, instead of a reconciled relationship, we miss the goal of the Good News of the Gospel.

Over the last 10 years, the gospel-centred movement has restored the centrality of the gospel to all of life. We have moved from assuming the gospel to foregrounding it in sermons, bible studies, and personal application. While this is worth giving thanks for, the danger is that a label such as 'gospel-centrality' eclipses the Person of the Gospel. We can just use the Gospel as a philosophy, i.e., as a moral compass to guide us to live wisely and to navigate certain problems. We can even master the many ways to 'Get to Christ' from any passage of the Bible without being emotionally affected.

Read Luke 15:11-32

In this passage we see that both sons did not enjoy a relationship with the Father. They have both 'left' him. The younger brother left physically while the older brother 'left' in a different way.

- How does the older brother display a philosophical approach to his father? (He lives out the demands of his sonship, without enjoying the relationship and blessing of the father)
- In what ways does your cerebral approach to God lead you away from enjoying your relationship with Him? (E.g., You have adopted a 'way of life' because the Christian lifestyle is appealing to you. You hope to be a better person by following the principles in scripture. You use Christian practices to help ease your guilt.)

Scripture calls us to love God with our mind (Mark 12:30). 2 Timothy 2:7 instructs us to think, so that God may give us insight. Philippians 4:8 reminds us to consider what is "true, honourable, lovely, etc". There is nothing wrong with loving God with our minds. We must be careful of reducing faith to mindless mysticism. But more likely, our error is to fall into the ditch on the other side of the road where we are purely cognitive towards our faith. The Bible asks us to 'consider' Jesus with logic many times, but if we only or primarily relate to Jesus with our minds, then we fall short of biblical Christianity. We are to love God with our hearts, soul, and strength as well. To be solely pragmatic is to empty the relationship of poetry. Our hearts are to be moved and our souls, to sing as our minds ponder God's greatness and goodness. Does your thinking evoke poetry, awe, and praise relating to the actual person of God or rather do you just engage with the cohesive ideas of Christianity, and apply principles to life? Consider why God doesn't just give us discourses for those who enjoy tight arguments in the Epistles. Most of the Bible are in the form of stories and poetry (psalms). Like music, both stories and poetry grip not just our minds, but our hearts and imaginations. If your Christian check boxes are more about 'shoulds' than responses to your Heavenly Father, then your pragmatism may be getting in the way of the rich relationship that the Gospel calls you into.

Consider how much of your behaviour is driven by 'shoulds'. List a few that come to mind. E.g. I should only marry a Christian, I should attend CG, I should tithe and be generous, and I should be welcoming to people on a Sunday.

Most of our Christian 'shoulds' are not wrong, but when they are seen as separate from the personal God we follow and obey, they can breed bitterness, resentment, and rebellion. When our behaviour is purely driven by 'should' and we forget the 'why' in relation to who God is as a person, we find ourselves in trouble.

Fill in this table and add in a few areas when your behaviour is driven by 'philosophy' and not 'relationship'

List the behaviour driven by "should"	How does 'philosophy' motivate the "should"? (list some logical reasons for your behaviour) *note: logic is not bad but cannot function alone as a motivator	How can 'relationship with God' motivate and change the should to 'want' or 'desire'?
E.g. I should be welcoming to new people at church	E.g. Christians are meant to be welcoming. If I'm friendly, people will like me more and it will make God happy. I have to set a good example. My leaders told me to.	E.g. God welcomes me, makes room for me, and calls me worthy of His love and attention. I receive His welcome with thanksgiving and I delight to please Him by offering it to others.
E.g. I should be generous	E.g. It's unbiblical to be stingy so I'll give. I have more than others so it's only right to help those who have less. I feel good when I give.	E.g. My Father owns everything and will always take care of me. I can trust Him with all I have. Money is just a tool God has given me, I can ask Him how He wants me to use it.

How do you think drawing near to God in a relationship will affect a 'checkbox' Christianity?

2. Discovering the beauty of the Father

2.1 The Welcoming Father (Romans 15:7)

The unknown is scary for all of us. If we are uncertain about what awaits us behind a closed door, we may hesitate before entering or not enter at all. How we think about God's disposition toward us, directly impacts whether we choose to linger from afar, or come near the throne of grace.

- Pause here and consider how you truly think God feels about you? If you were to knock on the door, how might you experience God? Smiling? Concerned? Disappointed? Frustrated? Disengaged? Overjoyed?
- Does that feeling change when you are **'behaving' vs when you don't?**
- What does the Father think about His Son, Jesus? Let's look at a few scriptures to see how the Father regards the Son. Read the following passages.
 - **Matthew 3:17-18** (Jesus' baptism)
 - **Matthew 17:1-8** (Jesus' transfiguration)
 - Now read **John 17:25-26**. How does the Father receive us on account of His Son?

We can be certain of God's favourable disposition because of Christ. Since we cannot see the Father, He revealed Himself most clearly through His Son. Jesus tells us if we have seen Him we have seen the Father (John 14:9). Paul tells us, **"Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God"** (Romans 15:7). Christ extends the Father's welcome to us. God does not do silent treatments nor does He send us to 'naughty corners' till we get our act together. No, He welcomes us *in Christ* as He gave His Son the 'silent treatment'. As the door opens we are greeted with the warm embrace of the welcoming affectionate Father. "Come in, come near!" He says with eyes full of love and delight. This is the good news of the Gospel; we are united with Christ, one with Him, so much so that when God sees us, He sees His sons and daughter in THE Son. And so with confidence, we can draw near to God (Hebrews 4:16).



2.2 The Pursuing Father (Luke 15:28)

But what if we aren't knocking at the door? Perhaps through the vicious lies of the enemy, our hearts have become cold and confused toward our Heavenly Father. Perhaps your earthly father displayed little love and affection and so it's difficult to imagine your Father in heaven in any other way. Truths we may know in our heads don't resonate in our hearts. You know scripture tells you God loves you but you have a hard time believing it.

Refer again to Luke 15:11-32

The older brother did not understand his father. He misjudged his father to assume he would withhold good from him ('you never even gave me a young goat'). His father's joy was perplexing and even offensive to him as his younger brother returned.

Consider how his father responded to being misjudged and misunderstood by his son. List the two things the father did in response from verse 28

- He went out to his son
- He entreated him to come in and celebrate with him

The younger brother also treated his father poorly and left without regard for the family. He returned to the home in a 'philosophical' manner. It was reasoning that brought him home and he expected to be received as a servant, not a son.

Consider how his father responded to his son's rejection of him. What similarities do you see in the way he responded to the younger brother as well as the older brother?

- He was waiting expectantly for his younger son and went out of his house to meet his older son.

Παρεκάλει (parekalei) is the Greek word for 'entreat' and means to call to or for, to exhort, to encourage. How could this action be considered surprising when we think of authority figures over us?

- Typically we don't expect such humility from one in authority. Perhaps we expect the father to wait inside the house for the son to come in and initiate conversation? Typically servants are sent out to call someone in, but here the father himself goes out to call his son.

What do you imagine the father's tone was as he entreated his son?
How might this scripture help you understand your Heavenly Father better?

3. Responding to such a Father

It will be ironic if your main takeaway from this session is 'knowing how to think rightly about the Father' instead of tasting and seeing that He is good. So how do you do that?

3.1 Faith and Repentance Before Your Father

Whether you had a good earthly father, who modelled the care, concern, love, and security, or an absent and indifferent earthly father, your Creator and heavenly Father is working all things to restore your relationship to Himself. There is a sense that all of humanity is God's offspring (Acts 17:29, Luke 3:8) However, we have sold our birthright to the world and find ourselves as orphans through our own doing. What God is doing through the Gospel is to restore our original sonship to us through Jesus Christ.

How then are we to respond? Faith and repentance are often said to be two sides of the same coin. What does this mean? Well, it means one cannot exist without the other. When the good news of the Kingdom of God is proclaimed, we are called to two things; repent and believe in the Gospel. Jesus Himself mentions both in the same breath (Mark 1:15). Saving faith is not just believing there is a God, even the demons do this and shudder (James 2:19). Saving faith requires that, in seeing the kingdom of God, we repent and believe in the Gospel. In order to enter into the kingdom of God as sons and daughters, we must leave behind our 'sonship' of the world (Eph. 2:1) and receive adoption by the Spirit through the work of Christ. We need to be born again. Faith and repentance are not just the way we are reconciled to the Father, but also the way we stay in sweet fellowship with Him. All of life as a Christian is faith and repentance.

Discuss briefly with your reading partner:

- What do you think faith is?
- How is the Christian's faith different from the 'believing' of demons in James 2:19?
- What does it mean to do something out of faith?
- What role do you think repentance is meant to play in your life?

The difference between the Christian's faith and the demon's belief is in the response to the revealed truth. True faith requires a response. The response is faith and repentance. Repentance is far more than just acknowledging we are wrong but is turning away from our sins. Faith is far more than merely believing in facts but is running back to the Father because of what Christ has done. They are the joyful response to receiving the good news of the Gospel through Jesus and turning from all that is against Him and the Father and embracing all that He commands. In this way, we are united with Christ and become like Him and are welcomed in as true sons and daughters of the Father. Faith is the means through which we enjoy the Father and are reconciled to Him, and repeatedly so. Repentance is turning away from anything that threatens to weaken our enjoyment of our Father.

3.2 Enjoying Your Father

The older brother in Luke 15 not only misunderstood his father, but he didn't enjoy his father and all the blessings that came with being a son. Do you wonder, if he had asked his father for a young goat to celebrate with his friends, would his father have given it to him? Would the answer always be yes? Or always no?

The younger brother took his inheritance and left his father. He thought that happiness and fulfilment existed outside his home, but found it left him empty and alone. He returned only expecting to be treated as a servant, clothed in shame.

Scripture tells the story of another son. A perfect son. A son who knew the father perfectly, a son who always obeyed, a son who talked and asked the father to provide many times. A son who loved and delighted in the father.

Read John 14:1-7

This conversation happens the night before the crucifixion and during the Passover meal. Just before this Jesus had washed His disciple's feet, predicted the betrayal by Judas and Peter's denial, as well as telling them He would be going away soon (John 13). This created some confusion as to where Jesus was going and why they couldn't follow Him.

Many of us perhaps feel a little like Thomas in this passage. We live and comprehend in a physical world and so a spiritual relationship and reality can be difficult to grasp.

What do you think Jesus means by, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

How does Jesus 'become' the way, the truth, and the life through the Gospel and show us the way to enjoy the Father?

Prayer and the Word

How do we relate to our Heavenly Father while we are still on earth and yet to be fully reconciled to Him? Jesus left heaven and came to earth in a physical body to show us how to draw near and relate to God in our humanness. We should not underestimate the common means God has provided to draw near to Him through reading His word and prayer. Christ Himself shows us this as an example.

If faith and repentance are the ways in which we are to respond to God, then prayer and the word are tools we are given. Any deeply connected and rich relationship requires nurturing. Just as time, honesty, communication, and love are needed for earthly relationships to thrive, so our relationship with God requires active engagement to develop. God has opened up the way for us to have that relationship and He not only entreats us to come but welcomes us when we do. Allow your prayers to be frequent, personal, and honest, instead of wooden and trite. There are many great resources available to teach you how to enrich your prayer life and we would encourage you to read some⁴.

Reading God's Word helps you grow in your knowledge of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. God uses His Word in our lives in a powerful and spiritual way that directs and leads us as we come to it in humble faith. As God's children, we gather weekly to hear His word preached, we meet in small groups to study and read it and we personally give time to the meditation of the truths we see in it.

Luke 10:22-23

"All things have been handed over to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him." Turning to the disciples in private he said, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see."

Draw near to the Father through Christ, He delights to give you more of Himself.

⁴Tim Keller, Prayer

Paul Miller, A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World
Pete Greig, How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People

3



RICH AND RELEVANT

God saves sinners through Christ's work

Session 3 Key Ideas:

1. Christ's work is rich
2. Christ's work is relevant

Christ's work is rich and relevant. Do you believe that?

We do not always see the richness of His work. What comes to mind when we think of 'Christ's work'? We tend to think of His work as solely being His death on the cross and His resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins. This is right and good! This is at the heart of the gospel. This is why we celebrate Sunday after Sunday: singing, praying, and preaching Christ's death and resurrection. Like Paul, we resolve to know nothing except Christ being crucified (1 Cor. 2)!⁵

And yet, if this is all we believe about Christ's work, we are largely mistaken. At first blush, the author of Hebrews appears to suggest that: "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God." (Heb. 6:1). But does He really mean that believers should move on from Christ's death and resurrection?

Bobbie Jamieson argues:

*When the author of Hebrews "moves on from the gospel," what does he move on to? The **priesthood** of Christ, the sacrifice of Christ, the **heavenly intercession** of Christ, the new covenant mediated by Christ, the **future return** of Christ, and **how all of that enables us to turn from dead works and serve the living God.***

When we speak of Christ's finished work, there is a right and a wrong way to understand it. His work is 'finished' insofar that Christ has become a sacrifice for those who would believe in Him, once and for all. He would never again be crucified because His death and resurrection is sufficient to save all who come to Him. But if by 'finished' we mean that Christ is now waiting in Heaven, twiddling His thumbs until it is time to return, then we are wholly mistaken.

⁵ To be sure, Paul wasn't just referring to Christ's death without His resurrection. He uses 'crucified' as a shorthand for Christ's death and resurrection, very much like how Christian theologians speak of Christ's 'crosswork' (c.f., Don Carson!)

Christ's priestly work continues beyond His earthly ministry. He is still interceding for His people. Like the Old Testament priests, He prays down salvation blessings on His people which He has secured with His blood.⁶ **Christ continues His kingly work:** No doubt the kingdom arrived when Christ came to earth. But He is still building his church by subduing rebels and graciously gathering them under His reign.⁷ **His prophetic work has not ceased,** because He still speaks to His people through His ministers and the proclamation of Scripture.⁸ He continues His work as mediator until He returns! Christ's work is richer than just His death and resurrection (More to come under Key idea 1).

Others of us struggle to believe that Christ's work is relevant. We think that Christ's finished work is relevant to unbelievers. It is their free pass out of hell, and a ticket to Heaven. His work helps the non-Christian to 'get in', but we need other biblical truths and motivators to 'stay in'.

This cannot be further from the truth. Recall 1 Cor. 15:1-2 which tells us of the gospel "which you received, in which you stand, and **by which you are being saved**". Our relationship with Christ's finished work is not just past tense (which you received), but present continuous tense (by which you are being saved). Around the same time, Paul, the author of 1 Corinthians, writes in Rom. 1:16 that the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes". Paul was writing to the saints in Rome (1:7), which means that he was NOT discussing the ability of the gospel to convert unbelievers, but to save believers to the end! And both of these verses merely speak of **Christ's finished work in relation to our sin!**

What about Christ's ongoing work, in relation to our suffering? His incarnation, being glorified in His humanity, makes Him even more compassionate towards our hurts, so that He knows what kind of grace we need for a given moment (Heb. 4:15-16). **Or what about His Second Coming with regards to our saintly identity?** He has not only set us apart as saints. One day, we will be filled with the fruit of righteousness (Phil. 1:11). (More to come in Key idea 2).

⁶ The Aaronic blessing in Num. 6 foreshadows what Christ does.

⁷ 1 Cor. 15:24-28 tells us that one day, His kingly reign would reach a climax, when He finally overcomes the last enemy, which is Death.

⁸ Consider Eph. 2:17. Paul tells us that Christ preached to those in Ephesus even though Christ never went that far. Clearly, Paul meant that Christ Himself preached as Paul preached the gospel in Ephesus! Or Rom. 10:17, 'Faith comes from hearing and hearing through the word of Christ'. The Word of Christ, is more than just the word about Christ. It is the risen Christ Himself speaking to His people.

Key idea 1: Christ's work is rich

Christ's work is rich. As aforementioned in the introduction, His work goes beyond His death and resurrection. This includes:

His incarnation. This means that the second person of the Trinity took on human flesh from birth, has ever since remained bodily, and will do so for all eternity.

His death and resurrection. Jesus came to die to take our sins and punishment. He rose again from the dead on the third day, not only to break the power of our sins, but to bring in the beginning of God's new creation.

His intercession. Christ, who has ascended to Heaven, is interceding for His people that their faith may not fail, and that their sins may be forgiven.⁹

His Second Coming. Christ will one day return to judge all who oppose Him, and to glorify all who love Him.

⁹To be sure, God has decisively and judicially forgiven our sins as a judge. And yet we are asked to confess our sins (1 John 1:9, Matt. 6:12) regularly, that He may forgive our sins relationally, as a Father. And wonderfully, He has appointed Jesus' ongoing prayer on the basis of His finished work, for the relational forgiveness of our sins! Even though our sins do not disrupt our union with God, it disrupts our communion with Him. And Jesus' ongoing intercession efficaciously guarantees that communion. To use an everyday example, fighting with my wife does not undermine our marital union, but it most certainly strains our communion (i.e., our relating to each other). Apologies are in place for mutual forgiveness!

The death and resurrection of Christ is often known as His *finished work*, while His intercession and Second Coming is His *ongoing work*. The finished work of Christ is the heart of the gospel. It is the centrepiece of the good news that God saves sinners. Jesus bore our sins and absorbed the wrath of God on our behalf when He died on the cross. But He rose on the third day for the forgiveness of our sins, and that we may be counted righteous in God's sight. This is the heart of the gospel. The longer term for this is Penal Substitutionary Atonement. Jesus was punished (penal) on our behalf (substitutionary), that we may be 'at one' with God (atonement).

But His finished work grounds His ongoing work. E.g., Christ's intercession is grounded in His death and resurrection. As He prays to the Father (ongoing work), He says, "Father, you cannot punish this sinner again, because you have already punished His sins on me at the cross (finished work)". Or consider how His Second Coming is to complete the work that He has begun. He comes again (future/ongoing work) to save bodily, and vindicate publicly those whom He had already died and risen for (finished work). Christ has done and continues to do His work in His incarnation. Only Christ in His humanity can die, rise, pray, and come again.

In a visual nutshell, Christ's work looks like this:

Christ's Incarnation			
Finished Work		Ongoing Work	
Death	Resurrection	Intercession	Second Coming

Why is it important that we know Christ's work in full, rather than reducing it to His death and resurrection?

There are two dangers in domesticating the work of Christ:



First, when we narrow Christ's work to His death and resurrection, we become impoverished as regards the riches that God has availed to us for our holy living.

After all, Scriptures avail to us a plethora of motivators and enablers beyond just Christ's death and resurrection.

■ **Christ's intercession as enabler.** In 1 John 1:9-2:1, John encourages us to confess our sins instead of denying or hiding them. We can do that because "God is faithful and just" and promises to forgive our sins (1 John 1:9). But what leads Him to forgive us regularly, is the fact that "if we do sin, we have an advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous". On account of Jesus' intercession as our advocate, as our defence attorney, God graciously forgives our daily offences.

■ **Christ's Second Coming as enabler.** In 1 Cor. 7:17-31, Paul encourages the believers to live in the light of the "appointed time" (7:29), which is Christ's Second Coming. In the light of the end, the importance of ethnicity (7:17-20), marital status (7:26-27), and societal standing (7:21-24) are relatively unimportant, and not to be pursued too vigorously.

In summary, let us not deprive ourselves of the riches that God has availed us to live for Him by falling back on Christ's death and resurrection only.



Second, when we narrow the scope of Christ's work to His death and resurrection, we worship a 'lesser' Christ.

If Christ does His finished and ongoing work in His incarnation (see diagram above), then to embrace His finished work while ignoring His ongoing work, is to rend Christ asunder. Insofar that the incarnate Christ cannot be divided up, neither can we nor must we divide up His finished work from His ongoing work! To ignore His ongoing work, is to believe in a lesser Christ, which leads to a diminishing of our worship and adoration towards Him. Conversely, when we hold to the fullness of Christ's work, we hold to the whole Christ. Christ is honoured, and we are helped. We must never emphasise certain aspects of His work to the neglect of others.

Key idea 2: Christ's work is relevant

Christ's work is rich, and it is also relevant.

What we mean by 'relevant' is that **His work ministers to us comprehensively**. The Bible tells us that we are all saints, sufferers, and sinners all at once.

Consider the following:

Jack who wakes up to chronic pain daily (**sufferer**), chooses to grumble against God (**sinner**), instead of learning to entrust himself to God's daily care and mercies (**saint**).

Jane, after being unjustly passed over for a promotion (**sufferer**), decides to turn to binge-drinking (**sinner**) instead of finding her refuge in God (**saint**).

Or Mary, a stay-home mother who, after experiencing an entire day of meltdowns by her toddlers (**sufferer**), takes it out on her husband (**sinner**), instead of remembering that God cares intimately about her struggles (**saint**).

From the above examples, it is evident that all Christians embody all three designations. We are simultaneously:

Sinners, who need challenge to our sin in the light of God's redemptive mercies.

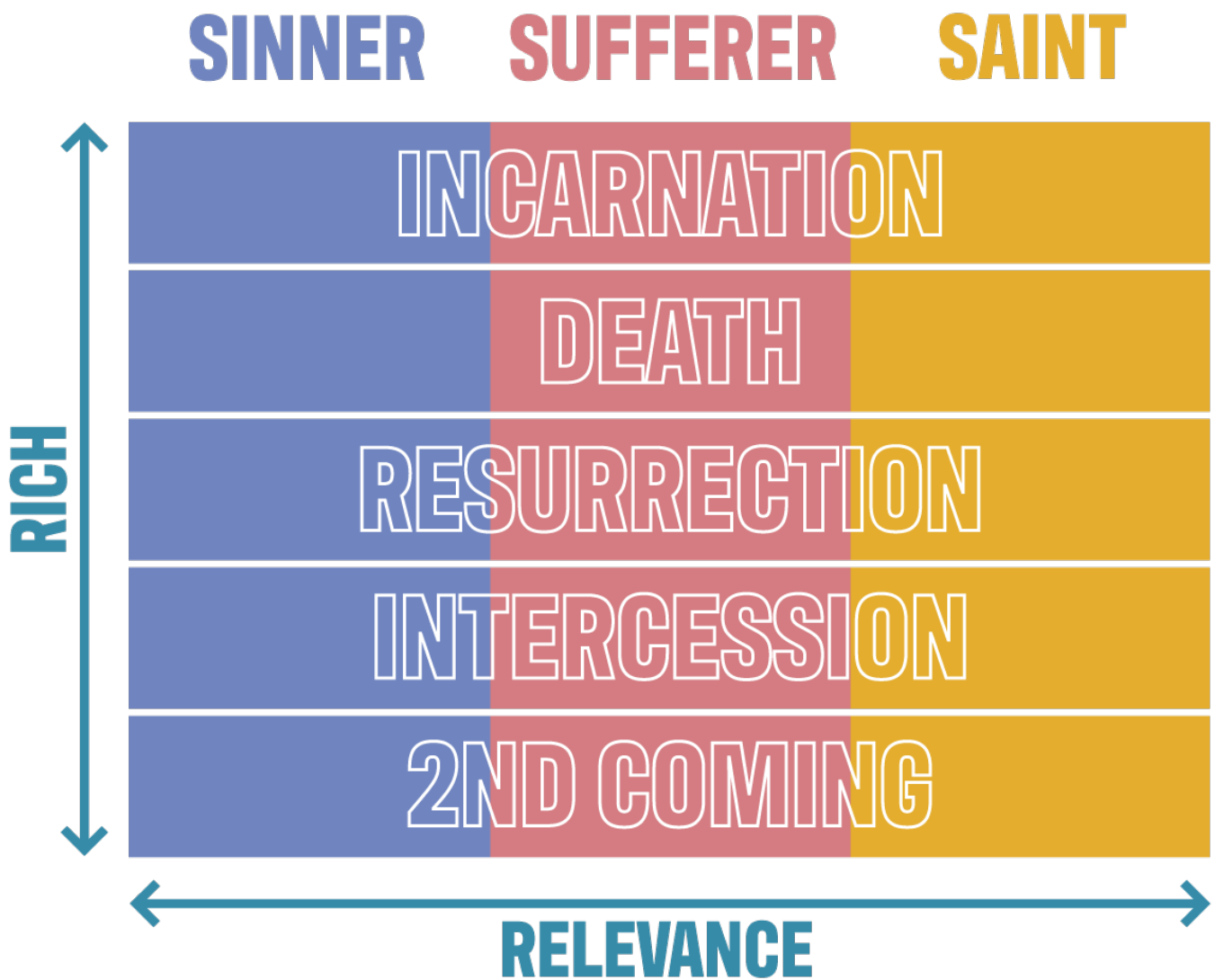
Sufferers, who need comfort in affliction and/or

Saints, who need confirmation of our core identity as God's children

If so, how does God minister to us through the rich and comprehensive work of His Son? How does Christ's incarnation, death, resurrection, intercession, and Second Coming, speak to each of these designations?

Consider the matrix below.

The vertical axis represents the 'riches of Christ's work', while the horizontal, its 'relevance' to us as sufferer, sinner, and saint.



Christ redeems us from our sinning, comforts us in our suffering, and empowers us in our sainthood. In the example used earlier—when Jane, a believer (**saint**) was unjustly passed over for a promotion (**sufferer**), and decided to turn to binge-drinking instead of finding her refuge in God (**sinner**)—consider how Christ’s *intercessory* work is relevant to all aspects.

With regards to her sin, Christ prays for God’s mercy and forgiveness.

When she stumbles towards God in confession after feeling a deep sense of guilt and shame for her binge-drinking (1 John 1:9, 2:1), she remembers that Christ is interceding for God’s relational forgiveness, based not on her failed performance, but Christ’s once-and-for-all performance.

With regards to her suffering, Christ prays that her faith may not fail (Luke 22:31).

The greatest temptation in suffering is not that the discomfort becomes unbearable, but that her faith be moved and shaken (1 Thess. 3:5). Christ our Great High Priest, who knows exactly how it feels to be overlooked and rejected, intercedes for her, that she may persevere in trusting God when the desires of her heart are not met.

With regards to her sainthood, Christ prays that her communion with God will be restored.

In praying for God to forgive her sins relationally, Christ is in effect praying for God to restore to her the joy of her salvation (Ps. 51:12). If the Old Testament priests prayed that God’s face would shine upon His people (Num. 6:24-6), how much our great high priest par excellence, who prays that God’s people would know God’s favour and smile! Also consider this: the Old Testament high priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year, wearing the prescribed breastplate, containing twelve jewels representing the twelve tribes of Israel. In his representative capacity he was, bringing the twelve tribes with him into the sanctuary of God. In the same way, Christ our Great High Priest, having passed through the heavens, brings us His people with Him into the presence of God. Christ’s intercessory ministry guarantees Jane’s communion and intimacy with God.

Christ’s work is relevant because it ministers to Jane as sinner, sufferer, and saint.

Let's return to the example of Jack, the chronic sufferer. How can the comprehensive breadth of Christ's finished and ongoing work minister to him?

Christ in His *incarnation* was a Man of Sorrows (Isa. 53:3) who was not unacquainted with our infirmities and weaknesses. He may not be suffering chronic pains per se, but He certainly knew what physical pain can do: it tempts one to distrust God's goodness; it isolates us from everyone else. The excruciating pain that He suffered must have tempted Him to come down from the cross.¹⁰ The one who has taken on flesh and experienced weakness, is not just sympathetic towards our physical pain (Heb. 4:14-16), but possesses a heightened compassion, as one who is glorified.

Christ's *death* is the basis by which we know the love of God that is poured out in our hearts by the Spirit (Rom. 5:3-5, 8). Pain messes around with our view of God. It introduces doubts about God. "Does He love me?", "Is He against me?" Christ's death proves God's love for us. If God loved us when we were still His enemies (Rom. 5:8, Christ's death is proof!), how will His love be any less when we are His children?

Christ *rose* again as the forerunner and pioneer of our salvation (Heb. 2:8-10). Pain and death are not the final word. He who walked into the grave before us, would Himself bring us into glory. We are roped up to a guide who goes before us. His journey from the cross to the crown, from the tomb to the throne, is also our journey.

Christ *intercedes* to save us to the end (Heb. 7:25). When our pain weakens our resolve to keep trusting in God and His goodness, we look to our Great High Priest who prays that our faith may not fail. Pain cannot separate us from God because Jesus will not stop praying.

Christ's *Second Coming* promises a complete redemption, which includes the redemption of our bodies. Like our Saviour, we will possess glorified bodies that will no longer be broken (Rom. 8:18-25), but bodies that can fully enjoy the pleasures of God's creation (Acts 10:40-41, Luke 24:42-43, John 21:12-13).

In summary, we see that Christ's work is not just rich, but relevant. God uses the fullness of Christ's work to minister to us as saints, sinners, and sufferers.

¹⁰Excruciating in Latin, quite literally means 'out of the cross'.

Discuss the following questions with your partner.

1. Under the headings of Sufferer, Sinner, and Saint, which identity do you relate to most readily? Which are you most prone to neglect or forget? Why do you think this is so?

2. Which aspect of Christ's work seems to resonate with you? Can you consider how the other aspects of Christ's work are important for your life here on earth?

3. Scan the QR code to access our Gospel Matrix spreadsheet that expands on the richness and relevance of the Gospel with scripture references for all. (We make no apologies for the comprehensiveness of Christ's work). Using the matrix,

- a. Pick a row or a column to work through
- b. Look up the scriptures in the boxes and meditate on them



Gospel Matrix Spreadsheet

The matrix is massive. Instead of going through every box, our recommendation is that you work through as many rows or columns as possible for an 'immersive' experience before connecting Christ's work to your personal struggle. E.g. I wonder how Christ's incarnation speaks to my dysfunctional relationship with my mom.

For Meditation

"Aslan," said Lucy, "you are bigger."

"That is because you are older, little one," answered he.

"Not because you are?"

"I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger."

From C.S. Lewis' Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia, The Chronicles of Narnia

Pray that with every passing day, Christ's person and work will be bigger and better to you.

4



CHANGES US AT A HEART LEVEL

God saves sinners
through the Spirit's work

Session 4 Key Ideas:

1. Our behaviours reveal our core desires and unbeliefs towards God
2. The gospel corrects our unbeliefs towards God
3. We need both the gospel and the Holy Spirit to change

Key idea 1: Our behaviours reveal our core desires and unbeliefs towards God

We all long for positive changes in our lives.

We long for our circumstances to change: *"If I could change my looks, life would be so much better." "If I could get out of this job, I can finally advance my career."*

We long for our behaviours to change: *"I want to be more patient with my spouse and my children." "I want to stop visiting those Internet sites." "I want to be more generous and less selfish with my time."*

And yet the Bible tells us that real biblical change must take place inside-out rather than outside-in. It must begin from the heart, rather than from our circumstances or behaviours. And yet if we are honest, we might just admit that outside-in changes are what we default to, because we feel so much more in control (at least we like to think so!) over our circumstances and behaviours than over our hearts. Think about the number of times you said to yourself after you lost your temper at a family member, *"I can do better the next time. I just need to try harder!"* **And yet we fail to realise that what drives our behaviours are our core desires. And what drives our core desires are lies that we entertain about God.**

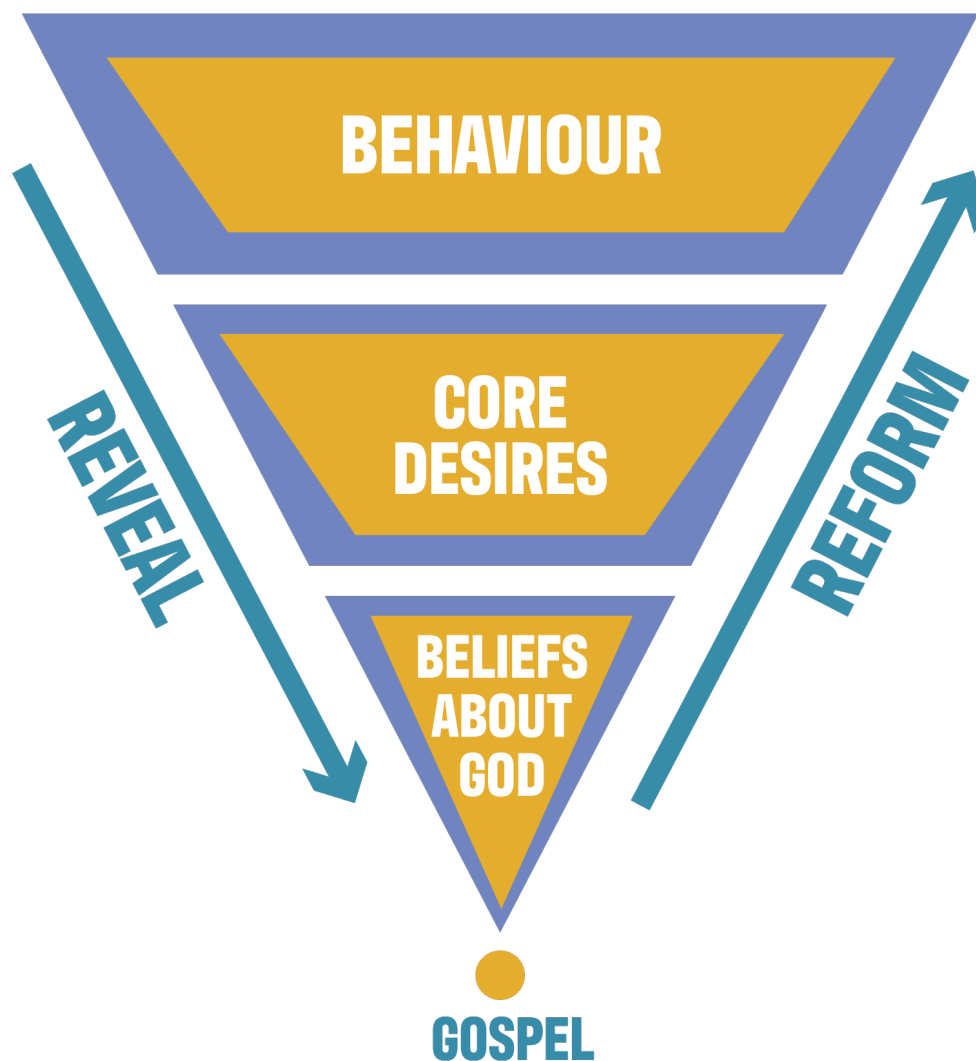
Suppose that a couple bicker frequently over how money ought to be spent. The husband thinks that his wife is a spendthrift, and the wife thinks that he is a miser. If they merely try to resolve their disagreement at the behavioural level, they might simply conclude that they just differ in spending philosophy. As long as they keep separate bank accounts, and refrain from interfering in each other's spending habits, all will be well.

Now let's move from the behaviour to the core desire. What might drive the wife to spend money, is in fact a desire to make herself look better in order to feel more acceptable to others. The husband's frugality, on the other hand, stems from a desire to "save up for rainy days". What he wants is security and safety. Should they be chatting about their differences at *this level*, the conclusions they draw about each other, and about the way forward might look very different.

But let's not stop there. **Let's go deeper still, right to the heart level.** What lies about God might each of them be unwittingly entertaining? The wife longs to be acceptable to others perhaps because in the depths of her heart, she struggles to believe that God has made her acceptable and beautiful. Her husband's desire to 'hoard' out of an overabundance of caution over their future, betrays his deepest unbelief in a God that promises to care for them. To be sure, they may not be conscious of these deep-seated unbeliefs. But that doesn't mean that they are not present!

And so, what we learned is that our outward behaviours always reveal both our core desires, and the contours of our unbelief towards God.

Take a quick look at the left side of the diagram below, and follow the 'reveal' arrow downwards:



Revisiting Adam's sin

Genesis 3:1-6

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die.⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

1 Let's read the text backwards. In vv.5-6, what exactly did the woman and the man long for when they ate the fruit of which they were told not to partake?

■ To be like God, knowing good and evil.

■ The idea of wanting to be like God can be a good thing (C.f., Ephesians 5:1 'be imitators of God')...or a disastrous thing, if that desire is to replace God.

■ It is likely referring to the latter, given that Genesis 1 repeatedly tells us that it is God's prerogative to define 'good'. In Genesis 3, the man and the woman now decide to usurp the divine prerogative. They want to know good and evil apart from God, rather than under God, by His word.

2 Have a think over what the Serpent is trying to do in v1. Which attribute about God is he wanting the woman to cast doubt on? (c.f., 2:16). Did the woman fall for it? (Hint: what did the woman 'add' to God's original command given in 2:17?)

■ The serpent's mention of 'any tree' in v1 insinuates that God is holding back and not being generous.

■ The woman fell for it by adding 'nor touch it'. That she exaggerated the prohibition, appears to show that she fell for the serpent's lies about God hook and sinker. She had a nagging disbelief concerning God's lack of generosity.

3 Read Genesis 2:9, 11-12, 16. Is it true that God was being ungenerous towards the man and woman?

■ No. He created all things for their delight ('pleasant to the sight and good for food' v9). He created a place of abundant goodness and riches (v12 'the gold of that land is good'). He withheld nothing except the fruit from one tree (v16, 'you may surely eat of every tree')

4 Looking at your responses to questions 1-3, what led the man to rebel against God and to dethrone God?

■ The man and the woman wanted to play God, because it began with entertaining lies about God's character.

If we look beneath the surface, things are never what they appear to be. When I decide to date a non-Christian against God's word, or pursue a promotion through biblically questionable means, my heart is saying, *"I need to fend for myself because God cannot be trusted to give me my highest good"*. When I turn to binge-watching netflix to numb myself after a hard day, my heart is saying, *"Entertainment brings greater comfort than the One who invites me to seek refuge in the shelter of His wings"*. When I get inconsolably bitter with God because I struggle to conceive, my heart is saying, *"You are cruel and unloving to withhold children"*, while forgetting that He did not withhold His only Son from me.

Reflection 1

Take some time to discuss the areas of your life when you are most prone to fail in. In those moments, what about God were you struggling to believe in exactly?

Try sharing your thoughts with the help of the following statements.

1. I struggle a lot with _____.
2. In my struggle, I imagine that God is not _____, or does not _____.

Key idea 2: The gospel corrects our unbeliefs about God

Why is it important to 'dive so deeply'?

Because the 'solution' that we think we need, turns on the way we perceive our problem. If our problem is merely behavioural, then all we need are practical measures. If you tend to procrastinate, read up on the habits of highly effective people. If you constantly fight with your spouse, pick up a book on communication or love languages. There is no lack of self-help books in the market, offering us life hacks or techniques to modify our behaviours. But if our issue is fundamentally an unbelief towards God, then our hearts need to be rid of that lie, and in place be given truths. **It is only when we recognise the lies that we believe about God at the heart level, that we can allow the gospel to correct our sinful views of God.**

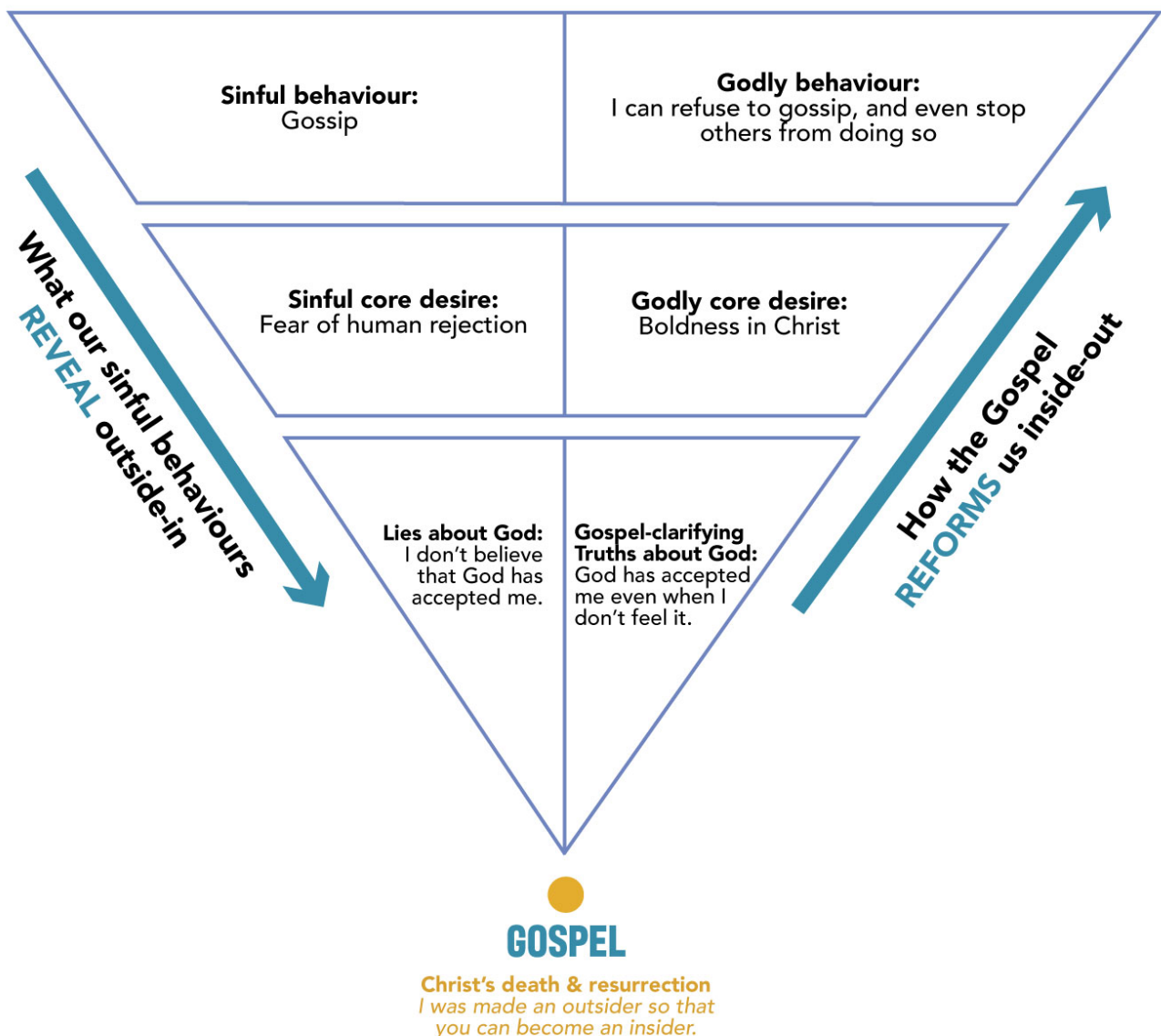
Suppose that you struggle with gossip (**sinful behaviour**). If you think that the issue with gossip is simply behavioural, you might use James 3-4 to deal with your gossip. You might tell yourself, "the tongue is a fire, I need to stop gossiping or I will get 'burned'". Or "I need to find ways to tame my tongue and bring it under control, like how bits control horses". And that's great! Except that it doesn't go deep enough.¹¹ What if the thing that drives my gossip is a desire to to be an 'insider' (**core desire**)? What if I say things that I typically wouldn't dream of saying because it feels good that I have 'inside knowledge' of someone else that others crave to know (Prov. 18:8)? With this 'insider knowledge', I can quickly become the centre of attention, or the life of the party? What if that desire to be an 'insider' really betrays an unbelief that God has already made me an 'insider' (**lies about God**)? Or stems from a lie that His inclusion of me amongst His own, pales in comparison to being included in a specific social circle that I desperately long to belong to?

¹¹ Even James 4:1-2 suggests that the reason for our fights stem from deeper desires! Scriptures often go deeper in their diagnoses than we do.

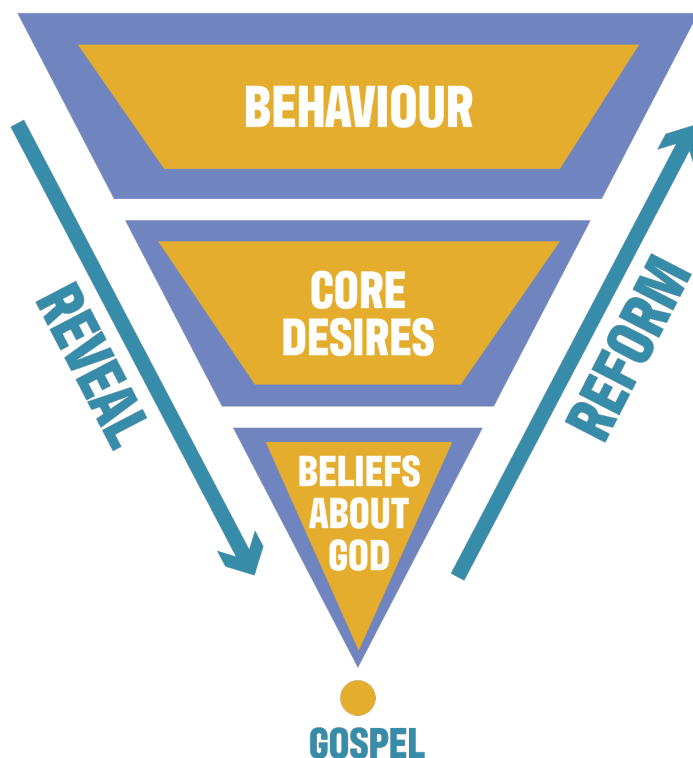
Recall again that God saves sinners *through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ*. **What does the Gospel say to us?** Christ's finished work of death and resurrection says this:

"I became an 'outsider' (Hebrews 13:12) so that you can become an 'insider'. I have welcomed and 'included' you when you have nothing to show for. Why then are you gossiping to 'earn your way' in?"

Look at the table below for a summary of what has been discussed. Move in an anti-clockwise direction starting in the left column with 'sinful behaviour' and finish in the right column with 'godly behaviour'.



Now take a look once again at the diagram, in particular the right-hand side:



Reflection 2

Pick up from what you discussed under Reflection 1.

1. Having looked beneath the surface to the possible lies which you hold to about God, use the right-hand column of the table above (and the Gospel Matrix (pg 33) if necessary) to allow the various aspects of Christ's work to correct the lies that you believe about God.
2. How might these gospel-clarifying truths change your core desires and behaviours?

So in sum, while our outer behaviours **reveal** our core desires and the lies we hold to about God, gospel-clarifying truths about God **reform** our core desires and our external behaviours. When we are transformed inside-out by the gospel, we begin to know real biblical change.

I guess that's it? We have explored the riches of Christ's work and its relevance to us. We have gone through the framework and had some practice identifying lies about God that we hold to, and being reminded of Gospel-clarifying truths. Off we go now with our 'sanctification project'! Is that right? Of course not! A framework doesn't change you any more than good theology does, without the help of the Spirit. Without the Spirit of God and Christ, we have no hope of change. God has saved us and is saving us through His Son. But God also saves by His Spirit.

Key idea 3: We need both the gospel and the Spirit to change

Without the Holy Spirit, we have no hope of becoming holy. Remember from session 1 that the gospel is the *good news that God saves sinners*. And by that we mean the *Triune God* and that *He saves us from beginning to end*. In Session 3, we learned that God saves us through His Son. In this final segment, we will learn that God saves us *through His Son and by His Spirit*. Jesus did not leave His people without help. He ascended to the right hand of the Father and poured out His Helper, the Holy Spirit, so that God would save and sanctify us *by the particular agency of His Spirit*.

Have you ever wondered why the Bible calls the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 8:9)?

First, there was nothing that Jesus did on earth that was without the help of the Holy Spirit. He was conceived by the Spirit (Luke 1:35); visibly empowered and baptised by the Spirit (Luke 3:22); He performed all miracles by the Spirit (Matthew 12:28; Acts 10:38); He even offered up His life to the Father by the Spirit (Hebrews 9:14). He was then raised from the dead by the Spirit (Romans 1:4). In His glorification, He was so functionally identified with the Spirit that sometimes the apostles use their names interchangeably! Paul calls Jesus the “life-giving Spirit”¹² In short, the Holy Spirit was a lifelong companion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Second, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ partly because He exists to spotlight Christ (John 16), the way a best man exists to make the bridegroom look good in his speech at weddings, (most of the time, at least!) He is the one who guided the apostles into writing Scripture and still guides His people into grasping the truths that Christ speaks (John 16:14). He is the one who sanctifies us and transforms us into the likeness of Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18). If the Spirit appears to be ‘low-key’ in the Bible, He is! That’s precisely because His job is to turn our attention away from Himself, and towards Jesus!

¹² C.f., 1 Corinthians 15:45. This doesn’t mean that the apostle Paul has confused the distinct persons of the Trinity. Rather he was trying to describe the unity between Jesus and His Spirit in their work or operations.

When we attempt to allow Christ's work to replace lies with life-changing truths about God, we **must** ask the Spirit for help. *That's because **only the Spirit** can convict us not just of the wrongness of our sins, but of its heinousness. **Only the Spirit** can make Christ's work not just logical, but lovely to our hearts.*

Consider how Paul describes our journey of faith in the book of Galatians

Galatians 2:20

*I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live **by faith in the Son of God**, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Galatians 5:5,16

*⁵ For **through the Spirit, by faith**, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. ¹⁶ But I say, **walk by the Spirit**, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

What insights do you gain from reading these verses side by side?

- Putting one and one together, to have 'faith in the Son' on a constant basis, is to 'walk by the Spirit, by faith'. There is no faith in Christ Jesus and His work, without walking by faith with the Spirit.
- That is why the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) comes from 'abiding in Christ' (John 15:1-11).

To end the way we began, let's return to the question: "How can you change?". Real change happens not just outside in, through a change in our behaviours or in our circumstances, but **inside-out**. That happens when the Spirit makes the work of Christ come alive, so that is not just relevant but ravishing, not just believable but beautiful. It is one thing to read reviews on how great a steak is. It is another to taste and savour for yourself. Furthermore, when the Spirit shows up, the gospel-clarifying truths about God do not just dispel lies. They make God real to our self-justifying and self-protecting fearful hearts. When God becomes real, our tendencies to fend for ourselves melt away. Our core desires and our external behaviours begin to slowly change over time. To borrow an analogy from one of my favourite preachers, "sin is now played in audio, while the reality of God is played in video format"!

Practically, what does 'faith in the Son' and 'walking by the Spirit' look like?

1. Constantly camp on the gospel. Do not settle for an aspect of it while neglecting other aspects.
2. Ask the Spirit to make our hearts alive to Christ's work and to the truths about God so that they grip and melt our hearts. And thank Him when that happens.
3. Be patient when change is slow or when the right affections do not come. Ask the Spirit to continue to produce God-honouring affections: both a horror for sin, and a marvel for God's loveliness.

Meditation

Meditate on the **sovereign but gentle control of the Spirit** in your life, and let these closing words be a word of hope and encouragement to you when you despair over your seeming lack of change:

"If God's work were resistible, that is what we would be saying: we would be maintaining some act of the soul in which we could choose to resist the work of the Spirit. But there is no private office for us, the CEO of our soul, from the door of which the Spirit of God can only plead for us to respond.

Our entire person with every faculty involved in decision making is open-plan to the pervasive work of the Spirit. There is no moment of our response to God that the Spirit does not penetrate and carry along. The Spirit is the one who works the initial miracle of regeneration and then irresistibly sustains every moment of our new life..."¹³

¹³ Garry Williams, "Love That is Always in Control" in *His Love Endures Forever*, 109.

Let's end by way of reminding us of the four important takeaways in this resource.

God saves sinners.

The gospel is good news that God saves sinners. The Triune God has saved and is saving you. God's work is always prior and primary to our work. Forgetting this is to turn Christianity on its head.

God saves sinners for Himself.

This implies that the goal and object of our faith and repentance is no less than God Himself. This also means that the only thing that keeps you from God, is your low view of His welcoming heart towards you.

God saves sinners for Himself, through His Son.

Jesus' finished and ongoing work is rich and relevant to us as sinners, sufferers, and saints. Do not devalue His work and impoverish what He did and is doing for you.

God saves sinners for Himself, through His Son, by His Spirit.

Let Christ's work correct those lies about God. But let Christ's Spirit make those truths about God real and gripping to you. Christ's work will not become real, nor God Himself beautiful and welcoming without the irresistible but gentle work of the Spirit of Christ and God. What then is our proper and rightful response but to say to each other: Come and enjoy God, through the Son, by the Spirit.

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Come and enjoy God, through the Son, by the Spirit.