

Small Group Preparation :: Week Two

Do this, and you will be ready for facilitating your community group this week!

The actual session and the article are on the pages following this preparation page.

As a leader, please consider the following:

1. How is your group doing in building community with each other right now? How can you lead in this area?
2. Does your life allow people to *belong* before they believe in Jesus? Who is in your *Sphere of Influence? Know that as you lead in being *On Mission*, that the students whom you work with will learn to follow you over time...

Environment:

Consider where you will meet regularly. Think about bringing a snack or preparing some sort of ice-breaker questions.

Idea: Google some ice-breaker questions.

Prayer

1. Pray for your group members by name, that the Gospel will be transforming their lives as God is transforming your life!
2. Listen to the Holy Spirit as He tells you how to lead this week.
3. Pray that God will raise up more people from your group to be *On Mission* and also learn to lead others.

More than a Bible study... this is a Revolution.

Here's the deal. Most people, including Christians, have a desperate need to understand and apply the Gospel to their lives in many ways. (You will see more clearly what we mean by this after you read the article for this week.) Because of this truth, we hope that the goal of your time in the Word each week becomes not for people to only "know more" about God or the Bible, but that your students would also learn to live as Christ. The Gospel should impact our daily lives a TON.

It is important that we understand that this is not a formula for successful Christian living. It is a journey of knowing Christ and learning to live the kind of life He desires for us. This material you are about to use can work well for both believers and people who have not begun a personal relationship with Jesus yet. We trust that as you spend a few minutes preparing for this, that God will begin to reveal your own need for the Gospel, and this should prepare you more than anything else to relate to your students well. Your openness and authenticity will bring freedom for your students to really grow and share.

We challenge you to inspire those in your group to begin the journey of being *Together On Mission* with you, which makes what you are doing so much more than just a traditional Bible study. You are in fact beginning a movement in the hearts and minds of those in your group.

Stuff for you to read and look over before you meet together.

Read the included article. You are going to read the article out loud as a group during the session.

Print out a copy of the article and the exercise for each person in your group.

Read the following verses that you will be using during the session:

Ephesians 3:7-8 (*Ask yourself what Paul means by being less than the least of all of God's people?*)

1 Corinthians 15:9 (*Paul's answer. His humility stems from his understanding of Grace.*)

1 Timothy 1:15-16 (*This is a recap of what Paul is trying to say in these verses.*)

Helpful Definition:

*Sphere of Influence – Friends in our lives who are not yet followers of Christ. We want to love them so much that we share not only the Gospel but our lives as well.

Helpful Quote: (*You can use this, or you can leave it out!*)

"All the love and acceptance which perfect obedience could have obtained of God, belong to you - because Christ was perfectly obedient on your behalf." ~ Charles Spurgeon

Thrive Small Group :: Week Two

Connect:

1. Take time to relationally connect with your group members.
2. Bring it in with the following questions, and give each person an opportunity to answer:
 - a. How would you explain what the Gospel is?
 - b. How have you experienced the Gospel?
3. Share your experience.

Pray:

Take a moment to pray and invite the Holy Spirit to teach everyone through the Word and to teach them the Gospel as they go through the lesson.

Scripture:

Briefly mention that you are going to take a look at the journey of another believer named Paul. Ask the group to describe Paul in their own words. Try to get a few different answers. Maybe no one will even be familiar with him!

Have different members of the group read the following Scriptures:

Ephesians 3:7-8

1 Corinthians 15:9

1 Timothy 1:15-16

"Most of us believe the Gospel is about us getting better, but as you can see from the life of Paul, the Gospel is about us decreasing and Christ increasing. Let's read the article to further understand what the Bible has to say about what the Gospel means."

Transition to article. We're going to read the article together, taking turns at paragraph breaks. The point of reading the article together is this:

- 1) To explain key concepts so everyone in your group has a common understanding and language
- 2) To provide a focal point of conversation.

Remember, we are trying to help you teach your group to talk through the cross chart. Those who do not understand it will be able to work it out in community, and those who "get it" will benefit from learning how to articulate it.

Ask follow-up questions as you go. You may be lead by the Holy Spirit or the discussion to ask other questions.

"Let's recap the main ideas from the article."

- 1) What two things are to "be growing" as we mature in faith?
- 2) What are the ways we "shrink" the cross? How do you see yourself doing this?

Pass out the supplement called, "Six Ways of Minimizing Sin." Introduce it by saying:

"Sometimes it's hard to identify the ways we minimize and justify our sin. This handout will help by suggesting 6 common ways we do this. Let's look at them together."

Then ask these questions: *"Which of these do you see yourself doing most often?"* (Make everyone share)

"Share a recent example of a time when you minimized your sin in one of these ways."

Transition to Exercise: *"We are talking about some significant concepts that we will continue that we will continue to dig deeper into the next two weeks. I want to end tonight by doing an exercise that will help us apply what we have been talking about to a specific area that we all deal with."*

Exercise: This next week, go ask someone close to you something that they see in you that needs to change?

The Gospel Grid

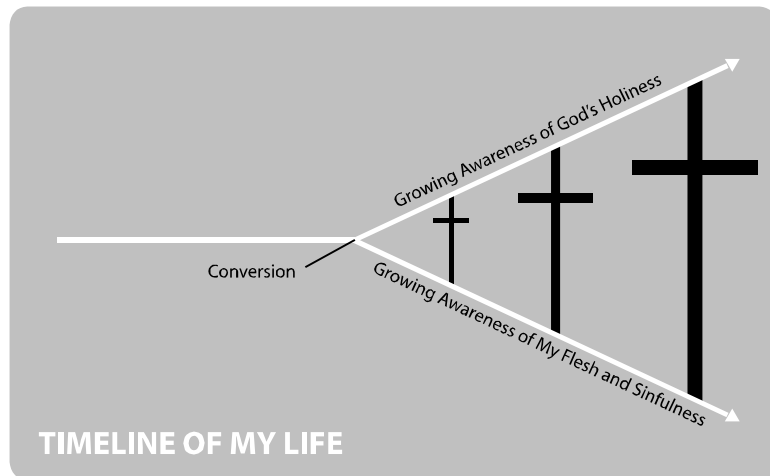
WEEK ONE ARTICLE

“The Gospel” is a phrase that Christians often use without fully understanding its significance. We speak the language of the gospel, but we rarely apply the gospel to every aspect of our lives. Yet this is exactly what God wants for us. The gospel is nothing less than “the power of God” (Romans 1:16). In Colossians 1:6, the Apostle Paul commends the Colossian church because the gospel has been “bearing fruit and increasing... in [them] since the day [they] heard it.” The Apostle Peter teaches that a lack of ongoing transformation in our lives comes from forgetting what God has done for us in the gospel (2 Peter 1:3-9). If we are to grow into maturity in Christ, we must deepen and enlarge our understanding of the gospel as God’s appointed means for personal and communal transformation.

Many Christians live with a truncated view of the gospel. We see the gospel as the “door,” the way in, the entrance point into God’s kingdom. But the gospel is so much more! It is not just the door, but the path we are to walk every day of the Christian life. It is not just the means of our salvation, but the means of our transformation. It is not simply deliverance from sin’s penalty, but release from sin’s power. The gospel is what makes us right with God (justification), and it is also what frees us to delight in God (sanctification).

The following model has been helpful to many people in thinking about the gospel and its implications. This diagram does not say everything that could be said about the gospel, but it does serve as a helpful visual illustration of how the gospel works.

The starting point of the Christian life (conversion) comes when I first become aware of the gap between God’s holiness and my sinfulness. When I am converted, I trust and hope in Jesus, who has done what I could never do: he has bridged the gap between my sinfulness and God’s holiness. He has taken God’s holy wrath toward my sin upon himself.



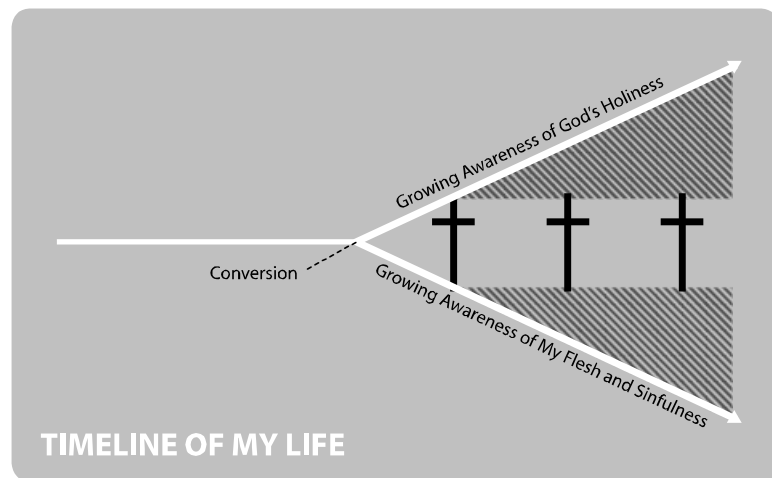
At the point of conversion, however, I have a very limited view of God’s holiness and of my sin. The more I grow in my Christian life, the more I grow in my awareness of God’s holiness and of my flesh and sinfulness. Through reading the Bible, experiencing the Holy Spirit’s conviction, and living in community with other people, the extent of God’s greatness and the extent of my sin become increasingly clear and vivid. It is not that God is becoming more holy, or that I am becoming more sinful. But my *awareness* of both is increasing. I am increasingly seeing God as he actually is (Isaiah 55:8-9) and myself as I actually am (Jeremiah 17:9-10).

GOSPEL CENTERED LIFE: WEEK 1

As my understanding of my sin and of God's holiness grows, something else also grows: my appreciation and love for Jesus. His mediation, his sacrifice, his righteousness, and his gracious work on my behalf become increasingly sweeter and more powerful to me. The cross looms larger and more central in my life as I rejoice in the Savior who died upon it.

Unfortunately, sanctification (growth in holiness) doesn't work quite as neatly as we'd like. Because of the indwelling sin which remains in my flesh, I consistently tend to minimize the gospel or "shrink the cross." This happens when I either a) minimize God's perfect holiness, thinking of him as something less than his Word declares him to be, or b) minimize the depth of my sin and brokenness, thinking of myself as someone better than I actually am. The cross becomes smaller and Christ's importance in my life is diminished.

We'll talk more about the specific ways we minimize the gospel in weeks to come. To counteract our sinful tendency to shrink the gospel, we must constantly nourish our minds on biblical truth. We need to know and see and savor the holy, righteous character of God. And we need to identify and admit and feel the depth of our brokenness and sinfulness. We don't need to do these things because "that's what Christians are supposed to do." Rather, we make this our aim because it is the life God wants for us – a life marked by transforming joy and hope and love.



Growing in the gospel means seeing more of God's holiness and more of my sin. And because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, we need not fear seeing God as he really is or admitting how broken we really are. Our hope is not in our own goodness, nor in the vain expectation that God will compromise his standards and "grade on a curve." Rather, we rest in Jesus as our perfect Redeemer – the one who is "our righteousness, holiness, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).

This material was designed for Coram Deo Church Community small groups. Much of the content has been adapted from Sonship (© World Harvest Mission, 2006). Questions? Contact Will Walker (will@cdomaha.com) or Bob Thune (bob@cdomaha.com).

Six Ways of Minimizing Sin

WEEK ONE SUPPLEMENT

Defending // I find it difficult to receive feedback about weaknesses or sin. When confronted, my tendency is to explain things away, talk about my successes, or to justify my decisions. As a result, I rarely have conversations about difficult things in my life.

Pretending // I strive to keep up appearances, maintain a respectable image. My behavior, to some degree, is driven by what I think others think of me. I also do not like to think reflectively about my life. As a result, not very many people know the real me (I may not even know the real me).

Hiding // I tend to conceal as much as I can about my life, especially the “bad stuff”. This is different than pretending in that pretending is about impressing. Hiding is more about shame. I don’t think people will accept the real me.

Blaming // I am quick to blame others for sin or circumstances. I have a difficult time “owning” my contributions to sin or conflict. There is an element of pride that assumes it’s not my fault AND/OR an element of fear of rejection if it is my fault.

Minimizing // I tend to downplay sin or circumstances in my life, as if they are “normal” or “not that bad”. As a result, things often don’t get the attention they deserve, and have a way of mounting up to the point of being overwhelming.

Exaggerating // I tend to think (and talk) more highly of myself than I ought to. I make things (good and bad) out to be much bigger than they are (usually to get attention). As a result, things often get more attention than they deserve, and have a way of making me stressed or anxious.