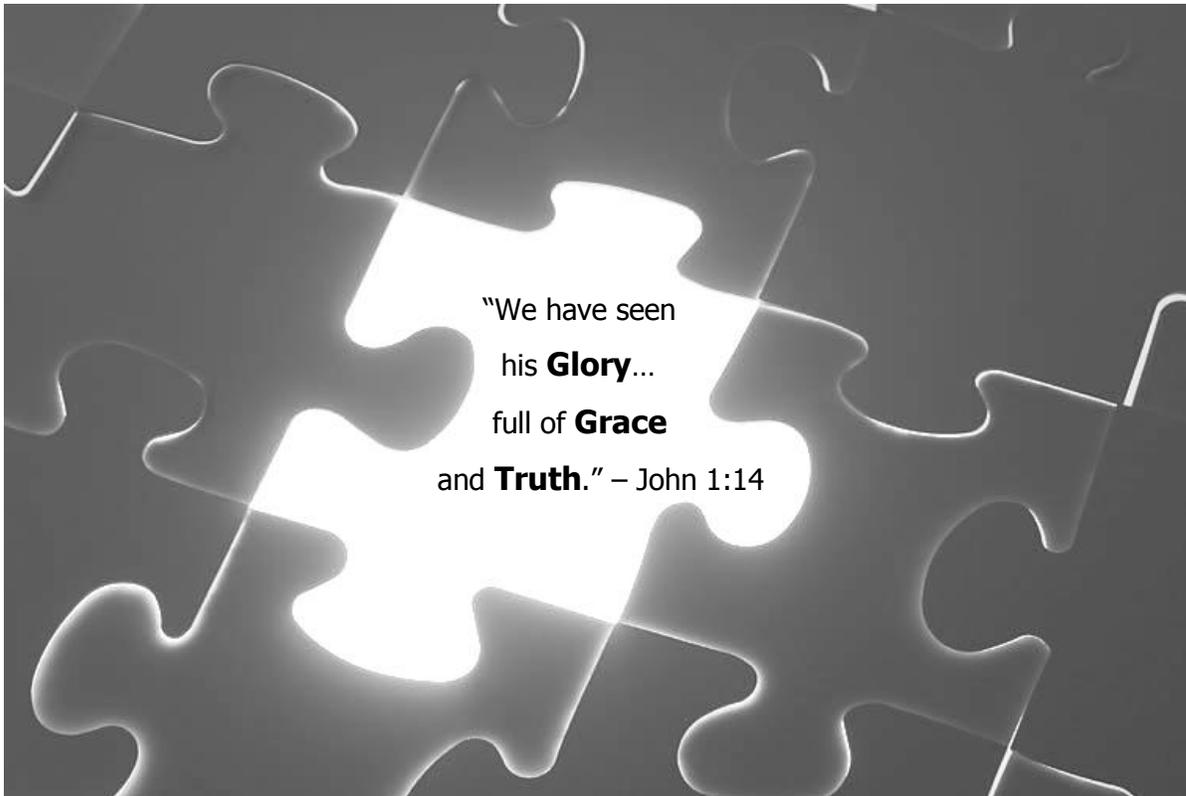


In Pursuit of Gospel Living

Living for Glory, Living by Grace, Living in Truth



Discipling others and being a disciple are dynamic life processes. Think of how Jesus interacted with his disciples. What was he trying to impart to them? His goal was literally to impart his life to them so that they would be vessels of his life, imparting his life in turn to the lost world.

In a similar way, the goal of Journey Group leaders is to impart their “life product” – a mature and equipped Christian life – via regular, intentional, life-on-life encounters with the people in their Journey Group. This material is designed to facilitate life-on-life discipleship by including these crucial elements:

- **Truth** - What God has revealed for His people to know, understand and obey.
- **Equipping** - Massaging God’s truth into life so that it becomes understandable and usable.
- **Accountability** - Asking the hard questions to encourage living fully for Christ.
- **Mission** - Engaging with the lost world in order to impart the gospel through word and deed.
- **Supplication** - Engaging in conversation with God to express dependence on Him.

Discipleship does not happen in a class room or in private study. It requires the interaction of small groups of people who share the common goal of becoming mature and equipped followers of Jesus Christ. The TEAMS approach listed above supports an interactive small group format, thus each unit is intentionally brief and provokes reflection, conversation, and prayer. The material itself should not be used as curricula, making it the focal point of a group Bible study. Rather, the material is best used as a tool for promoting honest discussion of spiritual goals, progress and struggles.

Unit 1



Glory – Why We Embrace Christ

Finding the Missing Piece that Satisfies

TRUTH

by memory – John 1:14 (ESV)

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

in Bible –

Welcome to *The Journey* and to your Journey Group!

Over the next few weeks, as you get to know others in your group and become acquainted with the way life-on-life missional discipleship works, you will be excited to see how it can help you make progress toward becoming a mature and equipped believer for the lost world. During this break-in period, *The Journey* will lay a solid foundation for your spiritual growth this year by focusing on the true heart and soul of Christianity – the gospel. In a six unit section called Gospel Living, you'll discover what the true gospel is, how it frees us, and how it calls us to embrace the pursuit of glory, grace and truth.

This week you will begin to explore the story of glory. To get started you'll want to read two very important passages in the New Testament that describe who Jesus is by using the term *glory*. Read these passages carefully, asking God to help you understand and apply what these chapters teach about Jesus and glory.

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John 1:1-18 – These verses form the prologue of the Gospel of John. John’s prologue is unique in the way he introduces Jesus to the reader. The Gospels of Matthew and Luke introduce Jesus by telling the story of His birth, while Mark tells the story of how His ministry began. John’s prologue on the other hand, uses terms like *word, light, flesh, glory, grace and truth* to describe who Jesus is before going on to tell the stories of what Jesus taught and did.

Read this passage and think about how John describes Jesus. What does he mean by *word, light, glory, etc*? Try to put John’s description of Jesus in your own words.

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Colossians 1:15-28 – In this letter to the church at Colossae, the Apostle Paul provides his own brief summary of who Jesus is. You will note that he has his own unique description, but there is a clear overlap with John 1 both in concepts and in the actual terms he uses.

Compare Paul’s description of Jesus with John’s. What do you notice that is unique? What is similar? How does Paul’s description of Jesus add to your understanding of who Jesus is?

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What do you think Paul means when he said “...*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” in verse 28?

to summarize -

If there is one thing that all people – religious or irreligious – have in common, it is that everyone is searching for that *one* thing that will satisfy them permanently. It's as if every person is a puzzle with one vitally important missing piece. The void people feel as a result of that missing piece triggers a life-long search for that elusive something. Sometimes we describe it as happiness, meaning, significance, hope, or fulfillment. But people seldom discover it though they look for it in a variety of life's experiences, pleasures, or relationships. In fact, some people despair of ever finding it, and choose instead not to go on living.

What is that missing piece? What can truly satisfy? What are people *really* searching for?

The answer is *glory*. People may or may not be familiar with the word, but glory is the missing piece that will bring their search to an end.

What is glory? Check a thesaurus for synonyms and you'll find "renown", "fame", "splendor", "magnificence", "grandeur", and "brilliance". In Churches, when the word glory is used, it is most often used in reference to the glory *of* God, meaning God's awesome majesty. Or sometimes Christians talk about giving glory *to* God, that is, to acknowledge his majesty in worship. But the Bible speaks of glory in a third way, and that is the subject we are addressing here; it is the glory *from* God, the glory that God satisfies people with by bestowing it upon them.

Where is that glory now?—lost. The story of glory is that God designed humanity to be made complete with the crowning touch of his glory. Psalm 8:5 says that God "...crowned him [e.g. humanity] with glory and honor." Yet, the first generation of people forfeited that glory by trying to establish their own glory, independent of God's gift. The apostle Paul writes that although the earliest people knew God, "...they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him...although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles." (Romans 1:21 – 23)

Thus, the all important crowning piece is missing, and we are all burdened with an instinctive search for that unknown quantity that will satisfy us. But because the search is unnatural (we were not designed to be without glory from God), people go astray into counterfeit, temporary glories whose satisfaction is short-lived at best, and destructive at worst. We live with an addiction to praise, power, and pleasure as we go from toy to toy, fix to fix, and relationship to relationship.

The sobering truth is that glory is lost and it is the *only* thing that will satisfy. Yet God has not left humanity without hope. Jesus called this hope the Gospel; it is the good news that glory can be rediscovered. And Paul tells us how we come to a satisfying end to our search; it is through "...Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:27)

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What does “Christ in you” mean? It means coming into a personal, life changing encounter with Jesus Christ, resulting in his indwelling presence. Jesus called it being “born again”. Now this phrase has been thrown around a lot and a lot of negative stereotypes are associated with it. But let’s try and clear up what Jesus meant by it. If you were asked to identify yourself by clicking one of these buttons, which would it be?



Many people will identify themselves as a Christian, just not a *born again* Christian. But that’s like saying someone is semi-married, or semi-pregnant. It just isn’t a real category at all. Jesus said in John 3:3, “... no one can see the kingdom of God [where glory from God is complete] unless he is born again.” So every Christian by Jesus’ definition, is a born again Christian. He didn’t intend for us to attach a social stigma to this term. He used it to indicate that through his indwelling presence, an initial deposit of glory is *birthed* again in all Christians, ending the search for the missing piece.

But this is not the end of the story of glory. God never intended the initial deposit to be sufficient by itself. He wants to keep pouring His glory into people’s lives, satisfying them day by day. How can we go on receiving glory from God? – By *giving* glory to the God *of* glory. Now, what gives glory to God is this: renouncing all counterfeit glories, and placing our hope of satisfaction in Him alone. Paul describes this very thing when he said that he accounted all his earthly gains (the counterfeit glories of personal status, power, human praise, and self-righteousness) to be losses compared to the “... surpassing greatness of knowing Christ.” (Philippians 3:7 – 9)

Unfortunately, we may make the mistake of thinking that we can gain glory from God, while we continue to embrace our counterfeits. This is what the Bible calls “idolatry”. The counterfeit glories may not be bad things in themselves, but they can become idols when we cling to them as necessary for life satisfaction because they rival the place of God in our lives.

The final chapter in the story of glory is, in a sense, still unwritten. Christians are looking forward to a full restoration of glory from God that had crowned humanity before it was lost. But in another sense this chapter is already certain, because Christ is the hope of glory and this promise will not fail. So because of deposits of glory, Christians can be satisfied with Christ in this life, but not with life in and of itself.

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EQUIPPING

As you read through the **Truth** section, perhaps there were some things you didn't agree with, or points that weren't clear to you. Perhaps you haven't experienced anything like the story of glory and it all seems rather idealistic to you. Take some time before your next group meeting to investigate further by exploring the Scripture passages given below. Jot down some notes for discussion with your group.

Compare Genesis 1:26 – 28 with Psalm 8:3 – 8 to understand what glory has to do with the way humanity was designed.

Compare Genesis 3 with Romans 1:21 – 32 to discover how the forfeiture of glory impacted humanity.

Reflect on your life and your own search for the missing piece. How did you become aware of a void within? How did your search affect your life? Have you discovered satisfaction in glory from God? Are you still searching? Are any counterfeit glories competing for God's place in your life? Use this section to journal your thoughts and be willing to share them with your group.

MISSION – INTRODUCTION

In John chapter 12 you will find the story of Jesus' triumphal arrival in Jerusalem just a few short days before He was crucified. On this day – the day Christians now celebrate as Palm Sunday – large, joyous crowds accompanied Him shouting, "*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" (v 13). Now, imagine that you were there, a part of the crowd jostling for a view of Jesus. Like everyone else you are fascinated by the stories you've heard. There is even a rumor in the crowd that a man had been raised from the dead. Many in the crowd are His devoted followers; others are just spectators enjoying the excitement of the moment. You're not sure how you feel about Him yet, but whatever He is, He certainly is a man of purpose and action. You'd like to meet Him to get your own sense of Him, though you don't see a way past the crowd. Then, by chance it seems, you catch the eye of one of Jesus' disciples, Philip. "Please," you ask, "my friends and I would like to meet Jesus." Philip, seeing that you aren't a Jew, first talks it over with Andrew, and then they both go to tell Jesus that some curious "Greeks" wish to meet Him. Seeing your opportunity, you follow behind and get just near enough to overhear Jesus telling Philip and Andrew, "*If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also.*" (v 26). As He speaks you observe a strange, but attractive blend of compassion and purpose in His face. And, in that moment you learn this: Jesus is on a mission driven by love. And those who serve Him must follow Him into that mission.

As you learned in the Orientation to *The Journey*, the purpose of life-on-life missional discipleship is to develop mature and equipped followers of Christ *for the lost world*. The goal of the Mission section is to support this purpose so that Truth, Equipping, Accountability and Supplication are transformed into a missional life, that is, a life that follows Jesus in His mission.

What is Jesus' mission? It is to make His gospel known to all people through word (sharing the gospel) and deed (demonstrating the gospel). This is the mission that every generation of His followers must take up as well. But, don't confuse becoming *missional* with becoming a foreign missionary. A missionary may devote his or her life to making the gospel known beyond a border or across an ocean. But, Christ calls all His followers to make the gospel known through word and deed wherever they live, work, or play as well as in their surrounding communities.

Throughout this year, *The Journey* will help you deepen your understanding of what it means to live a missional life, and why, as Christ's follower, you would want to take up His mission. Along the way you'll learn how to pray for people you know who aren't believers, and how to find meaningful opportunities to serve those around you. You'll also learn to tell the story of your own spiritual journey in a comfortable, engaging way, and you'll find out how easy it can be to discuss the common questions that most people want to know about faith in Jesus Christ.

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Unit 2



Glory – How We Embrace Christ

Embracing Christ in Personal Worship

TRUTH

by memory (option a) – Galatians 5:16 (ESV)

"So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature."

by memory (option b) – Joshua 1:8 (ESV)

"This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success."

in Bible –

Last week you began *The Journey* by looking at the story of glory and saw that Jesus Christ is our one true hope of realizing lasting glory in our lives. This week you will learn how to embrace Christ through daily personal worship. Developing this spiritual discipline is crucial for becoming a mature and equipped follower of Christ for the lost world. It is not just a religious thing to do. It is a spiritual channel through which God's glory, grace and truth continually flow into your life. The **21 Day Personal Worship Journal** is provided to help you establish a consistent habit of daily personal worship. Please print it off and bring it to your Journey Group meetings.

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Matthew 6 & 7 – These two chapters contain part of Jesus’ most famous sermon—The Sermon on the Mount. This sermon, which begins in chapter 5, gives us some of Jesus’ best-known and best-loved teaching including the Beatitudes, the Lord’s Prayer, the Golden Rule, and even His teaching about judging others. Matthew 6 and 7 has a lot that is worth your attention, but try to focus on Jesus’ teaching about communication with God. Look for what He says about prayer, fasting, worry, trust and making requests.

Matthew 6 relates Jesus’ teaching on how to pray and how *not* to pray. Try to summarize Jesus’ teaching on prayer in Matthew 6.

How to pray

How not to pray

In Matthew 7:13-28, Jesus told several stories to illustrate the need to obey his teachings, not just marvel at them. In your own words, summarize what Jesus taught about the benefits of obeying, and the consequences of not obeying His teachings.

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to summarize -

In the last unit we introduced the idea that the ultimate answer to anyone's search for satisfaction, significance, and happiness is the *glory that comes from God*. We reviewed how God designed us to be satisfied by nothing less than the glory He bestows and how humanity forfeited that glory by pursuing counterfeits that can't truly satisfy. Yet, God is merciful and offers the promise of renewed glory when we embrace His son Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:27). The question for this week is how to actually embrace Christ (and receive satisfaction) in our daily lives. Once you first embrace Christ as your soul satisfying source of glory, how is that commitment expressed in a practical, tangible way?

The answer is that the primary and regular means God has given to receive this satisfaction is through personal and congregational worship. The goal of this unit is to help you understand how to begin a lifelong habit of embracing Christ in daily personal worship.

If you are married, you probably understand that your marriage ceremony was not an end in itself; it was the beginning. Beyond the ceremony where you formally vowed your exclusive devotion to your spouse, your marriage consists in the daily, enriching experience of that devotion. In the same way, personal worship is the daily, enriching expression of your devotion to Christ. It is not the ceremonial beginning. It is the daily path.

Personal worship is the daily time you spend devoting your attention exclusively to the glory of Christ and receiving the satisfaction He gives. (This is why it is sometimes called "Devotions"). The two key activities that comprise personal worship are prayer and Bible study. These are critical for your spiritual growth, and without them your spiritual journey will be seriously hampered.

If the act of praying or reading the Bible is unfamiliar to you, don't feel anxious. This material will present a simple and engaging plan for getting started that you can follow as long as you feel that it helps you to engage with God. Along the path of your spiritual journey you will discover other methods that will help you, too. Just remember, personal worship isn't a *to-do* you check off of your day planner, and it doesn't earn you a special place in God's heart. It's really an opportunity, an invitation, for you to enjoy the glory of God in Christ and to receive satisfying glory from Him.

That being said, you do have to be intentional about making time for personal worship, or you will never form the habit. Take a look at your schedule, and decide on a time and place where you can carve out few minutes of *consistent, private* time for personal worship. Many people find it beneficial to begin their day with personal worship, and feel like it strengthens them prior to the stress of the day. So, try to find early morning time if you can. You will probably need a minimum of 20 minutes.

Next it's important to have a plan for reading the Bible. If reading the Bible regularly is a new experience for you, ask your group leader to recommend a plan for you. It would probably be best for

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you to begin reading in the New Testament, learning about the life and teachings of Jesus. It's also important for you to understand *how* to read the Bible for your maximum spiritual benefit. To that end, the **PRAISE** acrostic below will help you understand the basics of how to read, interpret, and apply the Bible to your life.

P ray first – Our nature is to be blind to spiritual things and we need God to make us spiritually sensitive to what He wants to teach us. The Psalms contain a prayer that would serve us well, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." (Psalm 119:18)

R ead the text – If you read the Bible randomly—a verse here and a verse there—it's almost certain that you will never really understand the major teachings of Scripture. Most of the Bible is meant to be read in paragraphs and sections. Chapter divisions are convenient section markers.

A sk Questions – Ask interpretive questions to help you get at the facts – What is the issue? What does that word mean? What is the flow of thought? Why did he say that? But be sure to ask application questions, too. What should I do? Learn? Believe? Repent of? How should I respond?

I nterpret in context – Be careful that you don't interpret a word, phrase, or verse in a way that isn't consistent with its context. Check your conclusions by asking yourself if the author would have intended his *original* audience to understand him the way you're interpreting him.

S ummarize – A most useful exercise is to capture the main point(s) and personal application(s) of a section (whether a paragraph or chapter) in a journal or notebook. This forces you to think through the meaning of a passage and your response, rather than skimming through without much benefit.

E ngage with God – Now, talk to God in response to what you have read. Ask him to apply His Word to your heart; to give you understanding, faith, and obedience. If you are new to prayer, you can pray aloud or silently, but don't worry about fancy words. God is interested in the sincere expression of your devotion to Christ. If you don't know what to pray, it may help you to focus on these 5 important elements (or targets) of prayer which Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13)

God's Honor – acknowledging His worth

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."

First, focus on God himself. Praise Him for His greatness; that He rules over all things. Consider His fatherly love for you. Meditate on who He is and what He is like.

God's Kingdom – acknowledging His priority

"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Next, focus on God's rule over you and the world. Think about what you just read and invite Him to accomplish His plans in every situation of your life, and in the world around you. You can also pray specifically for family, friends, and the people on your prayer list.

God's Provision – acknowledging His trustworthiness

"Give us this day our daily bread,"

Now focus on God's ability and willingness to meet all your needs. Ask God for His blessing on your work and home, and affirm your contentment with what He provides, great or small.

God's Forgiveness –acknowledging your repentance

"...and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

Then consider how you have fallen short of God's glory and confess your sins specifically. Ask that He would forgive you for Christ's sake, and rejoice that He has promised you forgiveness and glory in Christ Jesus. Pray that Christ's righteousness would be more evident in your life.

God's Power – acknowledging your dependence

"And deliver us from the evil one so that we may not be led into temptation."

Last, focus on God's ability and promise to deliver you from all the temptations of the Evil One. Thank Him for His promise to help you in every need. Pour out your troubles to Him, and bring your requests before him. Make a list of people and situations to pray for. As you keep track of answered prayers, your faith in God's power and love for you will increase.

Let's review. The goal of this unit is to help you begin a lifelong habit of embracing Christ in daily personal worship. Personal worship is the time you spend devoting your attention exclusively to the glory of Christ and the satisfaction He gives. To form this habit you should:

- Plan for a consistent time and private place.
- Follow a Bible reading plan using **PRAISE** as a guide.
- Focus on the **5 Targets of Prayer** described above.

EQUIPPING

How would you describe your attitude toward the Bible? Is it a familiar friend, or is the Bible an unfamiliar mystery to you? Do you think of it as trustworthy? Is it relevant, or irrelevant? Is it a foundation of your life, or a Sunday only religious handbook? Take a few minutes to write your thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and questions about the Bible.

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Learning to pray is as important to your spiritual health as learning to eat and drink is to your physical health. But perhaps you don't see it that way. Perhaps you wonder if prayer is important, effective, or if it "works". In the space below, write a few lines about what your attitude has been toward prayer.

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If a friend were to ask you, "Why should I bother to pray? Isn't God in control of everything?" How would you answer? Try to give 3 or more reasons why prayer is a worthwhile use of your time.

MISSION – LIVING

Last week you were reminded that the purpose of life-on-life missional discipleship is to develop mature and equipped followers of Christ for the lost world. The goal of the Mission section of *The Journey* is to support this purpose so that Truth, Equipping, Accountability and Supplication are transformed into a missional life.

So then, what is a missional life?

To answer that question, you must start with Jesus. What was His mission? Let's let Scripture speak for itself:

"And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction." (Matthew 9:35)

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve..." (Mark 10:45)

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10)

From these three verses how would you describe the mission of Jesus?

In its most basic sense, *a missional life is one that is motivated by the gospel to take up Jesus' mission*. Imagine that a great baseball manager approached you with a remarkable gift to offer. He has the power to instantly give you all the raw skills and athleticism to become a professional baseball player. What's more, he can also instantly give you a love for the game. What do you think you would do with those gifts? Would you become a lifelong baseball fan? Sure, but you would also begin learning the intricacies of the game. You would develop your skills and try out for a team. You couldn't be content to just observe from the stands. In the same way, as a believer begins to grasp the life changing power and love that s/he has received in the gospel, this motivates and empowers them to become a participant in the gospel mission, an agent of the gospel's love and power, not just a recipient.

Ephesians 2:8-10 shows that the gospel has power to not only save the recipient of grace, but also to transform the recipient into a "player". Go ahead and read Ephesians 2:8-10 and use the space below

SUPPLICATION

This week begin thinking about the possibility of engaging with God and embracing Christ through daily personal worship. Imagine the opportunity! What would it mean for your life? What impacts would it have? How would you want others in your group to support you in establishing a habit of personal worship?

Before your Journey Group meeting, write two or three prayer requests that you will share with your group. Extra space is provided so you can write down prayer requests from others in your group. Remember to pray for other group members during the week.

My prayer request regarding the truth for this week:

My prayer request regarding a situation in my life:

Prayer request regarding living a missional life:

Prayer requests from others in my group:

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Unit 3

Grace – Why We Embrace the Cross



Learning to Rightly Relate to God

TRUTH

by memory – 2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

in Bible –

In your study of the true gospel over the last two weeks, you learned that you were created in such a way that lasting satisfaction can only be found in the glory that God bestows in Christ. You also learned that the way to embrace glory is by experiencing Christ in daily, personal worship.

This week you will begin to consider a second important term as it relates to the true gospel – *grace* – and the cross by which grace is made available to us. As you read the **in Bible** study passages concentrate on discovering how God's blessings are secured for you, and how to rightly relate to God. Pay attention to key concepts like grace and law, sin and righteousness, freedom and slavery, faith and love.

If you like, you can use these **in Bible** scriptures in your personal worship. Be sure to follow the elements of **PRAISE** and the **5 Targets of Prayer** while you are establishing the habit of personal worship. Don't skimp on the "**S**" (Summarize Applications). It is especially important that you learn to apply the Scriptures to your own life and become a doer of God's word.

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Galatians 5:1-8 – In this passage from the Apostle Paul’s letter to Galatia, Paul is rebuking the Galatians for turning from grace in an attempt to relate rightly to God by another means.

How were the Galatians trying to relate to God? What are the consequences of their actions?

Ephesians 2: 1-13 – In these verses Paul is describing every person’s natural standing before God apart from Christ. He then shows what God did that allows Christians to have a right standing before God in Christ.

What was your spiritual standing before God apart from Christ? (verses 1-3, 11-12)

What did God do to give you a right standing before Him? (verses 4-10, 13)

Colossians 2:13-23 – In this passage Paul gives more details about what God did for Christians in the cross of Christ, and draws a contrast between what God has done for us and what we do for God.

Compare and contrast what God has done for us and what we do for Him. What constitutes a basis for rightly relating to God?

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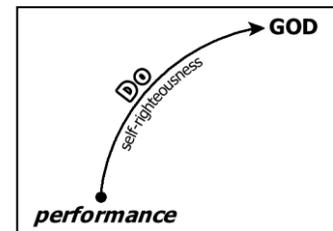
to summarize -

Last week you explored how to begin a lifelong habit of experiencing glory from God by devoting your attention to His glory in daily personal worship. Hopefully you are now several days into the formation of this invaluable spiritual habit. If you haven't started yet, it's not too late. Your group leader can help you and you can follow these bullet points as a simple guide.

- Plan for a consistent time and private place.
- Follow a Bible reading plan using PRAISE as a guide.
Pray First – **R**ead the text – **A**sk Questions – **I**nterpret in Context – **S**ummarize applications – **E**ngage with God
- Focus on the 5 Targets of prayer.
God's Honor – God's Kingdom – God's Provision – God's Forgiveness – God's Power
- Commit to 21 days of personal worship to establish the habit.

The subject for this week is relating to God. Everyone who believes in God wants to rightly relate to Him, that is, we want to be assured of His goodness to us now, and especially when we die. Now, if someone was to ask you if you know how to rightly relate to God, what would you say? Not sure? It turns out there are basically two ways to relate to God and every religion follows one or the other.

The first is characterized by *what I do for God*, and is best captured by the word *performance*. Performance is all about doing things (or not doing things) in order to gain God's approval. Interestingly, the commitment and determination required for performance does create a kind of goodness that we could call *self-righteousness*.



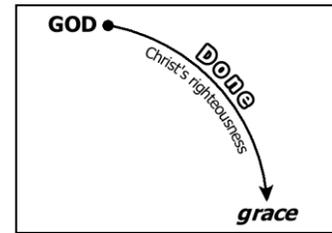
Self-righteousness sounds bad, doesn't it? We say we don't like self-righteous people and we don't want to be perceived as self-righteous ourselves. But, what we really mean is that we don't like haughty, arrogant self-righteousness; like the Pharisee in a story Jesus told who thanked God that he was so much better morally than other men. We don't like that. But, we actually like regular, non-arrogant self-righteous people. They make good friends and neighbors. We like our kids to play with theirs. Why? – Because they act the *right* way. We aren't concerned with why they act that way.

But Jesus on the other hand, was repulsed by all forms of self-righteousness because he was concerned with the motives that drive actions. Imagine the man who has decided to break his promise to keep a special date with his wife for purely self-centered reasons. Before he breaks the news to her, he tries to buy her off with gifts or romantic gestures. At first she may be flattered and respond warmly. But when she discovers the true motive for his seemingly loving actions she is repulsed, and rightly so. In the same way, God is repulsed when we give to charity, attend church, or volunteer in

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the community in order to get Him to like us. He loves these things, but only when they spring from a motive of love for Him. Performance is giving God the things He loves, yet with improper motives.

The second way to relate to God is characterized by *what God has done for me*, and is best captured by the word *grace*. Grace refers to what God has done for us through Christ's work on the cross. On the cross God exchanged our sinfulness with Christ's righteousness. This *great swap*, as it is called, is what the Apostle Paul spoke about in this week's memory verse, "*For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin [that is, a sin offering] who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*" (2 Corinthians 5:21). This righteousness is known as *declared* righteousness because a person is declared righteous by God the moment the swap takes place.



Another term for declared righteousness is *justification*, which you can remember as *just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned*. Justification doesn't imply that we become sinless. Rather, it means that God pardons the penalty due for all our sins. He forgives us. God not only likes us, He loves us unconditionally! True, we can still offend Him, and then we must confess our sin to experience joy. But nothing could alter his faithful love for us because our right standing with Him is based solely on what Christ has accomplished for us on the cross. Paul describes how the great swap resulted in forgiveness this way, "*And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.*" (Colossians 2:13-14)

Now consider this question. Does the great swap leave you free to live however you please, while being assured of eternal security? The answer is both no and yes.

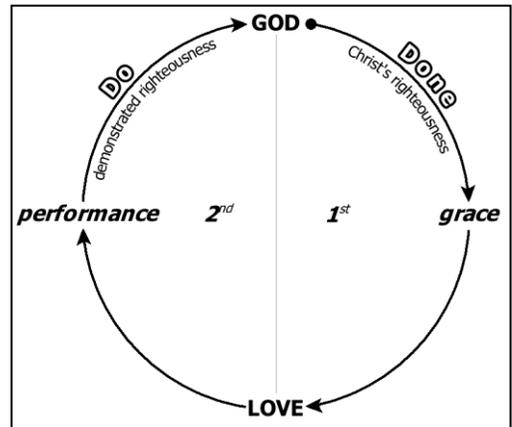
The answer is *no* if you mean that a prayer of acceptance causes the swap to happen. A prayer might express your desire for the swap. But just like a wedding ceremony, the prayer itself doesn't create love, it must be the expression of a love that already exists. Where does this love come from? It is a newborn love, created in the heart by the grace of Christ's infused righteousness. This newborn love is typically called *faith*; it is trust in God alone for righteousness. So, the swap depends completely on what He has done (*grace*), not what you could do (*performance*).

On the other hand, the answer is also *yes* because true believers are both free from sin's debt, and also free to live according to what pleases them. They now have the *moral ability*, because of grace, to perform for God out of a motive of love. This changes performance from an expression of self-righteousness to *demonstrated righteousness* as the diagram on the next page shows.

Incidentally, the diagram also explains a perceived contradiction in Scripture between Paul and James. Paul taught that we are justified by faith apart from performance, whereas James emphasized that

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faith without performance is useless. How can we reconcile this? Well, what Paul was talking about was the *declared righteousness* that is based on Christ's work on the cross alone (the **1st** side of the diagram), whereas James is concerned with *demonstrated righteousness* (the side labeled **2nd**). He wants to show that if we say we have declared righteousness, but our lives don't demonstrate righteousness, then we have never really received Christ's righteousness at all.



So where does your spiritual pilgrimage begin? Do or Done? If you say *Do*, you may indeed live an attractive, moral and religious life—but it will not earn you God's favor and love. For Paul and James, rightly relating to God is based solely on what God has done. That's why they embraced the cross, expecting to see a righteousness born of love demonstrated in the lives of all who embrace the cross. Are you struggling with this? Most people do. Operating from the performance mode comes naturally to us. It just *feels* like we're supposed to do something in order to get rightly related to God. Even if you are truly a born again Christian you may still struggle with a performance orientation in your relationship with God. Do you ever look at your past moral failures and wonder if they affect God's love for you? Do you ever find yourself motivated to go to Church, to give money, or to spend time in personal worship because you worry that God's favor won't be quite the same if you don't? Well, there are 3 simple beliefs about grace that can help you break out of the performance mentality.

The first is ***we lost it all*** – meaning all humanity has lost *all* virtue in God's eyes; not just perfection, but also all goodness. If this is true, then no amount of effort spent performing for God could ever result in your being good enough to earn His love. (And deep down we all know we should be a lot better.) In fact, the Bible teaches that, "all our [performance based] righteousness is as filthy rags" in God's sight. Of course the performance mentality doesn't believe that. It would have you believe *we lost a lot*, but not all. Performance tells you that there is something good enough you *can* and *must* do to earn a right standing with God. So, to break the trap of performance-based living, you must first embrace the belief that you lost it all.

The second is ***He did it all*** – meaning Christ did everything necessary to completely pardon law breakers like you and me. That means there is nothing left to be done. The grace of the great swap completely satisfies God and puts us in right relationship with Him. Performance thinking will tell you that *He did a lot*, but that we must also contribute faith and repentance out of our own goodness to make salvation a reality. But the true Gospel has no room for the meritorious work of self supplying

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any aspect of our salvation. Someone once said the only thing a person can contribute to their own salvation is the sin that makes it necessary.

The last is ***we get it all***– meaning that God credits the full righteousness of Christ to His followers. Therefore, since we are forever forgiven of all past, present, and future sins, we can be fully assured of God’s unconditional love. He also gives us everything necessary to live rightly related to Him and to be fully satisfied in life and eternity. Performance will tell you that *we get a lot*, but not everything that is needed. You can see that as long our beliefs leave us with anything lacking, this becomes the breeding ground for performance. Only when we believe we get it all and embrace the grace that comes via the cross can we expect to rest in Him and to accept that what He did for us was enough.

EQUIPPING

Take a few minutes to think about grace vs. performance. How do you see yourself relating to God? In what ways are you performance oriented, and in what ways are you living by grace?

In Galatians 5:1-8, Paul argues that the Galatian Christians should not seek circumcision as a means of relating to God because Christ has set them free from the slavery of performance. Think about your own life. In what ways has Christ freed you from the need to perform for God?

Review Ephesians 2:1-13 and write down the words and phrases Paul uses to describe how we lost it all, He did it all, and we get it all.

We lost it all - _____

He did it all - _____

We get it all - _____

Colossians 2:13-23 gives another explanation of how what God has done (grace) frees us from the need to do for God (performance). How do you try to perform for God to make Him love or accept you? How can you find freedom in accepting what God has done for you instead?

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MISSION – LIVING

Last week you began to think about the mission of Jesus and what it means to follow Him in His mission. His mission is to make His gospel known to all people through word and deed, and He charges those who follow Him to take up His mission in their generation. The gospel itself is the motivating power that enables us to participate in Christ's mission. So in its most basic sense, a missional life is one that is motivated by the gospel to take up Jesus' mission.

Now let's look a bit deeper at what it means to live a missional life. Matthew 9:35 tells us how Jesus made His gospel known: *"And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction."* Jesus shared the gospel message in His preaching and demonstrated the gospel with His actions. This approach has been summarized by the phrase *word and deed*. Like Jesus, His followers will make His gospel known through word and deed, as well. This implies that those who desire to live missionally will share a few common characteristics:

- Rather than isolating themselves, they will seek to engage relationally with the people they meet where they live, work and play.
- They will seek equipping opportunities to enhance their natural abilities, gifts, skills, experiences, resources, knowledge and compassion with which they make the gospel known by word and deed.
- They will look for needs around them where they can make the gospel known through word and deed.

Your mission assignment this week is to think about the needs that surround you where you live, work and play, as well as in your larger community. Who lives around you? What kinds of people groups do you encounter there? What needs do they have?

Make a list of at least 5 different needs of individuals or groups where you live, work or play.

Use this space to journal about 1 or 2 of these needs that particularly concern you. Why do these needs capture your attention?

How do you think Jesus would respond to these needs? Would He make His gospel known in these situations with word, deed or both? Try to describe exactly what you think Jesus would do.

What gifts, abilities, experiences or resources could you apply to these needs? Are there ways you would like to be better equipped to meet these needs?

Use the space below to write a prayer about the needs that concern you. Or, perhaps you find your eyes unseeing, or your heart unmoved by needs around you. If so, what would you ask of your heavenly Father?

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SUPPLICATION

This week think about your need to be freed from the performance mentality. How would you want your Journey Group to support you in prayer? Is there some way you could minister to someone in or outside of your group who struggles with the need to perform? Are you gracious toward others, or do you expect friends, your spouse, or children to perform well in order to earn your acceptance?

Before your Journey Group meeting, write two or three prayer requests that you will share with your group. Extra space is provided so you can write down prayer requests from others in your group.

Remember to pray for other group members during the week.

My prayer request regarding the truth for this week:

My prayer request regarding a situation in my life:

Prayer request regarding living a missional life:

Prayer requests from others in my group:

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Unit 4

Grace – How We Embrace the Cross



Embracing the Cross through Spirit-filled Living

TRUTH

by memory – Galatians 5:24-25 (ESV)

²⁴*And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

²⁵*If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.”*

in Bible –

Last week you saw that embracing the cross is the key to having a right relationship with God. It is by embracing the cross that you trust the grace of what God has done for you, instead of what you can do for Him.

This week you will focus on how the grace that comes by the cross can empower you to live a Spirit-filled life. You will be comparing Jesus’ teaching with complimentary passages from Paul’s letters to learn about Spirit-filled living. The passages from John’s Gospel will introduce you to the concept of the Christian’s union with Christ through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. The passages from Paul will explain the results of the Holy Spirit’s presence and work in our lives. There is a lot to absorb here, so study these texts carefully using **PRAISE**. Don’t be concerned if you don’t understand everything at first reading. Gather what you can, then move on to the Summary section below for a fuller understanding and practical application.

Pray First – Read the text – Ask Questions – Interpret in Context – Summarize applications – Engage with God

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John 15:1-11 – In this passage, Jesus uses the analogy of a vine and its branches to illustrate the spiritual union between Himself and believer.

What results can be expected when a person is united with Christ?

John 14:15-23 – Here Jesus begins to teach that even though He is going to return to the Father, His disciples would continue to experience union with Him by the agency of the Holy Spirit.

What does this passage teach about the person of the Holy Spirit and His role in believer's lives?

Romans 6:1-13 – In this important passage, Paul explains more fully what our union with Christ means – freedom from slavery to our sinful nature so that we can live a new life of righteousness.

What does it mean to be united with Christ in His death and in His life?

Galatians 5:13-25 – In this letter, Paul explains that the Spirit's work leads to freedom – not license to sin, but freedom from the power of sin – therefore he urges the Galatians to "walk" in the Spirit.

Describe what you think it means to *walk by the Spirit*.

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to summarize -

Last week you explored why Christians embrace the cross as the only means by which we can rightly relate to God and break out of the performance trap. This week we will survey how we can embrace the grace of the cross in our daily lives. This important discussion will help you understand how you can experience God's presence and power, making Christ more real to you and making you more like Christ. In simple terms, everyone wants to be aware of God in their lives. We want to *feel* His nearness and love. We want to *know* that He is at work in us blessing our lives, and at work through us blessing others. Spirit-filled living is the practical answer for this desire.

But, before we go further, let's make sure we don't attach any inaccurate perceptions to this phrase. Phrases like being *filled with the Spirit*, or *baptized with the Spirit* have gathered some unbiblical associations in the contemporary Christian world. So, if a discussion of the Holy Spirit brings to your mind negative connotations of extreme emotionalism or bizarre, out of control behavior, let's establish now that this is *not* what Spirit-filling living is about. In the Bible the original words for *spirit* (*ruach* in the Hebrew Old Testament; *pneuma* in the Greek New Testament) were word pictures that brought to mind the breath of God forcefully breathed or blown as in a strong, blowing wind. These words were expressions of God's power in motion actively creating, controlling, revealing, transforming, or empowering. So, the concept of being filled with God's Spirit should bring to your mind the idea of *living under the control of God's Spirit*, rather than being out of control.

So then, let's examine what Spirit-filled living is by dividing this discussion into two parts. First, you will learn about the *spiritual reality of your union with Christ*. Then, you will learn about your *spiritual responsibility to be filled with the Spirit*. These two ideas are captured in this week's memory verse: "*If we live [are made alive] by the Spirit, let us also walk by [surrender to the control of] the Spirit.*"

Last week you learned that having a right relationship with God is based on what God has done for you through the cross of Christ. This is what we call *grace*. Another benefit of grace is your spiritual union with Christ. Jesus promised this union in John 14:16-18. You may recall that Jesus said He would not abandon believers to leave them as orphans in the world. Instead, He would send the Holy Spirit in His place to make a living union with Him a reality for every believer. Thus, your spiritual union with Christ began when He took up residence in you by the indwelling of His Spirit at the beginning of your spiritual journey. In other words, God's Spirit is the *agent* of your union with Christ; the Spirit makes the union happen.

Your union with Christ has some unique benefits. One is that God regards Christ's death on the cross as your death, thus satisfying the death penalty for sin. But in addition to this, your union with Christ in his death has actually freed you from the *power* that sin once held over you. In your study of Romans and Galatians you read that we died to sin so that we are no longer slaves to our old sin

natures. (cf. Romans 6:1-6; Galatians 5:13ff) Instead, believers are made alive with Christ by His Spirit so that we are free to live righteous lives that please God.

You might wonder about the freedom that union with Christ brings. Were you freed from an old master (sin) so that you can be your own master? No. From a biblical perspective, there is no such thing as self-mastery. You are either a slave to sin, or you have been freed from sin to be God's slave (cf. Romans 6:22ff). However, slavery to God is actually a delightful freedom because you now have a master who is devoted to your good and loves you unconditionally.

But, does freedom from sin mean that Christians will never sin? It's admittedly obvious that Christians can and do sin, sometimes even committing grievous sins. Actually, freedom from sin doesn't mean that you *can't* or *won't* sin, it means that you don't *have* to sin. This wasn't the case before you became a follower of Christ, but Paul argues in Romans 6:7 that because you have died to the old sin nature, you are no longer enslaved to its mastery. It is still powerful, and it is still present within you. But you also have within you a new nature; one that is alive through union with Christ and free to struggle against sin by the power of His Spirit. (cf. Romans 6:8-11)

Imagine you are a sailor on an old sailing ship, and you and your shipmates are subject to a wicked and cruel captain. The crew hates the old captain but can't escape his ruthless control. Then unexpectedly, a new captain comes aboard who strips the old captain of his rank and power but allows him to roam the ship freely until the next port of call. The new captain is strong, but gentle and treats you and the crew with kindness. One day the old captain finds you relaxing on the deck and literally screams expletives and orders at you, which you promptly obey. Soon after, the new captain finds you and asks what you are doing. You explain what happened. Then the new captain reminds you – you don't have to obey the old captain anymore. He no longer has any authority over you.

In the same way, you may struggle with temptation. You may often yield to sin. But your old sin nature can't order you around. You aren't enslaved to it. You are free to struggle against it empowered by the Spirit of Christ who dwells in you.

This leads us now to consider your *spiritual responsibility to be filled with the Spirit*. As mentioned earlier, spirit-filled living means living under the control of the Holy Spirit. The person who is spirit-filled understands the purpose of the Spirit's presence and lives in harmony with that purpose.

So, what is the purpose of the spirit-filled life? In one sense that has already been answered – it is to unite us spiritually with Christ. But in a practical sense, the Spirit's purpose is to draw us ever more into the faith, hope, love, obedience, and devotion which constitute our communion with Christ.

Now with this purpose in mind, how can we live under the Spirit's control? We must start with recognition of the power of the cross in our lives. In Romans 6, Paul teaches that we should *know*, or

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understand (v 3) that we are dead to sin and alive to God because of our union with the crucified and resurrected Christ. In addition, Paul wants us to *consider*, or *chew on* (v 11) this fact so that we embrace it whole heartedly, and then *present*, or *surrender* (v 13) our lives to God to be tools of His righteousness. Paul expressed the same idea of daily surrender to God using different language when he taught the Galatian Christians to *walk by [i.e. surrender to the control of] the Spirit*, to avoid gratifying their sinful desires (cf. Galatians 5:16). Jesus taught a similar thought in John 15 with his illustration of a vine and branches. Just as a branch draws physical life from a central vine to bear fruit, so Christians must *abide* in Christ, drawing their spiritual life from Him to demonstrate the fruits of loving obedience to Him. From this you should learn that being filled with the Spirit is not a one-time experience, but rather a constant surrendering to the Holy Spirit's control. In fact, when Paul says to the Ephesian Church "*be filled with the Spirit*" (Ephesians 5:18), he means that he wants them to *keep on being filled with the Spirit*.

What then, does it mean for you to live a spirit-filled life – a life of surrender to God? First, it means that you must regularly confess your inability to do anything good and your total dependence on His work in your life. Jesus said, "*...apart from me you can do nothing.*" (John 15:5) If you have an "I can do it" attitude of moral determination, you will fail. But, if you humbly admit your dependence on Him, His Spirit will fill you with the power you need to be who He wants you to be, and do what He wants you to do. Further, you must trust Christ completely with your life and offer it daily in service to Him. You must pray continually that God through His Spirit would use your heart, mind, hands, feet, eyes, and tongue as His instruments.

Certainly, sinful failures will come. When they do, confess your sin to Him, knowing that He forgives you without reservation because of the cross. Then thank God for his forgiveness and for your union with Christ, and ask Him to fill you again with his Spirit. Some have called this exercise *spiritual breathing*; exhaling the impure by confessing your sin, and inhaling the pure by inviting the Spirit's control of your life again.

Finally, remember that a spirit-filled life is totally dependent on the reality of your union with Christ, which is a gift of grace, won by the cross and put into effect by His Spirit. This is where the power for spirit-filled living comes from. It is like a spiritual battery pack that you switch on by inviting the control of the Holy Spirit. If you are a follower of Christ, you have been made alive in Him by the Spirit. So, embrace the work of the cross in you by surrendering your life to the Spirit's control.

EQUIPPING

After reading the Scripture texts and Truth section for this week, you may have some lingering questions. Write a question or two that you would like to discuss with your Journey Group.

Something that wasn't specifically explored in the Truth section is the benefits of living a spirit-filled life. Spend a few moments thinking about the beneficial impacts that living under the Spirit's control could have in your own life situations or struggles. You can look at Romans 6:20-22 if you need some thoughts to get you started.

Describe how you view the controlling forces of your life. Do you see yourself as in control? – Someone else? – God's Spirit? – A sinful habit? What would need to change to better align your life with the Truth you studied this week?

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MISSION – LIVING

Depending on where you are in your spiritual journey, you may be wondering why you would want to participate in Christ's mission. Perhaps you're shy. Maybe you just don't like people. Maybe in your mind, the thought of talking about "religion" ranks right up there with "root canal" and "tax audit". Or, you may wonder, "How can I think about other's needs, when I'm the one who needs help"?

There are several reasons to take up Jesus' mission, not the least of which are to follow Christ's command, to bring glory to God, or to receive a glorious reward in heaven. But, if you're not in a place in your journey where this seems very helpful, perhaps the Apostle Paul can lend you a hand.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. In this passage, Paul is describing his motivation for taking up the mission of Jesus. What motivates Paul to make the gospel known?

The love of Christ is a compelling reason to make the gospel known through word and deed. Let's note that Paul's response to Christ's love is to become an agent of His love. We could say that the gospel itself, once received, motivated Paul to participate in its spread. Now, note this: *The gospel of Christ's love gave Paul the reason and the power to be its agent.* Paul was not a servant of the gospel for mere obligation of duty, or guilt without heart. No, Paul's service to Christ was the obedience of love he offered in response to the great love of God he had first experienced in Christ. Paul loved Christ, and was empowered to become a conduit of Christ's love for the world, because, as the Apostle John writes, Christ first loved him (1 John 4:19). Paul lived a missional life because the gospel of Christ's love created a missional heart in Him.

Do you have a missional heart? Write your thoughts and feelings about having a missional heart.

Now turn your thoughts into prayer. What would you say to Jesus about having a missional heart?

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Unit 5



Truth – Why We Embrace the Word

Following God's Path to Full Glory

TRUTH

by memory – John 8:31 - 32 (ESV)

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

in Bible –

So far in *The Journey* you have learned how and why we embrace the glory and grace that comes to us in the gospel. We embrace glory by experiencing Christ in daily personal worship. We embrace grace by living in the Spirit-filled freedom from sin that was bought by the cross.

This week you will turn your attention to a third word as it relates to the gospel – *truth*. You will be comparing three selections from the Gospel of John that preserve some of Jesus' best-known teaching on this subject. You should take note of Jesus' teaching about the concepts of *truth, freedom, discipleship, and glory*. How did Jesus use these terms? How are they related in His teaching?

You may now be only a few weeks into developing the spiritual habit of personal worship. If you find yourself faltering, don't quit. The spiritual benefits are worth the struggle. For your convenience, you can use the **in Bible** passages in your personal worship. Remember to follow the **PRAISE** outline and the **5 Targets of Prayer**, asking God to open your spiritual eyes and make you a doer of His word.

- **Pray First – Read the text – Ask Questions – Interpret in Context – Summarize applications – Engage with God**

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John 8:25-47 – In this passage Jesus is addressing a crowd of Jews and Pharisees (Jewish religious leaders) who challenged His claims to be from God, and had a mixed response to his teaching.

Why do you think it was so difficult for the Jews in this passage to believe in Jesus?

In this passage, Jesus is challenging what the Jews believed to be true, and at the same time calling them to stake their lives and obedience upon trust that what He says is true. This is no small challenge for anyone. What mental obstacles challenge your ability to trust Jesus with your life?

John 14:1-11 – Here in one of His last conversations with His disciples before the crucifixion, Jesus responds to an important question from Thomas.

Think about the many implications of the tremendous statement Jesus makes in verse 6. Try to think of as many implications of verse 6 as you can by completing this statement. *If Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, then...*

then...

then...

then...

then...

John 17:1-19 – Just before entering the garden of Gethsemane where He was betrayed and arrested, Jesus prayed this prayer for His disciples.

Look at verses 17-19. What did Jesus mean when He prayed for those who believe in Him, "*Sanctify them in the truth...?*"

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to summarize -

In the preceding weeks you learned that God designed you in such a way that you will never be fully satisfied by anything but the glory that comes as a gift from God. You also learned that God has given Jesus Christ as your only hope of glory, and that you can experience glory by embracing Christ in daily personal worship. In unit 3 you learned that God loves and accepts you solely because of what He has done for you through the cross of Christ, so you don't need to perform to earn his love. And last week, you learned how to embrace the power of the cross by surrendering your life to the control of the Spirit of Christ that lives in all believers.

This week you will begin to explore God's path to full glory – the path of *truth*. This is a critical study for you, because you will have to think about whether there is such a thing as absolute truth. If you say *yes*, then you will next have to think about whether Jesus is the personification of truth and whether you will follow His teaching.

The passage you read in John 8 tells us that as Jesus was speaking to a crowd many believed Him. His response may have surprised you, because He immediately challenged them with these words, "*If you abide in [continue to follow] my word, you are truly my disciples.*" Jesus knew that it's one thing to say *I believe*, and another thing to actually follow. Mere agreement wasn't enough to make them or us His disciples. Jesus is looking for followers; people who will stake their lives on His words as absolutely true, not half-hearted believers who only have a preference for His teaching under ideal circumstances. It is only those who continue to follow His word, who will discover that Jesus *is* the truth that sets them free.

Ok, wait. Maybe you think this description of a disciple sounds a little tough to swallow; maybe even fanatical. If so, you are a living illustration of the tension that exists between two worldviews that are competing for your allegiance: *Christian Theism* and *Naturalism*. Let's talk about each.

Naturalism is the predominant worldview in our society despite the fact that most people say they believe in God. It is founded on the belief that natural causes alone are responsible for the world we live in, and therefore, the universe itself is the ultimate reality. According to naturalistic philosophy, truth, morality and the meaning of life are created by each individual. Thus, nothing is absolute; everything is relative, except perhaps science. So, since everyone's beliefs, philosophies, and morals are equally valid, the only way everyone can get along is to be tolerant of each other's views. Tolerance is perhaps the ultimate value of our culture. Ironically, there is little, if any, cultural tolerance for commitment to absolutes.

You can see how this worldview is clearly opposed by the teaching of Jesus. His teaching was based on what we call Christian Theism. Christian Theism is committed to belief in one transcendent God who created and now rules over everything. He transcends the universe, yet He is not far off,

irrelevant to His creation. Instead, He has entered into the history and experience of humanity by revealing Himself and His will, especially through the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. So, God is the ultimate reality, not his creation. Truth (*what is true or false*), morality (*what is good or evil*), and the meaning of life (*what is significant or not*) are absolutes revealed by the Creator.

The dilemma that people who say they believe in God face is that a bold commitment to absolute truth is completely out of step with our modern culture. To resolve this tension, many people try to compartmentalize life so that their *religious* belief in God doesn't conflict with their generally naturalistic view of life. But to do this they have to abandon the notion that there is *absolute moral truth* that applies to all people from all cultures at every point in history. This puts them squarely at odds with Jesus. He calls for followers who are not only committed to the concept of absolute truth, but are also committed to Him as the living reality of truth (see John 1:14; 8:31-32 and John 14:6).

Well then, if you abandon truth as Jesus describes it, what possible substitute could replace it? The answer is *human reason* – the number one competitor of truth. Reason could be described as the human mind's decision making capacity without the guidance of God. Now, let's not get confused, truth and reason are not contradictory per se. But the trouble is that sinful human minds, making decisions on limited information, are not as *reasonable* as they think they are. Certainly human reason cannot even be compared to the all-knowing mind of God, "*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*" (Isaiah 55:9). Our human reason becomes dangerous when it determines that God's thoughts (eternal truth) aren't as important as our own pursuit of temporary happiness, situational convenience, or momentary pleasure. Reason will offer you the promise of true freedom, but God says it will only lead to bondage, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.*" (Proverbs 14:12) Contrast this to what Jesus promised in this week's memory verse, "*If you abide in my word...you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*".

As an example, suppose you and your spouse no longer feel in love with each other. What does reason say about this? Reason says it's pointless to stay married to someone you don't love. Isn't it more important for you both to be happy? But God's truth teaches that love is first of all a choice and that the marriage vow should not be broken just because feelings of love are gone. It goes without saying that God designed marriage for blessing and the happiness of families, and no one would ever say that divorce is a blessing. But human reason can convince us that anything is *right and reasonable* when we want it badly enough, though it will ultimately lead to trouble and pain. You could say that human reason is to revealed truth what human performance is to divine grace – a human-centered path to counterfeit glories that rivals God's plan and is doomed to result in bondage.

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Why do we embrace God's Word? Primarily, because He is worthy of our trust, but also because Jesus promised that following His teachings (the path of truth) would set us free. What did He mean? Free to do whatever you think is good, right, or reasonable at the moment? Obviously not. True freedom is having the power to act in harmony with the truth. The freedom Jesus promises is freedom from our fallen selves, and the power to live according to His word. It is freedom to know God as our Father, and freedom to receive soul-satisfying glory from Him in ever increasing measure. So let truth's promise of freedom and glory serve as a call not only to profess that you believe in Jesus, but to continue to follow Him as a disciple of His Word.

Here's a concluding note. Perhaps as you studied what Jesus said about truth this week, you have a nagging question. *What about evolution? Doesn't evolution prove that Naturalism is valid?*

It is true that the theory of evolution appears to present a significant challenge to Christian Theism and its belief in absolute truth as revealed in God's Word. Generations of people in our society have an implicit faith in this theory as the explanation of the origins of life, even though they want to retain a belief in God or some sort of higher power. But the two systems are contradictory. Naturalism (based on Evolution) and Christian Theism cannot both be true.

If evolution is a subject you are interested in investigating further, you will find that the supposed scientific consensus on the subject isn't real. There are several thoughtful books available that carefully examine the science behind evolution and present a biblically informed response. Your group leader can suggest some titles that might interest you.

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EQUIPPING

What do you think about absolute truth? Is there such a thing? Why or why not?

This week, you have been studying the way Jesus used the words *truth*, *glory*, *freedom*, and *discipleship*. Perhaps you have begun to see these words in a new light. Use the space here to write your thoughts about the way Jesus used these terms.

If you were to “abide in” or continue following Jesus’ teaching, how would your life be different?

Naturalism and Christian Theism are diametrically opposed worldviews, but they both wield tremendous influence in our culture. Try to think about specific ways that Naturalism may have influenced your perspective on life. How would Jesus’ teaching redirect your life in those areas?

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MISSION – LIVING

In the last few weeks you have been introduced to the concept of missional living, that is, living as a participant in Jesus’ mission. You have given thought to what a missional life is, and to why you would want to live missionally. This week, you will look a bit deeper into how you can live a missional life.

First, know that a missional life begins with a Spirit-filled life. You learned last week that Spirit-filled living is living under the control of the Holy Spirit. It is like *spiritual breathing* – exhaling the impure by confessing your sin, and inhaling the pure by inviting the Spirit’s control of your life. But don’t imagine that the Holy Spirit would only lead you to abstain from sin. He also leads you into righteous pursuits, such as participating in Jesus’ mission.

So, if the root of a missional life is living under the Spirit’s control, how is the fruit of missional living expressed? – through both word and deed. In other words, those who take up Christ’s mission will make the gospel known by sharing and demonstrating the gospel to those in need. All Christians are called to this mission, though some may be more active in the telling and others in the doing.

Read Acts 9:31-43 and describe how Peter and Tabitha lived under the Holy Spirit’s control and were engaged in making the gospel known through word and deed.

Look back at the list of needs you identified in unit 3 of this series. Describe how *you* could make the gospel known in one of those situations through both word and deed.

Use this space to write a prayer asking God to fill you with His Spirit and to begin leading you into a missional life. If you feel you can’t pray this yet, ask God who is patient to begin changing your heart.

SUPPLICATION

This week think and pray about what it would mean for you to be a true disciple of Christ, to devote yourself to following Him as the way, truth, and life. Pray that you would know Christ as the truth and that He would free you more and more from the effects of sin. Ask yourself how you would want your Journey Group to support you in prayer.

Before your Journey Group meeting, write two or three prayer requests that you will share with your group. Extra space is provided so you can write down prayer requests from others in your group. Remember to pray for other group members during the week.

My prayer request regarding the truth for this week:

My prayer request regarding a situation in my life:

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Unit 6

Truth – How We Embrace the Word



Living as Ambassadors to a Broken World

TRUTH

by memory – 2 Corinthians 5:20 (ESV)

"Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God."

in Bible –

Last week you learned that God's Word must be embraced as absolute truth, the one path to full glory. You also learned that God's Son must be embraced as the embodiment of that truth.

In this final week of Gospel Living you will explore how God intends that we live in response to truth. In the **in Bible** passages you will discover the commission that all Christians share, and catch a glimpse of how Paul lived and taught in response to that commission.

Don't neglect to develop the habit of daily personal worship. Remember to follow the **PRAISE** approach that you learned in unit two and the **5 Targets of Prayer**.

- **Pray First – Read the text – Ask Questions – Interpret in Context – Summarize applications – Engage with God**

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Matthew 28:16-20 – This passage at the end of Matthew’s Gospel contains what has been called Jesus’ *Great Commission* to all His disciples.

Who is the commission in verse 19 directed to – the disciples? all Christians? Explain your answer.

Imagine Jesus speaking to you personally to give you this commission. Describe what your thoughts and feelings would be. What would you feel you needed to do in obedience to the commission?

Romans 1:1-17 – In this letter to the Christian community living in Rome, the Apostle Paul introduces himself and the gospel message, and then explains why he wants to visit Rome.

In verse 16 Paul refers to his calling to preach the gospel as an "*obligation*" (ESV). What do you think motivates him to view his calling this way? Should all Christians share Paul’s attitude in this regard?

2 Corinthians 5:14-21 – In his second letter to the Christians who lived in Corinth, Paul explains the essence of the gospel message and his motive for making that message the priority of his life.

How does Paul summarize the gospel in verses 16-21? What key words and phrases does he use?

What motivates Paul to be so devoted to spreading the gospel? Several reasons can be found in this passage. Summarize them in your own words.

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to summarize -

Congratulations! This is the sixth and final unit of the Gospel Living portion of *The Journey*. Over the past few weeks, you were introduced to the biblical concepts of *glory, grace and truth*. You learned how to begin the invaluable spiritual discipline of daily personal worship. You also learned what it means to live by grace under the control of God's Spirit instead of living in the performance trap. As you continue to apply the principles and disciplines you learned, they will form the foundation of healthy growth into a mature and equipped follower of Christ. As in any endeavor in life, the fundamentals are critical to success. So, if you have unanswered questions about the earlier units don't ignore them. It's best to pursue a fuller understanding now by reviewing or talking with your Discipleship leader.

Last week your worldview may have been challenged by the teaching that God's Word is the revelation of absolute truth and that Jesus is the incarnation of God's truth. This week you will begin to contemplate the call to embrace God's truth by living as an ambassador to a broken world.

The Apostle John relates an amazing story in chapter 12 of the book of Revelation. It is a symbolic vision of a monumental, cosmic event; a great war in heaven. God's angels fought in the heavenly realm against Satan, who is pictured as a huge, red Dragon. The angels of God prevailed so that Satan and his minions were thrown down to earth, and power was taken from him so that he could no longer deceive the nations. When was this war? The details in Revelation 12 make it clear that this was not a vision of Satan's pre-creation rebellion and fall from glory. Rather, this is a vision of another war; a war that took place during human history. What we see here is Satan's raging attempt to destroy Jesus and so prevent the Kingdom of God from coming on earth. But his failure is declared across the heavens, *"Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down."* (Revelation 12:10)

The wonder of this vision is that in it God reveals His perspective on the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. History records a suffering man and later, an empty tomb. But behind the history is a decisive war in heaven and the defeat of a cruel enemy who has been stripped of his power to blind and deceive the nations. At the same time, through the coming of the Holy Spirit, God has bestowed power on His Church to bring the light of the Gospel to the nations (see Acts 1:8). Think of the enormity of it! The heavens embattled as the Son of God lays down His life and takes it up again! And because of this, the Church receives divine power and divine opportunity to be His witnesses. It should take our breath away, and it should profoundly reshape our perspective on life.

Paul can be our example in this regard. He had probably never heard of John's vision, yet he understood that the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus called for a drastic change in the way he looked at the world. He expressed his new perspective this way, *"from now on we regard no one from*

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a worldly point of view." (2 Corinthians 5:16, NIV) What Paul means is that he simply can't continue to pursue life and relationships in the way that he once had, as if the cross was a trifling matter with no impact on the world. For Paul, the crucifixion and resurrection was a truth so compelling that it required a thorough reorientation of his life purpose in response to it. In fact, he sees this truth as a call to all people, not only to believe in Christ, but to be His ambassadors to the broken world so that God's Kingdom may continue to come through His people.

Do you share that perspective? – Perhaps not. Many of us must admit that we find ourselves far too engaged in what could be called *so what life pursuits*. Imagine a millionaire telling you excitedly that he made \$38 in a garage sale. You would say, "So what? You're worth millions!" Yet, perhaps you, like that millionaire, are pursuing the trivial to the neglect of the monumental.

The two most common *so what life pursuits* that capture people's attention are *enjoying* one's world, and *impressing* one's world. To these pursuits, God says, "So what!" His design is that people respond to His victory by living in such a way that they *impact* their world. Which of these describes your approach to life? Which seems most consistent with what you have learned about glory, grace, and truth?

As you studied 2 Corinthians 5 this week you read that Paul said "*Christ's love compels us.*" (v. 14, NIV) What Paul means is that as far as his life goals are concerned, Christ's love for him has become *the* controlling principle. In other words, Paul lives in response to Christ's love. Secondly, he says that Christ's love is an imperative to all believers that they "*should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again.*" (v. 15) So, in these two verses we must think about the controlling principle of our lives, and then about where our allegiance lies. Is it to live for the kingdom of self, or for the Kingdom of our God and of His Christ?

Now, just pause for a moment on this question. If you are a Christian, you would at least know what you *want* the answer to be. You want to live for His Kingdom. Why? – Because you determined out of your own goodness that this was the right thing to do? Not at all. The reverse is true. It was Christ's love for you, poured into your heart that has made a change in *who you are*. You are a "*new creation*" (v. 17) with a new moral ability that you didn't previously have. And as a new creation, God calls upon your new moral ability to change *what you do* so that your life impacts the world. For you, like Paul, life won't be what it's meant to be, until you have embraced being an "*ambassador*" for Christ (v. 20).

Instead of *so what life pursuits* set your heart on the Kingdom of God growing in and through you. Abandon counterfeit glories and worship Christ as your hope of glory. Put to rest your efforts to earn God's love, and rest in the grace of what He has done for you through the cross. Recognize your union with Christ, and surrender to the control of His Spirit. Follow Christ as God's only eternal truth, and make it your life pursuit to be a messenger of that truth.

MISSION – LIVING

So far in this series, you have investigated the what, why, and how of missional living:

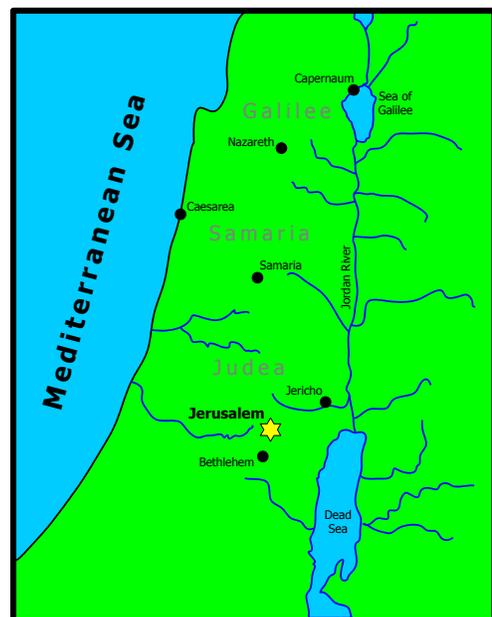
- **What is it?** – sharing in Jesus' mission to make the gospel known to all people
- **Why participate in it?** – the love of God displayed in the gospel compels and empowers
- **How is it manifest?** – by sharing in word and demonstrating by deeds

Let's now think about *where* a missional life will take you. As Christians seek to live missionally, their engagement with the world can be defined by the categories of need and distance. Needs may be spiritual, psychological or physical (e.g. food, shelter, protection, provision, etc.). Distance may be measured culturally or geographically. For example, in the story of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), Jesus describes a man from Samaria who met a Jewish man's immediate physical needs (food, shelter and medicine) even though their respective cultures were antagonistic to one another (Jews and Samaritans generally did not associate even though they lived close together). In the story of the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10), a Galilean fisherman (Peter) met the spiritual needs of a Roman army officer from Caesarea who was culturally distant from Peter's life experience. In Acts 16:25-34, a Jewish Christian from the eastern Mediterranean (Paul) met the spiritual needs of his jailer, a Greek from Philippi who was both culturally and geographically distant from Paul's life experience. So, living a missional life under the control of the Holy Spirit can take you across spiritual, economic, cultural, and geographic boundaries.

Listen to Jesus' instructions to the Apostles in Acts 1:8 noting the locations He refers to on this map, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."* To the Apostles, Jerusalem was their home base. Judea was the larger, but familiar, region surrounding them. Samaria was a region that was geographically near, but culturally distant from them. And of course, the end of the earth was both culturally and geographically distant from them. From this verse, it is clear that Jesus intended His followers to make the gospel known across every kind of barrier.

So, a good first step toward missional living is to take

Palestine During the Life of Jesus



SUPPLICATION

This week think and pray about what it would mean for you to be an ambassador for Christ. Think of how God could use you so that His Kingdom is expanded through you. Pray that you would understand the importance of becoming His ambassador. Ask yourself how you would want your Journey Group to support you in prayer.

Before your Journey Group meeting, write two or three prayer requests that you will share with your group. Extra space is provided so you can write down prayer requests from others in your group. Remember to pray for other group members during the week.

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