

Growing in Your Awe & Application of the Gospel

Part 1: Sing the Gospel

I plan, over the next few weeks, to write 10 posts that practically help us grow in our understanding and application of the Gospel. These 10 points are directly from the sermon "Preaching the Gospel to Yourself."

We are fortunate to have a rich history and solid present that is marked by deeply Gospel-Centered music. Singing the Gospel, or if you prefer listening to the Gospel sung, has a way of informing and enflaming our hearts with gratitude for God's grace. For some reason, God has chosen to use song and singing as a way for us to learn and express praise. I want to give you a sampling of 10 songs (5 Historical & 5 Contemporary) that are drenched with the Gospel:

Historical

1. Before the Throne of God Above ([Lyrics](#) & [Youtube](#))
2. There is a Fountain Filled with Blood ([Lyrics](#) & [Youtube](#))
3. Oh the Deep Deep Love of Jesus ([Lyrics](#) & [Youtube](#))
4. Not What My Hands Have Done ([Lyrics](#) & [Youtube](#))
5. Alas and Did My Savior Bleed ([Lyrics](#) & [Youtube](#))

Contemporary

1. All I Have is Christ ([Lyrics](#) & [Youtube](#))
2. East to West ([Lyrics](#) & [Youtube](#))
3. I Will Glory in My Redeemer ([Lyrics](#) & [Youtube](#))
4. How Deep the Father's Love for Us ([Lyrics](#) & [Youtube](#))
5. In Christ Alone ([Lyrics](#) & [Youtube](#))

Feel free to comment on this post and add your own favorites that are laden with Gospel truth.

Part 2: Read the Gospels

There is no better place to "look to Jesus" (Hebrews 12:2), "Abide in Jesus" (John 15:4), and "Remember Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:8) than in the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each Gospel adds its own brilliant paint strokes to the canvas of Christ's glory. So I recommend that you regularly, whatever your situation and station in life allows, behold Jesus in the Gospels and watch as you become more like Him (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Listen to the counsel that the famous Pastor J.C. Ryle gives to us, as believers, in regards to reading the Gospels:

“It would be well if professing Christians in modern days studied the four Gospels more than they do. No doubt all Scripture is profitable. It is not wise to exalt one part of the Bible at the expense of another. But I think it would be good for some who are very familiar with the Epistles, if they knew a little more about Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

“Now, why do I say this? I say it because I want professing Christians to know more about Christ. It is well to be acquainted with all the doctrines and principles of Christianity. It is better to be acquainted with Christ Himself. It is well to be familiar with faith and grace and justification and sanctification. They are all matters 'pertaining to the King.' But it is far better to be familiar with Jesus Himself, to see the King's own face, and to behold His beauty. This is one secret of eminent holiness. He that would be conformed to Christ's image, and become a Christ-like man, must be constantly studying Christ Himself.

“Now the Gospels were written to make us acquainted with Christ. The Holy Spirit has told us the story of His life and death, His sayings and His doings, four times over. Four different inspired hands have drawn the picture of the Saviour. His ways, His manners, His feelings, His wisdom, His grace, His patience, His love, His power are graciously unfolded to us by four different witnesses. Ought not the patient to be familiar with the Physician? Ought not the bride to be familiar with the Bridegroom? Ought not the sinner to be familiar with Saviour? Beyond doubt it ought to be so. The Gospels were written to make men familiar with Christ, and therefore I wish men to study the Gospels....Surely we cannot know this Christ too well! Surely there is not a word, nor a deed, nor a day, nor a step, nor a thought in the record of His life, which ought not to be precious to us. We should labour to be familiar with every line that is written about Jesus.”

J.C. Ryle, himself, wrote a devotional commentary on all 4 of the Gospels. Thanks to modern technology, every single one of them is online for FREE! I have found him to be a good companion as I read through the Gospel's and would commend him to you. Here are links to his devotional commentaries:

- [Gospel of Matthew](#)
- [Gospel of Mark](#)
- [Gospel of Luke](#)
- [Gospel of John](#)

Part 3: Study Romans and Ephesians

You cannot miss the beauty and bigness of the Gospel when you read Paul's letters to the Romans and Ephesians. Passages like Romans 3:21-26 and Ephesians 2:1-10 are a treasure-trove of Gospel-gold waiting to be mined.

What often happens when we read our Bibles is that we are in such a hurry to complete our "Bible-reading plan" that we don't actually read the Bible. We skim and scurry over rich truths and don't come away with any more of a rich understanding than when we started. Don't get me wrong; I am a big fan of reading to understand the breadth of Scripture but I am also a huge proponent of slowing down to get the depth of Scripture. We need that balance of breadth and depth lest we become surfacey or fragmented in our knowledge of Scripture.

I like to tell people to "Sherlock Holmes the Scriptures." And by that I mean: Read, Read, Read. Observe, Observe, Observe. Ask, Ask, Ask. Meditate, Meditate, Meditate. Reference, Reference, Reference. I think you get the point. What made Sherlock Holmes such a superior detective is that he would see things that nobody else would see and was thus able to come to conclusions that no one else could come to. Our goal in studying books like Romans and Ephesians should not be superior knowledge but a greater grasp of the Gospel.

Two directions that I would point you to that would help you go deep into Gospel rich books like Romans and Ephesians are:

First, grow in your understanding of how to be a better student of the Bible. The more sharpened your tools of Bible study are the more you will see when you study the Bible. We have a few good resources in our First Free library that can help you in this area:

- Knowing Scripture by R.C. Sproul
- How To Read the Bible For All It's Worth by Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart
- How To Study Your Bible by Kay & David Arthur

Second, grab a good commentary to guide you in your study of Romans and Ephesians. God has given the church many good teachers who have seen things that we won't see on our own and it would be prideful to think that we can't learn anything from them. One of those teachers who has been a great help to me and many others is John Stott. Stott is a rare combination of depth and readability. He is insightful while not always being over your head. Here are two of his commentaries I would recommend you own:

- The Message of Romans by John Stott (This is also in the First Free library)
- The Message of Ephesians by John Stott

Also whenever you are looking for a good commentary on the Bible I recommend going to the website bestcommentaries.com.

Part 4: Comb the Bible with a Christ-Centered Lens

The sin of the Pharisees was not studying the Bible but studying the Bible and missing Jesus. This is why Jesus said to them, "You search the Scriptures because you think

that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39). Every book in the Bible is in some way functioning as a window into the wonders of God’s glorious grace through Jesus.

In his book Living the Cross-Centered Life, C.J. Mahaney has this to say about how we should read our Bibles:

“Read your whole Bible with your eyes peeled for the Gospel. It has been noted that every passage of Scripture—in both the Old and New Testaments—either predicts, prepares for, reflects, or results from the work of Christ. As you read Scripture in your daily devotions, identify how each passage relates to the cross. The Old Testament in particular will come alive as you see it pointing to the coming Savior.” (p. 143)

One book that I would recommend getting a hold of in order to help you see how every book "either predicts, prepares for, reflects, or results from the work of Christ" is How to Read the Bible through the Jesus Lens by Michael Williams. In this book Dr. Williams summarizes the theme of every book and shows how each book connects to Jesus. Watch as he explains more about his book:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bm4b3l7rQaQ>

Here is an excerpt from his book on how Leviticus points to Jesus:

“The sacrifices that the Israelites offered to God were a means of acknowledging both His holiness and the requirement for those in special relationship with Him to keep themselves holy. The things sacrificed to God had to be without any imperfection, and even those designated to offer the sacrifices on the part of the people — the priests — had special rules and procedures to follow when doing so. This demand for holiness in our relationship with God has not been removed or minimized. Not only do we need a perfect sacrifice, we need a perfect priest to offer it for us. Jesus, because He is both the flawless sacrifice and the sinless priest, fulfills both roles. Unlike the other high priests, He [Christ] does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when He offered himself. (Hebrews 7: 27) When we acknowledge our unholiness and put our trust in Jesus and what He has done, His self-sacrifice is credited to us and achieves for us everything the many sacrifices of Leviticus could only point toward. It secures our unimpeded and uninterrupted fellowship with God as we live out his sacred purpose for us. Christ’s holiness admits us into God’s holy presence. There we find abundant stores of mercy and grace to help us as we seek to carry out our divine mandate to bring His blessing to all people (Hebrews 4:16).

May God help us to comb the Bible with a Christ-Centered lens.

Part 5: Seize Downtime to Soak-Up Gospel Centered Things

A Gospel-Centered life is built off of Gospel-Centered days and Gospel-Centered days are built off of Gospel-Centered moments. We cannot expect to live out a grand life if we don't capture the mundane moments of the everyday.

Take a mental tour and walk through a typical day for you. What kind of down-time do you have on a regular basis? What kind of multi-tasking opportunities present themselves to you daily? I can think of about five parts of my day that I could seize to soak-up Gospel-Centered things. First, I (try to) exercise on a regular basis and this allows me to watch or listen to stuff especially when I run on the treadmill. Second, I have about 40 minutes of driving time every day. Third, I usually have some tasks around the apartment like cleaning up or cooking or organizing something. Fourth, during the workday there is about 30 minutes worth of tasks that require minimal mental energy and allow me to listen to something at the same time. Finally, there is about a half-hour to an hour every day after my son goes to bed where my wife is busy working and I don't have anything pressing task to tackle.

It is in these mundane moments, totaling up to three hours, that I can soak in Gospel-centered things. The main things that I like to fill up this time with are: (1) Reading, (2) Viewing, and (3) Listening.

I'll talk more about reading in post #7 of this series but suffice it to say that during downtime reading requires the most mental effort and attention, but you will usually get the most out of it. You could think of all three of these categories according to this proverb: "The harder the labor the greater the mind harvest."

I love watching teaching series because it engages me on so many levels. I am a very visual person so audio does not capture and keep my attention very well. So when I am doing things like exercising or sitting in bed, I watch sermons or teaching series, especially ones that are saturated with the Gospel.

Finally, I have come to appreciate listening to audio books, audio Bibles and music. My favorite audio Bible is The Word of Promise. I have collected about 75 different audio books on my iTunes library and have listened to them during longer trips. Finally, when my brain can't handle storing any more information I go to my library of God-Exalting and Gospel-Centered music that I have been adding to for a couple of years.

I would commend to you the task of analyzing your day and finding where you have mundane moments that you can seize to soak yourself with the Gospel.

Part 6: Pray the Gospel

A regular rhythm in my prayer life has been to daily acknowledge and thank God for His Gospel grace to me. This hasn't always been a regular part of my prayers. I used to only walk through my laundry list of sins and then move on to my laundry list of requests that I wanted Him to grant. But without acknowledging God's Gospel grace to me, my prayers were prayed more out of guilt than gratitude and my petitions were more presumptuous than humble.

I now firmly believe that in our prayers we should acknowledge the work of the Savior just as much, if not more, than we acknowledge our sin. Robert Murray McCheyne once said that “for every one look we take at our sin we should take ten looks at Christ.” This applies directly to prayer. Christ should be thanked and acknowledged in our prayers because He is the reason we can pray, the reason we can confess, the reason we can be forgiven and the reason we can be empowered to overcome sin.

Read how C.J. Mahaney describes how we should permeate our prayers with the Gospel:

“The Gospel should be at the center of your prayer life because it makes it possible for us to approach God. The gospel gives us the confidence to pray boldly—we’re accepted in God’s beloved Son. There’s nothing complicated about this. To pray the Gospel, simply begin by thanking God for the forgiveness of sins, purchased through the death of His Son. Acknowledge that Christ’s work on the cross is what makes prayer possible. Thank Him that you’ll never be separated from God’s love because Jesus bore God’s wrath for sin. Thank Him that because of the cross you’re reconciled to God and have been given the Holy Spirit to dwell in you, lead you, guide you, and empower you to resist sin and serve God. Then ask God to bless you graciously with everything you need to obey and glorify Him. The gospel should be woven throughout our praise, our petitions, and our intercession, because our approach to God the Father is only—ever and always—through God the Son and His work on the cross.”

One practical way that I do this is to focus on a different verse each day that talks about the work of Jesus on my behalf and turn it into a prayer of gratitude. For example, today was 2 Corinthians 5:21: “He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” And this is how I prayed through it:

“Jesus, thank you for making the ‘Great Exchange.’ What an immeasurably undeserved gift that You who committed no sin took on all my sin past, present and future. So that I, a sinner, could stand before Your Father clothed in the righteousness that You earned for me.”

As I regularly place the Gospel in my prayers, God impresses His Gospel more deeply on my heart. May He do this for all of us more and more.

Part 7: Maintain a Healthy Diet of Books on the Gospel

Up until the time I graduated from high school, if my parents would have forced me to choose between sitting in my room and reading a book or pulling weeds, I would have chosen pulling weeds over reading one hundred times out of a hundred. I loathed reading. I couldn’t see the point of it nor did it feed my craving for entertainment. But sometime after I graduated from high school, God opened my eyes to see more of His bigness and beauty. A lot of the eye-opening work that God has done in my life has come through the help of authors and books.

God is a communicating God. He communicates mainly through words on paper, and we see this in that He gave us the Bible. In one sense reading is essential to the sustaining and developing of Christlikeness, but there is only one must-read book and that is the Bible. I never use the phrase “must-read” unless I am talking about the Bible. God has used authors throughout history and today who can communicate glorious things about God to help others see those glorious things.

In my own life for example, God has used Charles Spurgeon to show me that the cross is the central display of God’s grace and glory. God has used John Piper to show me that God is most glorified in me when I am most satisfied in Him. God has used Jerry Bridges to show me that the Gospel is needed not only for entering the Christian life but for living the daily Christian life as well. God has used Tom Schreiner to show me the technical tools necessary to mine the gold of Scripture. I could go on and on. My point is that *we ought to have a spiritual diet that consists of regularly taking in Gospel-focused books by Gospel-centered authors.*

The two authors I most highly recommend are Charles Spurgeon and Jerry Bridges. Almost without exception, everything that these two men have written is about or connected to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and they write in a refreshingly clear and understandable way.

Here is a list of the books we have on hand in the First Free library that are specifically written to help the believer know and live out the Gospel better:

- *Grace* by Charles Spurgeon
- *For Me To Live Is Christ* by Charles Spurgeon
- *Grace Abounding in a Believer's Life* by Charles Spurgeon
- *The Gospel for Real Life* by Jerry Bridges
- *Transforming Grace* by Jerry Bridges
- *The Great Exchange* by Jerry Bridges
- *The Discipline of Grace* by Jerry Bridges
- *Growing Your Faith* by Jerry Bridges
- *Living the Cross-Centered Life* by CJ Mahaney
- *Gospel Deeps* by Jared Wilson (Audio Book)
- *Gospel Wakefulness* by Jared Wilson

- *Jesus + Nothing= Everything* by Tullian Tchvidjian
- *Gospel: Recovering the Power that Made Christianity Revolutionary* by J.D. Greear
- *The Explicit Gospel* by Matt Chandler
- *Saved from What?* by R.C. Sproul
- *What is the Gospel?* by Greg Gilbert
- *God is the Gospel* by John Piper
- *Seeing & Savoring Jesus Christ* by John Piper
- *Fifty Reasons Why Jesus Came to Die* by John Piper
- *The Prodigal God* by Tim Keller
- *Getting the Gospel Right* by R.C. Sproul
- *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott

Happy reading everyone!

Part 8: Memorize Verses Focused on the Gospel

God's description of someone who is truly 'blessed' is someone who delights in God's Word and meditates on it day and night. I am convinced that memorizing Scripture is the best way to grow in our delight of and meditation on God's Word. I am not alone in saying this; author and professor Dallas Willard agrees:

"Bible memorization is absolutely fundamental to spiritual formation. If I had to choose between all the disciplines of the spiritual life, I would choose Bible memorization, because it is a fundamental way of filling our mind with what it needs. 'This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth.' That's where you need it! How does it get in your mouth? Memorization."

Pastor John Piper adds his own vote with this statement:

I [stress the practice of] Bible memory because I believe in the power of the indwelling Word of God to solve a thousand problems before they happen, and to heal a thousand wounds after they happen, and to kill a thousand sins in the moment of temptation, and to sweeten a thousand days with the 'drippings of the honeycomb.' I am jealous for you that you would 'let the word of Christ dwell in you richly' (Colossians 3:16). This is the path to solid joy and all the service of love that it sustains. Christ will be seen as the fortune He is when we treasure His Word more than money, and when the joy it awakens overflows with sacrificial love (2 Corinthians 8:2).

The best place to begin memorizing Scripture is to start storing up verses that describe and define the Gospel. The Gospel is the central truth of the Bible and as such it should be stuffed in our head so we can call it to mind at any moment to remind ourselves of the riches it provides. To grow in your awe of the Gospel, I suggest that you start with these 10 Gospel-focused passages:

1. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21
2. Ephesians 2:1-10
3. Romans 8:1-3
4. Isaiah 53:4-7
5. Romans 5:6-11
6. Psalm 103:8-14
7. 1 Peter 2:22-25
8. Colossians 2:11-15
9. Titus 3:3-7
10. Romans 3:21-26

A helpful strategy that I have used to memorize Scripture is the Ready, Repeat, Review model. It goes like this:

READY

- Pick It: *start by selecting a verse or passage*
- Plan It: *set a goal for how much and when*
- Print It: *put it on your electronic device, paper, or index card*
- Carry It: *take it with you wherever you go*

REPEAT

- Read It: *over & over until you can recite it from memory*
- Speak It: *over & over until you can say it from memory*
- Write It: *over & over until you can write it mistake-free from memory*
- Hear It: *on an audio Bible until you know it from memory*
- Walk It: *read and recite it while you are being active*
- Sing It: *try put it to song to make it more memorable*
- Study It: *to know its meaning and importance*

REVIEW

- Test It: *say it constantly and check your accuracy*
- Recall It: *every day for a week, every week for a month, and every month for a year*
- Use It: *in prayer, counseling, teaching, encouraging, and fighting sin*

There is also a website called FighterVerses.com that is devoted solely to helping people memorize Scripture, and I commend it to you. May God empower us to ‘store up His Word in our heart that we might not sin against Him’” (Psalm 119:9-11).

Part 9: Review Your Testimony of God’s Grace

The Apostle Paul knew his testimony very well, and because he knew it well, he was able to testify to God’s amazing grace in his life. This is how he spells out his testimony in

1 Timothy 1:12-17:

I thank Him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to His service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life. To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Notice four things that make Paul’s words a true testimony to God’s Gospel grace:

First, *Paul was deeply aware of his sin.* He had not forgotten the depths of sin that Christ had redeemed him from. Even following his conversion, Paul was keenly aware of his ongoing struggle with sin and daily need for a Savior (Romans 7:21-25; 2 Corinthians 12:7-10). Paul demonstrates to us that the more we are aware of our sin, past and present, the more we are amazed by grace.

Second, *Paul knew exactly “how” he had been saved.* He did not put forth a vague story of self-improvement and throw in the name of Jesus for good measure. Rather he unashamedly lets us know “how” he was saved: “*The grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus...[who] came into the world to save sinners.*” Paul didn’t want people merely to know “that” he was saved but “how” he was saved: through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Those who are most amazed by grace are those who are intimately aware of how they received saving grace.

Third, *Paul knew exactly “why” he had been saved.* Sadly most contemporary testimonies are just stories of moralistic improvement; “I once was a bad person, but now I’m being a good person.” Jesus did not come to make bad people good but to make dead people alive--alive to God’s mission and purpose. Paul relays to us in his testimony that God saved him to be a megaphone for the mission of declaring the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 20:24). The mercy of God moves us from living for ourselves to living for God and His mission (2 Corinthians 5:15).

Fourth, *Paul was jealous to give God all the glory*. He wanted us to know that the only thing he ever added to his salvation was his own sin. If we read Paul's testimony and come away thinking that Paul is an amazing person, we miss the point. The point of Paul's testimony is that God is amazingly gracious. Who else besides God can take a murderer and make him a missionary? Paul ends his testimony with "*To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever*" because he couldn't think of anything more appropriate.

So as we write, review, and share our own testimonies, let us make sure that we maintain an awareness of our sin against a Holy God, comprehend the saving work of Jesus, understand how we live no longer for ourselves but God's mission, and transfer every ounce of glory to God. May God keep our hearts tender to our testimonies of how we were saved so that we may grow in our awe of His grace.

Part 10: Get Around Gospel-Centered People

Growing to be a more Gospel-centered person is no small task. In fact, it is impossible to accomplish this task as a lone-ranger. God has designed us to be people who are connected in community. This is why the Bible speaks of the Church in terms of a family (Ephesians 2:19) and a body (Romans 12:4-5). If we cut ourselves off from community and accountability in our pursuit of Gospel-centeredness, we will stunt our growth or worse yet, stray from the Gospel.

Here are four reasons and ways that getting around Gospel-centered people can serve us to become more Gospel-centered:

First, *we need other Gospel-centered people to help us fight our Gospel-amnesia*. Gospel-amnesia is what happens when we forget our daily need for the Gospel and become self-reliant. This was Paul's criticism of the church in Galatians 3:1-5. They had forgotten the truth of the Gospel, become self-reliant, and drifted into legalism. When we are not preaching the Gospel to ourselves daily, we need to place ourselves in the path of people who will.

Second, *we need other Gospel-centered people to help us fight our lack of Gospel-application*. One of the marks of sin is its ability to create self-deception. There are areas in all of our lives right now where we are not walking worthily of or in dependence upon the Gospel. The worst part is that we are completely blind to it. This is where we need an outsider's eye to see and show us where the Gospel needs to take deeper roots in our lives (Hebrews 3:12-13).

Third, *we need other Gospel-centered people to help us fight our Gospel-apathy*. As much as we hate to admit it, our daily passion for God and His Gospel can often fluctuate like a roller-coaster, dipping down and climbing up. Left to ourselves, we can digress into a stagnant state of spiritual apathy (Revelation 2:4-5). We need the stability and passion of others to stir us out of our Gospel-apathy.

Fourth, *we need other Gospel-centered people to help us grow in our Gospel-awe.* We have not seen everything there is to the Gospel nor can we ever place on ourselves the label of “know-it-all.” We are finite individuals who have limitations on our ability to see Gospel truths. This is why we need other people who have seen things that we haven’t. There is so much gold to mine in the Bible, and there are people who have dug to deeper depths than we or have found things we missed. Rather than spend time nursing our egos, we should rejoice that God uses other people to help us grow in our grasp and awe of His Gospel.

So hunt down and invite Gospel-centered people into your life to fight for Gospel growth. Also, find and invest in other people whom you can help grow in the Gospel. We must remember and live out the truth that it takes a Gospel-centered community to create Gospel-centered individuals.