



A Study of Cornerstone EPC Core Values

1. Biblical Depth
2. Gospel Community
3. Joyful Generosity
4. Kingdom Mission

Companion videos and information available
@ cornerstonebrighton.com/foundations.





TABLE OF

WEEK 1 READING	4-7
WEEK 1 STUDY GUIDE	8-11
WEEK 2 READING	12-19
WEEK 2 STUDY GUIDE	20-21
WEEK 3 READING	22

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CONTENTS

WEEK 3 STUDY GUIDE	23-24
WEEK 4 READING	25-32
WEEK 4 STUDY GUIDE	33-34
WEEK 5 READING	35-41
WEEK 5 STUDY GUIDE	42-43

WEEK 1 - SERIES INTRODUCTION READING

What were we made for? To know God.

What aim should we set ourselves in life? To know God.

What is the 'eternal life' that Jesus gives? Knowledge of God. 'This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent' (John 17: 3).

What is the best thing in life, bringing more joy, delight, and contentment, than anything else? Knowledge of God. 'This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me"' (Jer. 9: 23 f.).

What, of all the states God ever sees man in, gives God most pleasure? Knowledge of himself. 'I desire ... the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings,' says God (Hos. 6: 6, KJV).

In these few sentences we have said a very great deal. Our point is one to which every Christian heart will warm, though the person whose religion is merely formal will not be moved by it. (And by this very fact his unregenerate state may be known.) What we have said provides at once a foundation, shape, and goal for our lives, plus a principle of priorities and a scale of values.

Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord. What, then, does the activity of knowing God involve? Knowing God involves, first, listening to God's Word and receiving it as the Holy Spirit interprets it, in application to oneself; second, noting God's nature and character, as his Word and works reveal it; third, accepting his invitations, and doing what he commands; fourth, recognizing, and rejoicing in, the love that he has shown in thus approaching you and drawing you into this divine fellowship.

KNOWING JESUS

The Bible puts flesh on these bare bones of ideas by using pictures and analogies, and telling us that we know God in the manner of a son knowing his father, a wife knowing her husband, a subject knowing his king, and a sheep knowing its shepherd (these are the four main analogies employed). All four analogies point to a relation in which the knower 'looks up' to the one known, and the latter takes responsibility for the welfare of the former. This is part of the biblical concept of knowing God, that those who know him – that is, those by whom he allows himself to be known – are loved and cared for by him. We shall say more of this in a moment.

Then the Bible adds the further point that we know God in this way only through knowing Jesus Christ, who is himself God manifest in the flesh. 'Don't you know me ... ? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father'; 'No-one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14: 9, 6). It is important, therefore, that we should be clear in our minds as to what 'knowing' Jesus Christ means.

The disciples were ordinary Galileans, with no special claims on the interest of Jesus. But Jesus, the rabbi who spoke with authority, the prophet who was more than a prophet, the master who evoked in them increasing awe and devotion till they could not but acknowledge him as their God, found them, called them to himself, took them into his confidence, and enrolled them as his agents to declare to the world the kingdom of God. 'He appointed twelve, to be with him, and to be sent out to preach ...' (Mark 3: 14, RSV). They recognized the one who had chosen them and called them friends as 'the Christ, the Son of the living God' (Matt. 16: 16), the man born to be king, the bearer of 'the words of eternal life' (John 6: 68), and the sense of allegiance and privilege which this knowledge brought transformed their whole lives.

Now, when the New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ is risen, one of the things it means is that the victim of Calvary is now, so to speak, loose and at large, so that anyone anywhere can enjoy the same kind of relationship with him as the disciples had in the days of his flesh.

The only differences are that, first, his presence with the Christian is spiritual, not bodily, and so invisible to our physical eyes; second, the Christian, building on the New Testament witness, knows from the start those truths about the deity and atoning sacrifice of Jesus which the original disciples only grasped gradually, over a period of years; and, third, that Jesus's way of speaking to us now is not by uttering fresh words, but rather by applying to our consciences those words of his that are recorded in the gospels, together with the rest of the biblical testimony to himself. But knowing Jesus Christ still remains as definite a relation of personal discipleship as it was for the twelve when he was on earth. The Jesus who walks through the gospel story walks with Christians now, and knowing him involves going with him, now as then.

'My sheep listen to my voice,' says Jesus; 'I know them, and they follow me' (John 10: 27). His 'voice' is his claim, his promise, and his call. 'I am the bread of life ... the door of the sheep ... the good shepherd ... the resurrection' (John 6: 35; 10: 7, 14: 11; 25). 'He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life' (John 5: 23 f., RSV). 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me ... and you will find rest' (Matt. 11: 28 f.).

Jesus's voice is 'heard' when Jesus's claim is acknowledged, his promise trusted, and his call answered. From then on, Jesus is known as shepherd, and those who trust him he knows as his own sheep. 'I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand' (John 10: 27 f.). To know Jesus is to be saved by Jesus, here and hereafter, from sin, and guilt, and death.

A PERSONAL MATTER

Standing back, now, to survey what we have said that it means to ‘know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent’, we may underline the following points.

First, knowing God is a matter of personal dealing, as is all direct acquaintance with personal beings. Knowing God is more than knowing about him; it is a matter of dealing with him as he opens up to you, and being dealt with by him as he takes knowledge of you. Knowing about him is a necessary precondition of trusting in him (‘how could they have faith in one they had never heard of?’ [Rom. 10: 4, NEB]), but the width of our knowledge about him is no gauge of the depth of our knowledge of him.

Second, knowing God is a matter of personal involvement, in mind, will, and feeling. It would not, indeed, be a fully personal relationship otherwise. To get to know another person, you have to commit yourself to his company and interests, and be ready to identify yourself with his concerns. Without this, your relationship with him can only be superficial and flavorless.

It is also necessary to stress that anyone who, on the basis of ‘religious experiences’, ‘says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him’ (1 John 2: 4; cf. verses 9, 11, 3: 6, 11, 4: 20).

But, for all this, we must not lose sight of the fact that knowing God is an emotional relationship, as well as an intellectual and volitional one, and could not indeed be a deep relation between persons were it not so. The believer is, and must be, emotionally involved in the victories and vicissitudes of God’s cause in the world, just as Sir Winston’s personal staff were emotionally involved in the ups and downs of the war. Believers rejoice when their God is honored and vindicated, and feel the acutest distress when they see God flouted.

This is the emotional and experiential side of friendship with God. Ignorance of it argues that, however true a person’s thoughts of God may be, he does not yet know the God of whom he is thinking.

Then, third, knowing God is a matter of grace. It is a relationship in which the initiative throughout is with God – as it must be, since God is so completely above us and we have so completely forfeited all claim on his favor by our sins.

We do not make friends with God; God makes friends with us, bringing us to know him by making his love known to us. Paul expresses this thought of the priority of grace in our knowledge of God when he writes to the Galatians, ‘now that you know God – or rather are known by God ...’ (Gal. 4: 9). What comes to the surface in this qualifying clause is the apostle’s sense that grace came first, and remains fundamental, in his readers’ salvation. Their knowing God was the consequence of God’s taking knowledge of them. They know him by faith because he first singled them out by grace.

SERIES INTRO READING (CONTINUED)

‘Know’, when used of God in this way, is a sovereign-grace word, pointing to God’s initiative in loving, choosing, redeeming, calling, and preserving. That God is fully aware of us, ‘knowing us through and through’ as we say, is certainly part of what is meant, as appears from the contrast between our imperfect knowledge of God and his perfect knowledge of us in 1 Corinthians 13: 12. But it is not the main meaning. The main meaning comes out in passages like the following,

‘And the LORD said to Moses ... I am pleased with you, and I know you by name’ (Exod. 33: 17). ‘Before I formed you (Jeremiah) in the womb I knew you; before you were born I set you apart’ (Jer. 1: 5). ‘I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep, and my sheep know me ... and I lay down my life for the sheep ... My sheep listen to my voice, I know them ... and they shall never perish’ (John 10: 14 f., 27 f.). Here God’s knowledge of those who are his is associated with his whole purpose of saving mercy. It is a knowledge that implies personal affection, redeeming action, covenant faithfulness, and providential watchfulness, towards those whom God knows. It implies, in other words, salvation, now and forever, as we hinted before.

BEING KNOWN

What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it – the fact that he knows me. I am graven on the palms of his hands. I am never out of his mind. All my knowledge of him depends on his sustained initiative in knowing me. I know him, because he first knew me, and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, one who loves me; and there is no moment when his eye is off me, or his attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when his care falters.

J. I. Packer, Knowing God (Westmont, IL: IVP Books, 2011), Portions of Chapter 3.

Did you know?

Cornerstone was birthed in 1986 as a “daughter” church of Ward Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Livonia (today located in Northville). Meeting initially at Maltby Middle School in Brighton, the church body moved into its newly constructed place of worship in September 1991.



First service at Maltby School in Brighton, MI 1986

WEEK 1 - SERIES INTRO STUDY GUIDE

MAIN IDEA

In our Foundation series we want to dig deeper into who God has called Cornerstone to be as a people and the mission that God has put us on. We want to better understand and grow deeper in our Foundations- the identity and mission that God has given Cornerstone.

The main idea of our Kickoff message is our mission as ambassadors of Jesus Christ- to Connect to God, One Another and the World Through the Love of Jesus Christ.

THEME VERSES

Acts 1:4: And while staying with them he (Jesus) ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father.

Acts 2:42: And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Acts 3:4-5: And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them.

BEFORE YOU WATCH THE VIDEO

1. In your own words, what is the mission of Cornerstone EPC?
2. This series focuses on the passions and core values of Cornerstone. Before beginning the series, what would you identify as the core values of Cornerstone and how do you see them put into action?

AFTER YOU WATCH THE VIDEO

1. What is the mission of Cornerstone as explained by Pastor Winans in the video? Pastor Winans explained there was a hierarchy of relationships in the mission of Cornerstone. How would you explain that hierarchy to a visitor to Cornerstone?

2. In the top of the hierarchy of relationships, is our relationship with God. Pastor Winans quoted Acts 1:4 to show how Jesus told the disciples to wait until they receive the Holy Spirit. Pastor Winans said that this principle applies to us in a similar manner- that we must not go and pursue our spiritual lives until we have our connection with God via the Holy Spirit. How do you connect with God? In what ways do you have a daily habit of connecting with Him?

3. In our connection with God, Pastor Winans explained that we are giving and receiving words with God. Pastor Winans referenced that the Word of God is breathed out (2 Tim 3:16) and it is the work of the Holy Spirit to speak to us personally through His word.

- How does reading scripture equip you for your Christian life? Do you give words (e.g. praise, worship, lament, requests) back to God in your relationship to Him? Do you have a time of thanks and adoration?

4. If you are reading this as a small group or as an individual, how do you fulfill the mission of Acts 2:42 of, “fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers”?

5. Acts 2:44-47 says, “And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.”

- How does the unity and generosity of the early Church challenge our understanding of Christian community? How can you create a sense of welcoming and openness in our church?

6. In Acts 2:42-47, there are four things the early church were devoted to: the apostle's teaching (i.e., hearing God's word together), the fellowship (i.e., living as the family of God) the breaking of bread (i.e., communing with one another and with Christ through the Lord's Supper), and the prayers (i.e., worshiping God together).

- Which of these four areas is a strong point for your group/church? In which area do you need to grow? As a group, family or individual, go through each of the four areas and ask: how will we devote ourselves to this area?

7. Our last area of mission is to connect to the world through the love of Jesus Christ. Pastor Winans referenced Acts 3:2,4 "And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms.... And Peter directed his gaze at him".

- What does Pastor Winans draw our attention to about Peter and this man lame from birth? How would you challenge yourself to see and then connect to our community of Brighton with the love of Christ? With your family? With your neighbors?

8. In the following examples, Jesus initiated a conversation with someone outside the Jewish community that resulted in him revealing who he was: a Samaritan woman (John 4:7-42) and a crippled beggar (John 5:1-15).

- How are you at initiating conversations of faith with those outside your known circle of believers? Do you understand the Gospel well enough to share the message of Jesus with others?

9. Now that we have reviewed the three connections of our mission at Cornerstone (Connect with God, one another and the world), what area would you want your small group or individual to focus on in depth?

- Of the core values that we will be reviewing in the next weeks (Biblical Depth, Gospel Community, Joyful Generosity, Kingdom Mission), which of these four excite you the most?

10. What other thoughts or questions do you have about our mission at Cornerstone to connect to God, one another and the world?

ASSIGNMENT

Individually, examine yourself on each of Cornerstone's connections (Connect to God, with one another and the world) and commit to prayer and scripture reading to prepare to go deeper in your understanding and application of our mission.

ASK YOURSELF

- How can I grow deeper in my faith and relationship with God through prayer and scripture reading?
- How can I open myself to connecting with others in church through bible study or meals or serving?
- How can I share the love of Jesus Christ in my everyday encounters with people?



Sanctuary Construction Circa 1990

WEEK 2 - BIBLICAL DEPTH READING

WHY STUDY THE BIBLE?

Why study the Bible? It may seem odd and foolish to raise this question since you probably would not be reading this book unless you were already convinced that Bible study is necessary. Our best intentions, however, are often weakened by our moods and caprice. Bible study often falls by the way. So, before we examine the practical guidelines for Bible study, let's review some of the compelling reasons for studying the Bible at all.

TWO MYTHS

First, we will look at some of the reasons people give for not studying the Bible. These "reasons" often contain myths that are passed off as truisms through much repetition. The myth that claims first place in our hall of excuses is the idea that the Bible is too difficult for the ordinary person to understand.

Myth 1—The Bible is so difficult to understand that only highly skilled theologians with technical training can deal with the Scriptures. This myth has been repeated many times by sincere people: "I know I can't study the Bible, because every time I try to read it, I can't understand it." When some people say this, they may want to hear, "That's all right. I understand. It's really a difficult book, and unless you've had seminary training, maybe you shouldn't try to tackle it." Or perhaps they want to hear, "I know, it's too heavy, too deep, too profound. I commend you for your tireless efforts, your strenuous labors in trying to solve the mystifying riddle of God's Word. It is sad that God has chosen to speak to us in such obscure and esoteric language that only scholars can grasp it." This, I am afraid, is what many of us want to hear. We feel guilty and want to quiet our consciences for neglecting our duty as Christians.

When we express this myth, we do it with astonishing ease. The myth is so often repeated that we do not expect it to be challenged. Yet we know that as mature, educated adults we can understand the basic message of the Bible. Indeed, the scholars who drafted and signed the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (1982) affirm "that a person is not dependent for understanding of Scripture on the expertise of biblical scholars."

If we can read the newspaper or blogs, we can read the Bible. In fact, I would venture to guess that more difficult words and concepts are expressed on the front page of a newspaper than on most pages of the Bible.

Myth 2—The Bible is boring. If we press people for an explanation for what they mean when they express the first myth, usually they respond by saying, “Well, I guess I can understand it, but frankly the book bores me to death.” This statement reflects not so much an inability to understand what is read as a taste and preference for what we find interesting and exciting.

The preponderance of boredom that people experience with the Bible came home to me when I was hired to teach the Scriptures in required Bible courses at a Christian college. The president of the institution phoned me and said, “We need someone young and exciting, someone with a dynamic method who will be able to ‘make the Bible come alive.’” While I knew what the president was getting at, I nevertheless wanted to say, “You want me to make the Bible come alive? I didn’t know that it had died. In fact, I never even heard that it was ill. Who was the attending physician at the Bible’s demise?” No, I can’t make the Bible come alive for anyone. The Bible is already alive. It makes me come alive.

When people say the Bible is dull, it makes me wonder why. Biblical characters are full of life. There is a unique quality of passion about them. Their lives reveal drama, pathos, lust, crime, devotion and every conceivable aspect of human existence. There is rebuke, remorse, contrition, consolation, practical wisdom, philosophical reflection and, most of all, truth. Perhaps the dullness some experience is due to the antiquity and cultural distance of the material. How does the life of Abraham or of Timothy—lived so long ago and so far away—relate to us? But the characters of biblical history are real. Though their life settings are different from ours, their struggles and concerns are very much like ours.

THE CLARITY OF SCRIPTURE

In the sixteenth century the Reformers declared their total confidence in what they called the perspicuity of Scripture. What they meant by that technical term was the clarity of Scripture. They maintained that the Bible is basically clear and lucid. It is simple enough for any literate person to understand its basic message. This is not to say that all parts of the Bible are equally clear or that there are no difficult passages or sections to be found in it. Laypeople unskilled in the ancient languages and the fine points of exegesis may have difficulty with parts of Scripture, but the essential content is clear enough to be understood easily. Martin Luther, for example, was convinced that what was obscure and difficult in one part of Scripture was stated more clearly and simply in other parts of Scripture.

Some parts of the Bible are so clear and simple that they are offensive to those suffering from intellectual arrogance. I once was lecturing about how Christ's death on the cross fulfilled the curse motif of the Old Testament. In the middle of my lecture a man in the audience interrupted me, saying loudly, "That's primitive and obscene." I asked him to repeat his comment so that everyone present could hear his complaint. When he repeated it, I said, "You are exactly right. I particularly like your choice of words, primitive and obscene." The entire history of redemption is communicated in primitive terms, from the episode of the encounter of Adam and Eve with the serpent to the devastating destruction that God visits on the chariots of Egypt in the exodus to the crass and brutal murder of Jesus of Nazareth. The Bible reveals that God hears the groans of all of his people, from the peasant to the philosopher, from the dull-witted to the sophisticated scholar. His message is simple enough for the most simplistic of his fallen creatures to understand. What kind of a God would reveal his love and redemption in terms so technical and concepts so profound that only an elite corps of professional scholars could understand them?

God does speak in primitive terms because he is addressing himself to primitives. At the same time, there is enough profundity contained in Scripture to keep the most astute and erudite scholars busily engaged in their theological inquiries for a lifetime.

If primitive is an appropriate word to describe the content of Scripture, obscene is even more so. All of the obscenities of sin are recorded with clear and forthright language in the Scripture. And what is more obscene than the cross? Here we have obscenity on a cosmic scale. On the cross Christ takes upon himself human obscenities in order to redeem them.

If you have been one of those who have clung to the myths of dullness or difficulty, perhaps it is because you have attributed to the whole of Scripture what you have found in some of its parts. Maybe some passages have been peculiarly difficult and obscure. Other passages may have left you bewildered and baffled. Perhaps those should be left for the scholars to unravel. If you find certain portions of the Scripture difficult and complex, need you insist that the whole of Scripture is boring and dull?

Biblical Christianity is not an esoteric religion. Its content is not concealed in vague symbols that require some sort of special "insight" to grasp. There is no special intellectual prowess or spiritual gift that is necessary to understand the basic message of Scripture. You may find that in Eastern religions where insight is limited to some guru who lives in a shanty high in the Himalayas. Maybe the guru

has been thunderstruck by the gods with some profound mystery of the universe. You travel to inquire and he tells you in a hushed whisper that the meaning of life is the sound of “one hand clapping.” That’s esoteric. That’s so esoteric that even the guru does not understand it. He cannot understand it because it’s an absurdity. Absurdities often sound profound because they are incapable of being understood. When we hear things we do not understand, sometimes we think they are simply too deep or weighty for us to grasp when in fact they are merely unintelligible statements like “one hand clapping.” The Bible does not talk like that. The Bible speaks of God in meaningful patterns of speech. Some of those patterns may be more difficult than others, but they are not meant to be nonsense statements that only a guru can fathom.

THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR BIBLE STUDY

The Bible itself has much to say about the importance of studying the Bible. We will examine two passages, one from each Testament, in order to catch a glimpse of these mandates. In Deuteronomy 6 we find a passage that was familiar to every Jew of the Old Testament. Its words were used to call the assembly together for worship. We read: *“Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might”* (vv. 4–5). Most of us are familiar with these words. But what follows them immediately? Read on: These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign upon your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (vv. 6–9) Here God sovereignly commands that his Word be taught so diligently that it penetrates the heart. The content of that Word is not to be mentioned casually and infrequently. Repeated discussion is the order of the day, every day. The call to bind on the hand, the forehead, the doorpost and gate makes it clear that God is saying that the job must be done by whatever method it takes.

Looking at the New Testament we read Paul’s admonition to Timothy: You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and

BIBLICAL DEPTH READING (CONTINUED)

profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:14–17) This exhortation is so basic to our understanding of the importance of Bible study that it warrants a careful scrutiny.

Continue in the things you have learned (v. 14). This part of the admonition lays the accent on continuity. Our study of Scripture is not to be a once-for-all matter. There is no room for the proverbial once-over-lightly. Consistency is necessary for a sound basis of biblical studies.

Sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation (v. 15). Paul refers to the Scripture's ability to give wisdom. When the Bible speaks of wisdom, it refers to a special kind of wisdom. The term is not used to connote an ability to be "worldly wise" or to have the cleverness necessary to write a Poor Richard's Almanack. In biblical terms, wisdom has to do with the practical matter of learning how to live a life that is pleasing to God. A cursory glance at the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament makes this emphasis abundantly clear. Proverbs, for example, tells us that wisdom begins with the "fear of the Lord" (Prov 1:7; 9:10).

That fear is not a servile fear but a posture of awe and reverence, which is necessary for authentic godliness. The Old Testament distinguishes between wisdom and knowledge. We are commanded to acquire knowledge, but more to acquire wisdom. Knowledge is necessary if wisdom is to be gained, but it is not identical with wisdom. A person can have knowledge without having wisdom, but he or she cannot have wisdom without having knowledge. A person without knowledge is ignorant. A person without wisdom is deemed a fool. In biblical terms foolishness is a moral matter and receives the judgment of God. Wisdom in the highest sense is being wise with respect to salvation. Thus wisdom is a theological matter. Paul is saying that through the Scriptures we can acquire that kind of wisdom that concerns our ultimate fulfillment and destiny as human beings.

Knowing from whom you have learned them (v. 14). Who is this "whom" Paul is talking about? Is he referring to Timothy's grandmother? Or to Paul himself? These options are doubtful. Whom refers to the ultimate source of the knowledge Timothy has acquired, namely, God. This comes out more clearly in the statement "All Scripture is inspired by God."

Scripture is inspired by God (v. 16). This passage has been the focal point of volumes of theological literature that describe and analyze theories of biblical inspiration. The crucial word in the passage is the Greek term *theopneustos*, which is often translated by the phrase "inspired by God." The term more precisely

means “God-breathed,” which refers not so much to God’s breathing something “in” as to his breathing something “out.” Rather than the term inspiration, we may be better advised to render the Greek by the English expiration. In that case we would see the significance of the passage not so much in providing us with a theory of inspiration—a theory of how God transmitted his Word through human authors—but rather a statement of the origin or source of Scripture. What Paul is saying to Timothy is that the Bible comes from God. He is its ultimate author. It is his word; it comes from him; it carries the weight of all that he is. Thus, the injunction to remember “from whom you have learned them [these things].”

Scripture is profitable for teaching (v. 16). One of the most important priorities Paul mentions is the preeminent way in which the Bible profits us. The first and indeed foremost profit is the profit of teaching or instruction. We may pick up the Bible and be “inspired” or moved to tears or other poignant emotions. But our greatest profit is in being instructed. Again, our instruction is not in matters of how to build a house or how to multiply and divide or how to employ the science of differential equations; rather we are instructed in the things of God. This instruction is called “profitable” because God himself places an extremely high value on it. The instruction is assigned worth and significance. Countless times I have heard Christians say, “Why do I need to study doctrine or theology when all I need to know is Jesus?” My immediate reply is, “Who is Jesus?” As soon as we begin to answer this question, we are involved in doctrine and theology. No Christian can avoid theology. Every Christian is a theologian. Perhaps not a theologian in the technical or professional sense, but a theologian nevertheless. The issue for Christians is not whether we are going to be theologians but whether we are going to be good theologians. A good theologian is one who is instructed by God.

Scripture is profitable for reproof, correction, and training in righteousness (v. 16). In these words Paul articulates the practical value of Bible study. As fallen creatures we sin, we err, and we are inherently out of shape with respect to righteousness. When we sin, we need to be reproofed. When we err, we need to be corrected. When we are out of shape, we need to go into training. The Scriptures function as our chief reproof, our chief corrector and our chief trainer. The bookstores of this world are filled with books on training methods to acquire excellence in sports, to lose weight and get our physical figures into shape, and to acquire skills in all areas. Libraries have stacks of books written to teach us financial management and the nuances of wise investment policies. We can find many books that will teach us how to turn our losses into profits, our liabilities into

BIBLICAL DEPTH READING (CONTINUED)

assets. But where are the books that will train us in righteousness? The question still remains, “What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” (Mt 16:26).

That the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work (v. 17). The Christian who is not diligently involved in a serious study of Scripture is simply inadequate as a disciple of Christ. To be an adequate Christian and competent in the things of God we must do more than attend “sharing sessions” and “bless me parties.” We cannot learn competency by osmosis. Biblically illiterate Christians are not only inadequate but unequipped. In fact, they are inadequate because they are not equipped. An NFL star may be able to run barefoot, but when playing a league opponent he will be sure to wear cleats.

THE BIBLE AS REVELATION

One of the most important advantages the Bible gives us is that it provides information that is not available anywhere else. Our universities provide us with a wealth of knowledge acquired by human investigation of the natural world. We learn by observation, analysis and abstract speculation. We compare and contrast varied opinions from notable scholars. But with all the skills of knowledge that we necessary for authentic godliness. The Old Testament distinguishes between have at our disposal in this world, there is no one who can speak to us from a transcendent perspective, no one who can reason with us, as the philosophers say, *sub species aeternitatis* (from the eternal perspective).

Only God can provide us with an eternal perspective and speak to us with absolute and final authority. The advantage of the equipment provided by Scripture is that knowledge is made available to us that can be learned from no other source. The Scripture does, of course, talk of matters that can be learned by other means. We are not utterly dependent on the New Testament to learn who Caesar Augustus was or how far it is from Jerusalem to Bethany. But the world’s best geographer cannot show us the way to God, and the world’s best psychiatrist cannot give us a final answer to the problem of our guilt. There are matters contained in Holy Writ that “unveil” for us that which is not exposed to the natural course of human investigation.

A MATTER OF DUTY

I could plead with you to study the Bible for personal edification; I could try the art of persuasion to stimulate your quest for happiness. I could say that the study of the Bible would probably be the most fulfilling and rewarding educational experience of your life. I could cite numerous reasons why you would benefit from a serious study of Scripture. But ultimately the main reason why we should study the Bible is because it is our duty.

If the Bible were the most boring book in the world—dull, uninteresting and seemingly irrelevant—it would still be our duty to study it. If its literary style were awkward and confusing, the duty would remain. We live as human beings under an obligation by divine mandate to study diligently God's Word. He is our Sovereign, it is his Word, and he commands that we study it. A duty is not an option. If you have not yet begun to respond to that duty, then you need to ask God to forgive you and to resolve to do your duty from this day forth.

R. C. Sproul Jr., Knowing Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), Selections from Chapter 1.



WEEK 2 - BIBLICAL DEPTH STUDY GUIDE

MAIN IDEA

Knowing, understanding and living out the Word of God in every aspect of life.

THEME VERSE

James 1:5 “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”

BEFORE YOU WATCH THE VIDEO

1. What does it mean to value Biblical depth?
How is it acquired? How is it used?
2. What role does the Bible play in your life?

AFTER YOU WATCH THE VIDEO

1. Psalm 1 :2 says that the blessed man “delights in the law of the Lord, and on his law, he meditates day and night.” What do you think it means to meditate on the law day and night? How do you envision practicing this in your life, in your small group, in your church community?
2. Read Psalm 19:7-11. What do these verses say concerning the value of Scripture? What is the significance of repeating “of the Lord” (of Yahweh)? How do you connect knowing God with reading Scripture?
3. Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17. What does Paul acknowledge regarding Timothy’s experience with the Scriptures? What is the clear wisdom contained in the Scriptures according to these verses? To what end is the Scripture given for us and how then are we to use it?

4. How will/does Biblical depth play a role in our interactions with the world? Is it an aid or an essential part of how Christians interact with the world? Explain your answer.

5. How has Bible reading and Bible study been both a blessing and a challenge?

6. How can you deepen the value of Biblical depth in your life?

7. Think of a person who impresses you with their Biblical depth. How would your walk with Jesus be different if you suddenly had their level of Biblical understanding? How would your interactions with the world outside the church be different? What might those barriers be and how can they be minimized?

8. Jesus Himself used scripture many times to point out inconsistencies, hypocrisy and outright error on the part of the Pharisees. The Pharisees, however, often demonstrated significant Biblical knowledge; they knew what the Scripture said and many times they were correct with what the Scriptures said. For example, Luke 5:21 says:

- The scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?”
- They were right, only God can forgive sins. The Pharisees demonstrated significant Biblical knowledge. What’s the difference between Biblical Knowledge and Biblical Depth?

9. What other thoughts or questions do you have about Biblical Depth?

ASSIGNMENT

The next time you read your Bible begin with this perspective. Read John 1:1-5 before starting. These verses tell us “... and the Word was God”. As you read your Bible you will be experiencing all parts of the Trinity. You will be learning about God, through the Word (Jesus), with the Holy Spirit guiding you to what They want you to experience and understand.

The Bible is more than a book. The Bible in your hand is a private place prepared by God especially for you. He wants you to get to know Him better. Now begin your time in the Bible.

WEEK 3 - GOSPEL COMMUNITY READING

PREACH THE GOSPEL TO YOURSELF, PAUL TRIPP

No one is more influential in your life than you are. Because no one talks to you more than you do. So observes Paul Tripp — and in doing so, he accents our need to daily preach the gospel to ourselves.

In our sin, we constantly find our responses to life in our fallen world to be disconnected from the theology that we confess. Anger, fear, panic, discouragement stalk our hearts and whisper a false gospel that will lure our lives away from what we say we believe.

The battleground, says Tripp, is meditation. What is it that is capturing your idle thoughts? What fear or frustration is filling your spare moments? Will you just listen to yourself, or will you start talking? No, preaching. Not letting your concerns shape you, but forming your concerns by the gospel.

OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE

Preaching the gospel to ourselves is a spiritual discipline that is both proactive and reactive. It's reactive as we encounter temptation and frustration and seek to restock in the moment, or as we reflect back on our sin and circumstances and try to evaluate them with a gospel lens.

But it's also proactive — it goes on the offense — when we feed our souls in some regular rhythm before the events and tasks and disappointments of daily life begin streaming our way.

Tripp counsels that we make it a daily practice to 1) gaze on the beauty of Christ, 2) remember who we are as a child of God, 3) rest in his power and provision, and then 4) act in reliance upon him.

THE GOSPEL AND THE SCRIPTURES

There is a difference, Tripp notes, between merely reminding ourselves of truth, and preaching to ourselves the truth of the gospel. The latter is self-consciously and intentionally reminding ourselves of the person and presence and provisions of our Redeemer.

But while gospel self-preaching is not the same thing as Bible reading, the connections and interdependences are profound. The Scriptures, says Tripp, provide the inerrant material for preaching to ourselves the gospel of grace.

They are the content to be taken up and applied to our lives in view of Jesus's person and work.

It will not adequately strengthen our soul, in the long run, just to hear the same canned gospel repeated over and over. Neither will it sustain our spiritual lives to merely take in information without seeing it in light of Jesus, and pressing it into our hearts.

*Paul Tripp is a pastor and best-selling author of more than 20 books, including **Marriage: 6 Gospel Commitments Every Couple Needs to Make**.*

WEEK 3 - GOSPEL COMMUNITY STUDY GUIDE

MAIN IDEA

Look inward to find a reason and desire to become part of Cornerstone's Gospel Community. Look outward to see how others can become part of this community.

THEME VERSE

John 15:13 (NIV) "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."

This is often interpreted as meaning the greatest act of love is to sacrifice your life for someone. But that's not what the verse actually says. It says "lay down one's life" [same word as laying down our crowns before Jesus?]. This conveys the idea of living for one's friends as well as dying for one's friends. Living for each other, and Jesus, is what we do in a Gospel Community.

BEFORE YOU WATCH THE VIDEO

1. What comes to mind when you think of the phrase Gospel Community?
2. Of all the non-church communities you've been part of over the years (sport teams, band, choir, volunteer groups, book clubs, etc.), which has had the most positive impact on you? What made this different from the other experiences?
3. Sally Jo used the phrase, "Preach the Gospel to yourself". What does that mean to you?
4. How is, "preaching the Gospel to yourself" different from preaching it to others? How is it the same?
5. Our ultimate hope when we share the Gospel with others is that they may come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. What do you think the goal is when preaching the Gospel to yourself? What are you hoping will happen?

AFTER YOU WATCH THE VIDEO

1. What does it mean to make Gospel Community a commitment for you? How would that impact your life (positively and negatively)?
 2. How does the idea of Cornerstone's Gospel Community reflect its mission statement of Connecting to God, one another and the world through the love of Jesus Christ?
 3. Most people working through these questions are already a part of Cornerstone's Gospel Community by being in a small group or through other ministries. How can you encourage others who are not a part of Cornerstone's Gospel Community?
 4. Although there are no requirements to join our church community, anyone can attend, there are barriers to becoming part of Cornerstone's Gospel Community? How can they be overcome?
- What other thoughts or questions do you have about Cornerstone's Gospel Community?



WEEK 4 - JOYFUL GENEROSITY READING

From Randy Alcorn "Treasure Principle"

COMPOUNDING JOY

"The less I spent on myself and the more I gave away, the fuller of happiness and blessing did my soul become." HUDSON TAYLOR

In 1990, I was a pastor of a large church, making a good salary and earning book royalties. I had been a pastor for thirteen years, and I didn't want to do anything else.

Then our family's life was turned upside down. I was on the board of a pregnancy resource center, and we had opened our home to a pregnant teenager, helping her place her baby for adoption in a Christian home. We also had the joy of seeing her come to faith in Christ.

After searching Scripture and praying, I began participating in peaceful, nonviolent civil disobedience at abortion clinics. We simply stood in front of the doors to advocate on behalf of unborn children scheduled to die. For this I was arrested and sent to jail. An abortion clinic won a court judgment against a group of us. I told a judge that I would pay anything I owed, but I couldn't hand over money to people who would use it to kill babies. (Please understand, I've never failed to pay other debts. But I could not voluntarily pay money to a business that existed to kill children. I chose to live with the legal consequences of refusing to do so.)

Then I discovered my church would be forced to surrender one-fourth of my wages each month to the abortion clinic. The church would have to either pay the abortion clinic or defy a court order. To prevent this, I resigned. That judgment was one of the best things that ever happened to us. I'd already divested myself of book royalties. The only way I could avoid garnishment was to make no more than minimum wage. Fortunately, our family had been living on only a portion of my church salary, and we had just made our final house payment.

Another court judgment followed, involving another abortion clinic. Though our actions had been nonviolent, the clinic was awarded the largest judgment ever against a group of peaceful protestors: \$8.2 million.

JOYFUL GENEROSITY READING (CONTINUED)

It seemed likely we would lose our house. By all appearances, our lives had taken a devastating turn. Right? Wrong. That judgment was one of the best things that ever happened to us. What others intended for evil, God intended for good (Genesis 50:20). We began a new ministry. My wife, Nanci, worked at a secretary's salary, supplementing my minimum wage. Her name alone was on all our assets, including the house. My inability to legally own assets was nothing I sought after, but God used it to help me understand what He means by "Everything under heaven belongs to me" (Job 41:11).

This wasn't the first time God taught me about His ownership. Many years ago, I had a new portable stereo, back when those were cool. I loaned it to our church's high school group for a retreat. It was returned beat-up and, I admit, it bothered me. But the Lord reminded me it wasn't my stereo - it was His. And it had been used to help reach young people. Who was I to complain?

Back then the material possessions I valued most were my thousands of books. I loaned them out, but it troubled me when they weren't returned or came back looking shabby. Then I sensed God's leading to hand over all the books to begin a church library. I later looked at the names of those who checked them out, sometimes dozens of names per book. I smiled, realizing that by releasing the books, I had invested in others' lives. Suddenly, the more worn the book, the happier it made me. My perspective totally changed.

God used stereos and books and court judgments to take my understanding of His ownership to a new level. Contemplate His words: The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to him. (Psalm 24:1, NLT) "The silver is mine and the gold is mine," declares the LORD Almighty. (Haggai 2:8) Remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth. (Deuteronomy 8:18) You are not your own; you were bought at a price. (1 Corinthians 6:19–20) God was teaching me the first of six keys to understanding the Treasure Principle: God is the owner of everything, including books and stereos, houses and cars, clothes and jewelry, electronics and toys. He even owns me and you, our souls and our bodies. God never revoked His ownership, never surrendered His claim to all treasures.

Ironically, the same year I first engaged in civil disobedience, 1989, I'd written extensively about God's ownership in my book *Money, Possessions,*

and Eternity. By the time the book came out, I no longer legally owned anything. God revealed to me, in the crucible of adversity, the life-changing implications of that truth. I realized our house belonged to God, not us. Why worry about whether or not we would keep it? He could easily provide us another place to live. But understanding ownership was only half my lesson. If God was the owner, I was the manager. I needed to adopt a steward's mentality toward the assets He had entrusted—not given—to me. A steward manages assets for the owner's benefit. He carries no sense of entitlement to the assets he manages. It's his job to find out what the owner wants done with his assets, then to carry out his will.

JOYFUL GIVING

Jerry Caven had a successful restaurant chain, two banks, a ranch, a farm, and real estate ventures. At age fifty-nine, he was searching for a lakeside retirement home. But the Owner had other plans. "God led us to put our money and time overseas," Jerry says. "It's been exciting. Before, we gave token amounts. Now we put substantial money into missions. We often go to India." What changed the Cavens' attitude toward giving? "It was realizing God's ownership," Jerry explains. "Once we understood that we were giving away God's money to do God's work, we discovered a peace and joy we never had back when we thought it was our money!" One day a distraught man rode his horse up to John Wesley (1703–1791), shouting, "Mr. Wesley, something terrible happened! Your house burned to the ground!" Wesley weighed the news, then calmly replied, "No. The Lord's house burned to the ground. That means one less responsibility for me."

Wesley's reaction wasn't denial. Rather, it was a bold affirmation of God's ownership. Whenever we think like owners, it's a red flag. We should be thinking like stewards, investment managers, always looking for the best place to invest the Owner's money. One day we'll undergo a job performance evaluation: "For we will all stand before God's judgment seat....So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God" (Romans 14:10, 12).

JOYFUL GENEROSITY READING (CONTINUED)

Our name is on God's account. We have unrestricted access to it. As His money managers, God trusts us to set our own salaries. We draw needed funds from His wealth to pay our living expenses. One of our central spiritual decisions is determining a reasonable amount to live on. Whatever that amount is—and it will legitimately vary from person to person—we shouldn't hoard or indiscriminately spend the excess. After all, it's His, not ours.

Every spring my wife and I read through dozens of letters from people in our church who are going on summer missions trips and asking for support. (One year we received forty-five requests.) When this time comes each year, we feel like kids in a candy store—a store as big as the world and as expansive as the heart of God. Why such excitement? Because we get to invest in our brothers and sisters in Christ who are sharing the Gospel. We get to hear stories and read e-mails about what God is doing in many different countries.

We see the enthusiasm, the growth, the kingdom-mindedness, the changed priorities of people young and old. We pray that those who go—and those to whom they go—will never be the same. And we will have had a part in it! I attended a gathering of givers where we took turns telling our stories. The words fun, joy, exciting, and wonderful kept surfacing. There were lots of smiles, laughter, and tears of joy. One older couple shared how they travel around the world, participating in the ministries they give to.

Meanwhile, their home is becoming run-down. They said, "Our children tell us, 'Fix up your house or buy a new one. You can afford it.' We tell them, 'Why would we do that? That's not what excites us!'" Ray Berryman, CEO for a national municipal services firm, says he and his wife give at least half of their income to God's work each year. "My joy in giving comes from serving God in a way that I know He's called me to and realizing that what I give is impacting people for Christ," Ray says. "It's exciting to know we're part of evangelizing, discipling, helping, and feeding the needy. It just feels wonderful." The more we give, the more we delight in our giving. It pleases us. But more important, it pleases God.

"God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

JOYFUL GENEROSITY READING (CONTINUED)

However, the cheerfulness often comes during and after the act of obedience, not before it. So don't wait until you feel like giving! Just give and watch the joy follow. God wants us to find joy. He even commands us to rejoice (Philippians 4:4). But if we don't give, we're robbed of an important source of the joy God instructs us to seek!

I know a single man who came to Christ in his twenties, read the Scriptures, and got so excited that he decided to sell his house and give the money to God. But when he shared this plan with his Bible-study group, something tragic happened: they talked him out of it.

Over the years, I've heard from readers who say they believe the group's counsel saved this young man from an unwise decision. I disagree, largely because I knew his circumstances and the depth of his conviction and his joy at the prospect of doing this. He was highly skilled with a well-paying job. Had he sold his house and given away the profits, instead of being in the 99th percentile of the world's wealthy, he might have dropped to the 98th percentile. But he would have had both treasures in Heaven and the joy of knowing he had followed the Lord's prompting to help others. It would likely have set his life on a trajectory of trust in God instead of conformity to the usual way of doing things. To this day I wonder what great things God might have done through this young man had he not been talked out of doing what he believed God wanted him to do.

When it comes to money and possessions, the cultures of the world and the church sometimes seem indistinguishable. If you ever feel inclined to talk a young believer (including your child) out of giving, please restrain yourself. Don't quench God's Spirit, and don't rob someone of present joy and future rewards. Instead, watch and learn. Then ask God what He wants you to give away, and what gladness He wants to bring into your life.

THUNDER, LIGHTNING, AND GRACE

The Macedonian Christians understood the joy of giving: "Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity" (2 Corinthians 8:2). How do "severe trial," "overflowing joy," "extreme poverty," and "rich generosity" all fit in one verse?

Giving isn't a luxury of the rich. It's a joyous privilege of the poor. I've discovered that impoverished Christians in many countries find great joy in giving. The Macedonians, according to Paul, "urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints" (v. 4). They had to plead, presumably because others were telling them that their poverty exempted them from giving. Giving isn't a luxury of the rich. It's a joyous privilege of the poor.

These early Christians were dirt-poor but came up with every reason they could to give. What a contrast to those who have so much but come up with endless justifications for not giving! It's humbling to receive gifts from people in far greater need than you. I've experienced this on missions trips where the poor gladly serve their best food to visiting Americans. They're not pretending their sacrifice makes them happy. It really does.

When the tabernacle was being built, people were so excited they had to be "restrained" from giving more (Exodus 36:5-7). That's what giving will do to you. God uses giving to conform us to His image.

Gaze upon Christ long enough and you'll become more of a giver. Give long enough and you'll become more like Christ. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:1: "We want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches." How was God's grace demonstrated? By their act of giving to needy Christians. In verse 6, Paul calls the Macedonians' giving to help the hungry in Jerusalem an "act of grace." The same Greek word is used for Christian giving and for God's grace. Christ's grace defines, motivates, and puts in perspective our giving: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (v. 9).

Contemplate Christ's giving of Himself on our behalf. The infinitely wealthy King chose to become poor, not only to save us from Hell, but also to make us rich by buying our peace with God through His own death. God's grace is His giving to us in Christ the righteousness He loves and we desperately need, while taking in exchange our sin that He hates and which we need deliverance from. Our giving is a reflexive response to God's grace in our lives. It doesn't come out of our altruism or philanthropy for which we might congratulate ourselves. Rather, it comes out of Christ's transforming

JOYFUL GENEROSITY READING (CONTINUED)

work in us. We give because He first gave to us. While our giving to Him pales in comparison to His giving to us, it pleases God when we follow His example. The greatest passage on giving in all Scripture ends not with “Congratulations for your generosity,” but with “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:15). When God’s grace touches us, we give joyfully. As thunder follows lightning, joyful giving follows grace. When the lightning of God’s grace strikes us, the thunder of our giving should follow.

WHAT CHRISTIANS CAN LEARN FROM GENEROUS UNBELIEVERS

All people are made in God’s likeness. By His common grace, Christ followers aren’t the only ones who can discover enormous joy in giving. Speaking of world needs, novelist Stephen King wrote, “We have the power to help, the power to change. And why should we refuse? Because we’re going to take it with us? Please.” He continued, sharing sort of a secular version of the Treasure Principle: “I want you to consider making your lives one long gift to others, and why not? All you have is on loan, anyway....All that lasts is what you pass on.”

Investor T. Boone Pickens talked about how good it feels to give. He said, “I was put here to make money so I could give it away.” I heard a nearly giddy Warren Buffet, then the second or third richest person in the world, say he once wondered why he’d made billions of dollars. Then he said he’d discovered the reason: so he can help many people. Buffet created the Giving Pledge, which at this writing has been signed by 156 billionaires who’ve joined him in committing to give away most of their wealth.

GIVING AS AN INCREDIBLE PRIVILEGE

Despite the \$8.2 million court judgment twenty-six years ago, we never lost our house. While paying me a minimum-wage salary, the ministry received all the royalties from my books. With joy in our hearts, Nanci and I continue giving away 100 percent of the book royalties to missions, ministries, famine relief, and pro-life work. When we first started doing this in 1989, book royalties began to dramatically increase.

JOYFUL GENEROSITY READING (CONTINUED)

Since Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM) began, by God's grace, the ten million books sold have brought in over eight million dollars of royalties. I try to write good, biblically based books, but sometimes I think God sells those books mainly to raise funds for ministries and people close to His heart!

Some have wondered if I realize what we could have done with eight million dollars. My answer is always the same: Nothing that would have brought us nearly as much joy as we've found in giving it away. There's just nothing like giving. It's exhilarating. For me, the only feeling that compares is the joy of leading someone to Christ. The great thing is that our giving to missions helps people come to Christ all over the world. Someday we'll meet them in Heaven! When that happens, will any of us wish we'd kept that money instead of giving it?

Giving brings us far more than it takes. It infuses our lives with gladness and gratitude. It interjects an eternal dimension into the most ordinary day. That's one reason you could never pay givers enough to convince them not to give.

Alcorn, Randy. The Treasure Principle, Revised and Updated: Unlocking the Secret of Joyful Giving (pp. 37-38). Random House Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.



WEEK 4 - JOYFUL GENEROSITY STUDY GUIDE

MAIN IDEA

Generosity isn't a matter of resources, it's a matter of faith and obedience. Jesus blesses those who walk in faith and obedience.

THEME VERSE

James 2:14-17 "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead!"

BEFORE YOU WATCH THE VIDEO

1. How would you describe Jesus' generosity toward His followers?
2. How would you describe the Christian's role in Jesus' generosity toward both Christians and non-Christians?

AFTER YOU WATCH THE VIDEO

1. List those blessed by Jesus in Pastor Hunt's story.
2. With the exception of Jesus' actions, what started the chain of events that led to the Hunts being gifted?
3. The gifts given to the Hunt's originated from Jesus. How did Jesus' generosity show up at the Hunt's doorstep?

JOYFUL GENEROSITY STUDY GUIDE (CONTINUED)

4. Generosity has many forms, several of which came into play in Pastor Hunt's story. Jesus displayed these same types of generosity:

- Jesus saw someone's need and acted upon it (Ex: Luke 19:1-10 (Zacchaeus))
- Jesus gave resources generously (Ex: Feeding 5,000 etc.)
- Jesus gave time generously (Ex: Three years with His disciples)
- Jesus gave emotional support (Ex: Comforting Peter after his denial)

How did those involved with the Hunt's gift display these same types of generosity?

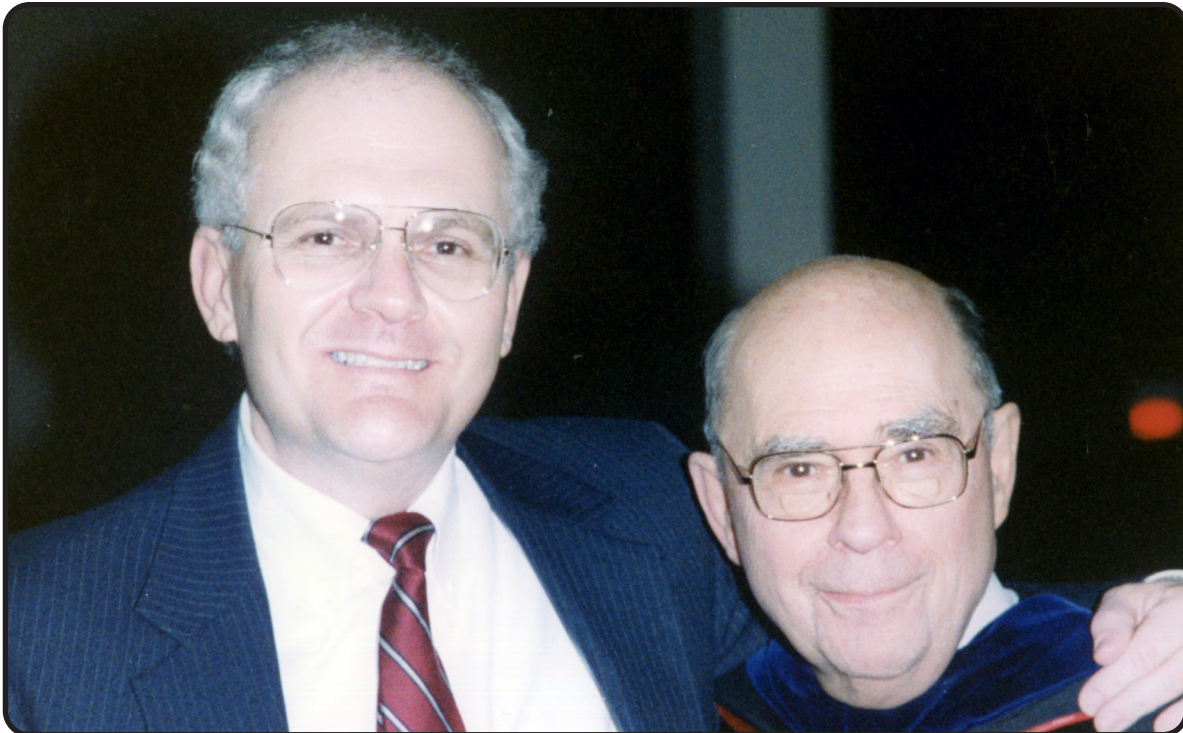
5. Jesus could have miraculously caused the Hunt's gift to appear on their doorstep, had Pastor Hunt or Linda get a bonus from work, or met their needs in many other ways. Why do you think He chose to meet their needs in this particular way?

6. Revisit the list you created earlier of those blessed by generosity from Pastor Hunt's story. Would you change your answer?

7. What other thoughts or questions do you have about joyful generosity?

ASSIGNMENT

Ask God to show you someone around you who could benefit from your joyous generosity. This may be in the form of time, emotional support or financial generosity. Ask God to help you excel in the grace of giving every day.



WEEK 5 - KINGDOM MISSION READING

A HOLE IN THE WHOLE

Faith today is treated as something that only should make us different, not that actually does or can make us different. In reality we vainly struggle against the evils of this world, waiting to die and go to heaven. Somehow we've gotten the idea that the essence of faith is entirely a mental and inward thing. —DALLAS WILLARD WHERE IS THE HOLE? So how can our gospel have a hole in it? As I mentioned in the prologue, the word gospel literally means glad tidings, or good news. It is shorthand, meant to convey the coming of the kingdom of God through the Messiah. One dictionary has this definition:

Gospel: glad tidings, esp. concerning salvation and the kingdom of God as announced to the world by Christ.

The amazing news of the gospel is that men and women, through Christ's atoning death, can now be reconciled to God. But the good news Jesus proclaimed had a fullness beyond salvation and the forgiveness of sins; it also signified the coming of God's kingdom on earth. This new kingdom, characteristics of which were captured in the Beatitudes, would turn the existing world order upside down.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 5:3–10)

The kingdom of which Christ spoke was one in which the poor, the sick, the grieving, cripples, slaves, women, children, widows, orphans, lepers, and aliens—the “least of these” (Matt. 25:40 NKJV)—were to be lifted up and embraced by God. It was a world order in which justice was to become a reality, first in the hearts and minds of Jesus' followers, and then to the wider society through their influence. Jesus' disciples were to be “salt” and “light” to the world (Matt. 5:13–14). They were to be the “yeast” that leavens the whole loaf of bread (Matt. 13:33). His was not intended to be a far-off and distant kingdom to be experienced only in the afterlife; no, Christ's proclamation of the kingdom of heaven was a call for a redeemed world order populated by redeemed people now. In other words, perfect kingdom of God that I just described was to begin on earth. That was the vision first proclaimed by Jesus, and it was good news for our world. But this does not seem to square with our twenty-first-century view.

THE “BINGO CARD” GOSPEL

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. —2 COR. 9:13

More and more, our view of the gospel has been narrowed to a simple transaction, marked by checking a box on a bingo card at some prayer breakfast, registering a decision for Christ, or coming forward during an altar call. I have to admit that my own view of evangelism, based on the Great Commission, amounted to just that for many years. It was about saving as many people from hell as possible—for the next life. It minimized any concern for those same people in this life. It wasn't as important that they were poor or hungry or persecuted, or perhaps rich, greedy, and arrogant; we just had to get them to pray the “sinner's prayer,” and then we'd move on to the next potential convert. In our evangelistic efforts to make the good news accessible and simple to understand, we seem to have boiled it down to a kind of “fire insurance” that one can buy. Then once the policy is in effect, the sinner can go back to whatever life he was living—of wealth and success, or of poverty and suffering. As long as the policy is in the drawer, the other things don't matter as much. We've got our “ticket” to the next life.

There is a real problem with this limited view of the kingdom of God; it is not the whole gospel. Instead, it's a gospel with a gaping hole. First, focusing almost exclusively on the afterlife reduces the importance of what God expects of us in this life. The kingdom of God, which Christ said is “within you” (Luke 17:21 NKJV), was intended to change and challenge everything in our fallen world in the here and now. It was not meant to be a way to leave the world but rather the means to actually redeem it. Yes, it requires that we repent of our own sinfulness and totally surrender our individual lives to follow Christ, but then we are also commanded to go into the world—to bear fruit by lifting up the poor and the marginalized, challenging injustice wherever we find it, rejecting the worldly values found within every culture, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. While our joining in the coming kingdom of God may begin with a decision, a transaction, it requires so much more than that.

I believe that we have reduced the gospel from a dynamic and beautiful symphony of God's love for and in the world to a bare and strident monotone. We have taken this amazing good news from God, originally presented in high definition and Dolby stereo, and reduced it to a grainy, black-and-white, silent movie. In doing so, we have also stripped it of much of its power to change not only the human heart but the world. This is especially reflected in our limited view of evangelism. Jesus commanded his followers to take the good news of reconciliation and forgiveness to the ends of the earth. The dictate is the same today. Christianity is a faith that was meant to spread—but not through coercion. God's love was intended to be demonstrated, not dictated. Our job is not to manipulate or induce others to agree with us or to leave their religion and embrace Christianity. Our charge is to both proclaim and embody the gospel so that others can see, hear, and feel God's love in tangible ways. When we are living out our faith with integrity and compassion in the world, God can use us to give others a glimpse of his love and character. It is God—not us—who works in the hearts of men and women to forgive and redeem. Coercion is not necessary or even particularly helpful. God is responsible for the harvest—but we must plant, water, and cultivate the seeds.

Let's look more closely at this metaphor, used often in the New Testament to describe evangelism (for example, Matt. 9:37–38; Mark 4:1–20, 26–29; Luke 10:1–3; and John 4:35–38). For most of the twentieth century, American evangelists really homed in on this idea of the harvest, believing that the fruit was already ripe and just needed to be picked. This was the essence of Billy Graham's great global crusades, Campus Crusade's pamphlet *The Four Spiritual Laws*, *The JESUS Film*, and *Evangelism Explosion*. All of these tools and efforts were highly effective at proclaiming the good news that our sins could be forgiven if we committed our lives to Christ. Many millions of people did commit their lives to him. In fact, my own life was influenced by both *The Four Spiritual Laws* and a Billy Graham crusade, so I can personally attest to how successful these techniques are at harvesting fruit that has already ripened.

But what about the fruit that hasn't ripened? For most of us who made our first-time commitments to Christ as adults, our stories were not of instant conversion the first time we ever heard about Jesus. In fact, according to the Barna Research Group, only about 6 percent of people who are not Christians by the age of eighteen will become Christians later in life. It is rare that a simple recitation of the gospel will cause people to instantly change their minds. It usually takes much more than that. Our own narratives typically involve a journey of discovery marked by relationships with respected friends and loved

reading, discussions, learning about the basis for the Christian faith, seeing the difference faith made in the lives of people we knew, and witnessing genuine faith demonstrated through acts of love and kindness toward others. In other words, before we became “ripe” for harvest, a lot of other things had to happen first.

Haven’t we heard the stories of faithful missionaries who dedicated their whole lives in another country without seeing even one person embrace Christ as Savior—only to learn that fifty years later there was a tremendous harvest? In our instant-gratification society, we would prefer to go directly to the harvest. Who wants to do all of that hard work of stump pulling and boulder moving? But isn’t all of that “other” work the essence of the coming of the kingdom of God in its fullness? When we become involved in people’s lives, work to build relationships, walk with them through their sorrows and their joys, live with generosity toward others, love and care for them unconditionally, stand up for the defenseless, and pay particular attention to the poorest and most vulnerable, we are showing Christ’s love to those around us, not just talking about it. These are the things that plant the seeds of the gospel in the human heart.

Didn’t Jesus always care about the whole person—one’s health, family, work, values, relationships, behavior toward others—and his or her soul? Jesus’ view of the gospel went beyond a bingo card transaction; it embraced a revolutionary new view of the world, an earth transformed by transformed people, his “disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28:19 NKJV), who would usher in the revolutionary kingdom of God. Those words from the Lord’s Prayer, “your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” were and are a clarion call to Jesus’ followers not just to proclaim the good news but to be the good news, here and now (Matt. 6:10). This gospel—the whole gospel—means much more than the personal salvation of individuals. It means a social revolution.

JESUS HAD A MISSION STATEMENT

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. —JOHN 10:10

The revolution began in Nazareth, where Jesus grew up. Picture for a moment your neighbor’s son’s being asked to speak at the Sunday service at your church. Can you imagine your shock if he stood up, read the Scripture pertaining to the second coming of Christ, and then said, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”? That is exactly what Jesus did in the synagogue in Nazareth, except he referred to the Messiah’s first coming. This happened at the very start of Jesus’ public ministry, immediately after his baptism by John the Baptist and the forty days in the wilderness, facing the temptations of Satan.

Listen to this remarkable passage:

KINGDOM MISSION READING (CONTINUED)

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:14–21).

The passage Jesus read was a messianic prophecy that envisioned a future messiah who would be both a king and a servant. As perhaps Jesus’ first public statement of his identity as the Messiah, what he said in Nazareth was a declaration both of who he was and why he had come. It was in essence Jesus’ mission statement, and it laid out the great promises of God to those who receive the Messiah and his coming kingdom. In this mission statement, we see three main components.

First, we see the proclamation of the good news of salvation. Take note that the recipients of this good news were to be, first and foremost, the poor, just as Jesus promised in the Beatitudes. When we talk today about proclaiming the gospel, we typically mean evangelism, a verbal proclamation of the good news of salvation and how it can be received by anyone by asking God’s forgiveness and committing his or her life to Christ. But this is not the whole gospel.

Second, we see a reference to “recovery of sight for the blind” (v. 18). In the original text from Isaiah 61, there is also a promise to “bind up the brokenhearted” (v. 1). These references indicate that the good news includes a compassion for the sick and the sorrowful—a concern not just for our spiritual condition but for our physical well-being also. We see this same concern time after time in the ministry of Jesus as he healed the diseased and the lame, showed empathy for the poor, fed the hungry, and literally restored sight to the blind. Jesus clearly cared about addressing poverty, disease, and human brokenness in tangible ways.

Third, we see a majestic commitment to justice. Jesus has come to “proclaim freedom for the prisoners,” “to release the oppressed,” and “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18–19). In the first century, the allusion to prisoners and the oppressed would have certainly meant those living under the occupation of Rome but also, in a broader sense, anyone who had been the victim of injustice, whether political, social, or economic. The proclamation of “the year of the Lord’s favor” was a clear reference to the Old Testament year of Jubilee, when slaves were set free, debts were forgiven, and all land was returned to its original owners. The year of Jubilee was God’s way of protecting against the rich getting too rich and the poor getting too poor.

Proclaiming the whole gospel, then, means much more than evangelism in the hopes that people will hear and respond to the good news of salvation by faith in Christ. It also encompasses tangible compassion for the sick and the poor, as well as biblical justice, efforts to right the wrongs that are so prevalent in our world. God is concerned about the spiritual, physical, and social dimensions of our being. This whole gospel is truly good news for the poor, and it is the foundation for a social revolution that has the power to change the world. And if this was Jesus’ mission, it is also the mission of all who claim to follow him. It is my mission, it is your mission, and it is the mission of the Church.

A BIBLE FULL OF HOLES

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. —GAL. 1:6–7

We have shrunk Jesus to the size where he can save our soul but now don’t believe he can change the world. —ANONYMOUS

Luke 4 is not the only place in the Bible that speaks to the issues of poverty and justice. God’s Word is replete with such passages, from Genesis to Revelation—but do we heed them?

When my friend Jim Wallis was a seminary student at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School outside of Chicago, he and some of his classmates did a little experiment. They went through all sixty-six books of the Bible and underlined every passage and verse that dealt with poverty, wealth, justice, and oppression. Then one of Jim’s fellow students took a pair of scissors and physically cut every one of those verses out of the Bible. The result was a volume in tatters that barely held together. Beginning with the Mosaic books, through the books of history, the

KINGDOM MISSION READING (CONTINUED)

Psalms and Proverbs, and the Major and Minor Prophets, to the four Gospels, the book of Acts, the Epistles, and into Revelation, so central were these themes to Scripture that the resulting Bible was in shambles. (According to The Poverty and Justice Bible, there are almost two thousand verses in Scripture that deal with poverty and justice.)

When Jim would speak on these issues, he would hold his ragged book in the air and proclaim, “Brothers and sisters, this is our American Bible; it is full of holes. Each one of us might as well take our Bibles, a pair of scissors, and begin cutting out all the scriptures we pay no attention to, all the biblical texts that we just ignore.”⁷ Jim’s Bible was literally full of holes.

Hole (hōl) n.—A hollowed place in something solid

The gospel Jesus described in Luke 4 is indeed something solid. If there is a hole in our gospel, in our understanding of the nature of God’s call upon us, his followers, it is not because Scripture is unclear about these issues. Rather, it is because we have chosen, as Jim Wallis suggests, to pay little attention to God’s unmistakable message to bring the whole gospel to the whole world. We’ll come back to the scriptural basis for a fuller understanding of the whole gospel in the next section. But any head analysis of what Jesus expects of those who choose to follow him must be accompanied by the heart, and the hands and feet as well. In my own case, getting what I knew in my head into my heart and out to my hands and feet was the challenge. Walking the walk was a lot harder than talking the talk. Isn’t it always that way?

Stearns, Richard. The Hole in Our Gospel Special Edition: What Does God Expect of Us? The Answer That Changed My Life and Might Just Change the World (pp. 11-12). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.



WEEK 5 - KINGDOM MISSION STUDY GUIDE

MAIN IDEA

Carrying out Kingdom Mission involves witnessing and preparation and it is not optional.

THEME VERSE

The great commission Matthew 28:18-20 (ESV) Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

BEFORE YOU WATCH THE VIDEO

1. What comes to mind when you hear the term Kingdom Mission?
How have you seen people who have a Kingdom Mission live out that mission?
2. Have you ever been on the receiving end of a Kingdom Mission for you?
How did that come about and what effect did it have on you?

AFTER YOU WATCH THE VIDEO

1. Pastor Brian quoted John Piper: “Mission is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exist because worship doesn’t. Worship is the ultimate goal of the Church.”

- What do you think about this statement? Do you agree or disagree?
Explain your answer.

2. Pastor Brian said that a church that follows God’s leading must have a passion for missions.

- Why did he say must rather than should?

3. When Pastor Brian quoted the great commission (Matthew 28:16-20) he said the literal translation is that we are to make disciples “as you are going”. This implies that we don’t go out to witness for Jesus, we witness for Jesus each time we go out. If God told you the next time you went out (grocery shopping, to the gas station, to a movie, ..) that you were going to be presented with a golden opportunity to present the Gospel to someone who desperately needed to hear it, how would you prepare for that encounter?

4. Not only are we to witness for Jesus when we go about our daily lives, this is not new. We have always been witnessing for Jesus as we went about our daily lives. Being a witness is not optional, but what kind of witness you are is optional.

- What can you do to become a more effective witness?

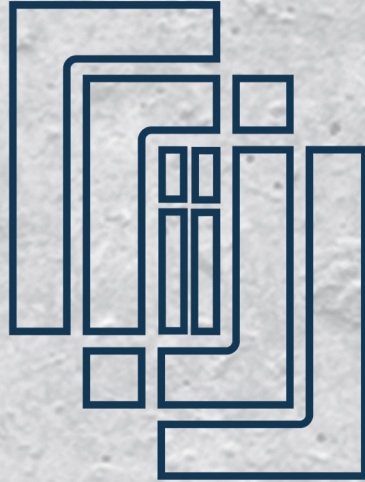
5. Presenting the Gospel to others can be a scary proposition. Witnessing is often one of the lowest scores on spiritual self-evaluations. Yet, it is not complicated. A witness is someone who gives testimony about something they have experienced. Your best witness is your own story of your life before and after becoming a follower of Jesus and what He means to you now.

- With that in mind, what is your testimony?

6. What other thoughts or questions do you have about Kingdom Mission?

ASSIGNMENT

The next time you are out in a crowded public place, look around. Almost everyone you see will not accept the Gospel and will be going to Hell. This is harsh but it is reality. Now picture another crowd or people but this time it is entirely made up of people you know and love who are not followers of Jesus. In the midst of the people is one dedicated follower of Jesus. What kind of witness do you want them to be for your loved ones? What kind of witness are you willing to be for their loved ones?



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