

THE GOSPEL SHAPED LEADER *Workbook*

BECOME AN EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY DISCIPLE OF JESUS

BY SCOTT THOMAS

How to Use This Workbook

This resource aims to help participants walk through *The Gospel Shaped Leader: Leaning on Jesus to Shepherd His People*.¹ The Workbook follows the chapters and headings from the book.

Feel free to make copies so groups can journey through the book's contents. Every participant should purchase a copy of the full-length book and have a copy of the Workbook in either digital or hard copy.

Copies of the book are available on Amazon or through the publisher, newgrowthpress.com, which offers a 25% discount for ten or more copies.

Who Benefits from This Workbook?

This Workbook is for anyone in church ministry, vocational or non-vocational: Pastors, Church Staff, Elders, Deacons, Small Group facilitators, Disciple-makers, Department directors, Students, and anyone who wants to grow in their understanding of the gospel ministry and disciple-making.

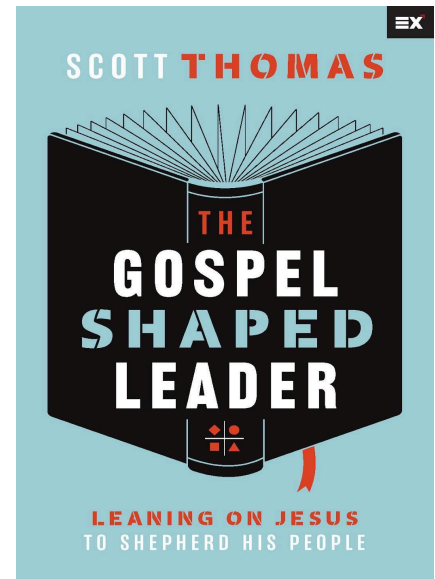
What Context Works Best?

This Workbook best suits Small Groups, Sunday School classes, staff training, discipleship groups, mentoring, and one-on-one settings.

There are 13 chapters, which fits into a typical quarter if used once a week. However, participants could use it for an intensive. It is best to complete it in 13 weeks or less.

Discussion-Based Facilitation

The content is most effective when used in an adult learning approach. The Socratic questions are open-ended queries that promote reflection rather than lead to a single “right” answer. Individuals can work through the Workbook independently, but it is more effective with two or more participants. The questions will assist a person in understanding how to become an emotionally healthy disciple of Jesus who can guide others with the gospel.



¹ Scott Thomas, *The Gospel Shaped Leader: Leaning on Jesus to Shepherd His People* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021).

The Gospel Shaped Leader Workbook by Scott Thomas

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What I Hope To Discover from The Gospel Shaped Leader

Expectations + Actions = Outcomes

Henry Ford is attributed to saying, “The man who thinks he can and the man who thinks he can't are both right.” If we begin a new project or course of study without expectations, it will not produce the maximal outcomes. Jesus said, “No one, after putting his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62). The plowman aims his plow toward a goal and does not keep looking back. His eye is on the target, and it keeps his work straight and effective. Set goals for your hopes in this study:

What do you hope to learn about yourself?

What do you hope to learn about emotional health?

What do you hope to learn about the gospel's role as a disciple?

How do you hope to apply this resource to your life and ministry?

Now, let's plow ahead as healthy, gospel-shaped disciples of Jesus.

The Gospel Shaped Leader

The pastor had just returned the Communion cup to the table, the weight of Christ's sacrifice still lingering. The congregation's voices had swelled in worship, their doxology declaring devotion. Yet, as he stepped into the foyer, he walked into a different kind of gathering—one not of service but of self-promotion.

A tight circle of elders stood engaged in debate, their voices low but insistent. They weren't discussing prayer, shepherding, or the flock's needs. They were jockeying for a position, each making his case for why he should be board chairman. Qualifications expressed vigorously as if leadership were a prize to be won rather than a calling to be lived.

A heaviness settled in the pastor's chest. Moments ago, they had shared the Lord's Table—a table of sacrifice. Yet here they were, grasping for status. The irony was almost too much to bear.

Then, a familiar scene from Scripture pressed into his heart. After Jesus instituted the first Lord's Supper, His own disciples had done the same thing—argued over who among them was the greatest. Christ's words stirred within him: *"I am among you as one who serves"* (Lk. 22:27).

He stepped forward, his voice steady. Not to rebuke but to remind.

"Brothers, we have just knelt at the Lord's Table. In this house, leadership isn't about sitting at the head of the table—it's about serving those at the table."

A silence settled over the group. Some crossed their arms, and others glanced at the floor. The tension was thick, a clash between selfish ambition and Christ's selfless call. The pastor maintained his tone, firm yet pleading.

"The world tells us leadership is about strategy, influence, and power. But in the kingdom of God, leadership is about surrender. Christ—our King—had every right to claim a throne, yet He took up a cross. He could have ruled from a palace, yet He chose a manger. He could have demanded service, yet He knelt to wash the feet of those who would betray Him."

He gestured toward the sanctuary, where the echoes of worship still lingered.

"The gospel shapes everything—our thinking, living, and leading. Not profit. Not politics. Not power. Jesus won by losing everything. He became poor so that we might be rich. He emptied Himself so we could be filled. If we lead in any other way, we are not leading in Christ."

His voice softened.

"So tell me, brothers—do you still wish to lead? Because in this house, the greatest among us will be the one who kneels first."

This is gospel-shaped leadership. It is not defined by ambition but by the cross. It does not grasp power but gives it away. When the gospel shapes us, we can lean on Jesus to shepherd His people through us.

The Gospel Shaped Leader

Session #1: WATCH: Gospel-Shaped Leaders Pay Careful Attention to Their Souls

Preparation: Read Chapter 1 of The Gospel Shaped Leader²

Introduction

It is time to change how we shepherd our churches and Christian ministries. The current church model is not working; we do not need a new one. We need to return to the original plan demonstrated by Christ and commanded in Scripture.

Discuss: Why is this important and relevant in today's culture?

Ministry does not end with how well believers *understand* the gospel but how well they *demonstrate* it. William Tyndale characterizes the gospel as good, merry, glad, and joyful tidings that make our hearts happy and make us sing, dance, and leap for joy.

Discuss: How does Tyndale's description involve an integrated life?

Believers in Christ do not just proclaim the good news; they embody it through their lives and interactions with others.

Discuss: What does it mean for a believer to "be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col. 1:9b-10)?

Formed by Something

The Apostle Paul tells the Ephesian elders, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

Discuss the following:

- What are your reflections on this verse?

² Scott Thomas, *The Gospel Shaped Leader: Leaning on Jesus to Shepherd His People* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021).

- What is the main idea?
- How is the main idea accomplished?
- Why is the balance between self and others important?

Significance of Emotional Health and Ministry Effectiveness

Ministry involves managing oneself and relating to others. One way those outside the church explain maturity is through what psychologists call emotional intelligence (EQ), which aligns closely with biblical wisdom and gospel formation. Emotional intelligence is essential for the effectiveness of church ministry. One expert argues that it is a prerequisite for leadership.

Discuss: Why is emotional intelligence necessary in ministry?

Four Emotional Intelligence Domains

1. Self Awareness

“For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (Rom. 12:3).

Discuss: What does Romans 12:3 suggest about self-awareness?

People with self-awareness understand their emotions and attitudes and how it affects others. They know their strengths and weaknesses and patiently allow the Lord to redeem them.

Discuss: How does self-awareness affect a believer’s ability to shepherd others?

2. Self Management

“[You were taught] to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:22–24).

People with self-management submit to King Jesus in every area of their lives. They are patient in their hardships and constant in prayer. They walk in the light with others by the power of the Spirit.

Discuss: What stands out in the description above of self-management?

3. Relational Awareness

“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:14).

People with relational awareness are thoughtful of the needs of others around them and can minister to them with gentleness. Love and grace are evident in their unspoken actions, attitudes, and emotions. They communicate with straightforwardness, transparency, and honesty.

Discuss: Why is relational awareness not more common in the local church?

4. Relational Management

“I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1–3).

Discuss: What difference would it make if the believers in a ministry exercised their ministry as Paul suggests above?

People with relational management abilities equip and encourage others and help them advance their ministry gifts. They value relationships and swiftly resolve conflicts and misunderstandings.

Google’s Shocking Revelation

After exhaustive research, the six characteristics of success for employees at Google are all soft skills:

1. Coaching
2. Communicating and listening well
3. Possessing insights into others
4. Having empathy toward and being supportive of one’s colleagues
5. Being an excellent critical thinker and problem solver

6. Making connections across complex ideas³

The Bible stresses the value of soft skills.

Discuss: Find the soft skills required for church leaders from 1 Timothy 3:1–13.

Acts 20:28

Healthy Leadership

Pay careful attention to yourself

Pay careful attention to all the flock

<p>SELF AWARENESS</p> <p>“For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned” (Rom. 12:3).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand their emotions and attitudes and how they affect others.• Know their strengths and weaknesses.• Patiently allow the Lord to develop them.	<p>RELATIONAL AWARENESS</p> <p>“For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal. 5:14).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thoughtful of the needs of others.• Love, grace, and gentleness are evident in their dealings with others.• Communicate with grace-filled candidness.
<p>SELF MANAGEMENT</p> <p>“[You were taught] to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph. 4:22–24).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Submit to King Jesus in every area of their lives.• Patient and prayerful in their hardships.• Walk in the light with others by the power of the Spirit.	<p>RELATIONAL MANAGEMENT</p> <p>“I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:2–3).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equip and encourage others and help them advance their ministry gifts.• Value relationships.• Resolve conflict and misunderstandings swiftly.

Discuss: Review the four domains above. What areas do you need to develop further?

³ Valerie Strauss, The Surprising Thing Google Learned about Its Employees and What It Means for Today’s Students,” *Washington Post*, December 20, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/12/20/the-surprising-thing-google-learned-about-its-employees-and-what-it-means-for-todays-students>

Become a Gospel-Shaped Believer

Paul encourages Timothy to “keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim. 4:16). Christ shapes our hearts and character with the gospel. Look at the list of four types of people God uses to help watch the condition of our souls on page 16 of *The Gospel Shaped Leader*.

Discuss: Which type of friend do you need to help you persist in watching your soul?

Prayer for a Healthy Soul

Lord, we have weaknesses that regularly invade our hearts and minds. They invade us with such fervor that we tremble at their persistence. You are Lord over every one of your children. You created us to care for your flock and want us to care for our own souls. Empower us to shepherd God's flock among us and be an example to the community. You are the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. When we stray, draw us back into your fold.

Homework

Read the four emotional intelligence domains and rate your EQ in each of the four major domains from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). Explain your ratings.

Self-awareness	1	2	3	4	5
Self-management	1	2	3	4	5
Relational awareness	1	2	3	4	5
Relational management	1	2	3	4	5

Write down ways you could improve in each of the following areas.

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-management
3. Relational awareness
4. Relational management

Part One

Self-Awareness

For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. Romans 12:3

Self-Awareness.

1. I am growing in understanding my emotions and moods (1 Cor. 13:12).
2. I allow God to test and refine them (Ps. 26:2).
3. I am learning how they affect others around me (Lam. 3:40).
4. I know my limitations and can assess my strengths by faith (Rom. 12:3; 1 John 1:8).
5. I am confident in the Lord's redeeming work within me and am patient in my progress (2 Tim. 1:6–7).

Discuss: What are your thoughts about the five characteristics of self-awareness?

Discuss: What are indicators that a believer is not self-aware?

The Gospel Shaped Leader

Session #2: DIE: Gospel-Shaped Leaders Sacrifice to Make a Difference

Preparation: Read Chapter 2 of The Gospel Shaped Leader

Introduction

Sacrifice is a prominent theme throughout the Bible. A sacrifice is a substitute that takes the sinner's place and bears the curse of sin. We read of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Job making sacrifices. Jesus' death was a sacrifice to bear our sins on our behalf.

Discuss: How does the sacrifice of Christ for us shape how you approach sacrifices in your life?

Sacrifice for a Cause

Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:12–13).

Discuss: What was the outcome of Jesus' sacrifice? How does this motivate you to follow his example in loving others?

Behold, the Lamb of God

John the Baptist recognized Jesus as the living sacrifice when he proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Jesus was born to die, completing his purpose for life by hanging on a cross.

Our sacrifice for others is not salvific, but it represents the One who "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7–8).

Discuss: Why was humility a prerequisite for Christ's sacrifice? Why is humility necessary for us?

The Necessity of Sacrifice

The world believes leaders ascend and others serve them. In contrast, Jesus teaches that his followers descend. If the cross of Christ teaches us anything, it's that Gospel-shaped believers sacrifice to ensure others live.

Discuss: What sacrifices are you willing to make for the benefit of others?

Sacrifice Demands Risk-Taking Action

In the gospel, we move from "How can others work for me?" to "How can I work for others?" This subtle shift makes all the difference. Paul exhorts the Church at Galatia, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Discuss: It's far too easy for Christians to perceive themselves as self-giving when self-protecting. In what ways are you protecting your life instead of sacrificing it by faith?

Conclusion

Whether big or small, God calls each of us to take risks by sacrificing for the sake of others. When we serve others, we open the door of life change for many people. When Jesus sacrificed his life for us, he made an eternal difference. How is the Lord leading you to sacrifice for others?

Prayer for Making a Difference

Lord, you gave your life to release us from the penalty of our sins. Your death set us free from condemnation. You became the Lamb that took away our sins once and for all. We can't contribute to the payment. It satisfied a Holy God. It is finished on the cross. Allow us the honor to serve others sacrificially. We give you our all, holding

*nothing back. We are yours to use as a living sacrifice, to be and do what you desire.
Help us to make a difference for your glory.*

The Gospel Shaped Leader

Session #3: WALK: Gospel-Shaped Leaders Embrace Their Father's Love

Preparation: Read Chapter 3 of *The Gospel Shaped Leader*

Introduction

Self-awareness is a growing understanding of one's emotions and moods. It starts with an awareness of our identity with the Father. The gospel compels us to live out of our identity as God's precious children. We do not work tirelessly to be accepted and loved by God; rather, we trust that we have been united with Christ, so that when God looks at *us* he says, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well-pleased." Self-awareness is not highlighting our strengths. Instead, we allow God to embrace our weaknesses and walk with us.

Discuss: Why do we struggle to *feel* loved by God?

Discuss: Look at Paul's description of the kinds of people God uses in 1 Corinthians 1:27–31. Share your reflections.

The Prodigal Son Meets the Prodigal Father

Understanding God's love for us is foundational to our ability to love others and receive love. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

The prodigal son is a familiar story (Luke 15:11–31). The son asks for his inheritance before his father dies. Dad has to sell off some of his property to oblige the selfish son. The son wastes all his money on a reckless lifestyle that includes prostitutes (15:30). He goes to work in a pigsty and grows so hungry that the pig slop looks appealing. So, he returns to his father to beg for mercy.

The word *prodigal* can mean "wasteful" or "careless." It can also mean "extravagant" or "overwhelming." The latter describes the father's response to the returning son. He fully restores his sonship. The father runs out to meet the son and embraces him as a gift of grace.

Discuss: Do you know that God has displayed this "prodigal" love of the father toward you? Do you display the "prodigal" love of the father toward others??

Henri Nouwen was a spiritual thinker who wrote about the life of Jesus and the love of God in ways that inspired countless people to trust God more fully. He wrote about God's embracing heart in the following manner.⁴

For most of my life, I have struggled to find, know, and love God. I have tried hard to follow the guidelines of the spiritual life—pray always, work for others, read the Scriptures—and avoid the many temptations to dissipate myself. I have failed many times but always tried again, even when I was close to despair.

Now I wonder whether I have sufficiently realized that God has been trying to find, know, and love me all this time. The question is not “How am I to find God?” but “How am I to let God find me?” The question is not “How am I to know God?” but “How am I to let God know me?” And finally, the question is not “How am I to love God?” but “How am I to let God love me?” God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home.

Discuss: How do you relate to Nouwen's pondering heart?

The Prodigal Disciple Maker

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us, and his love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:7–8, 11–12).

Discuss: How will embracing God's love change how you disciple others?

Prayer to Embrace the Father's Love

Lord, let us boast in you and not in any human accomplishment. We bear no great gifts—only a heart to receive your love for us. You clothe us with your righteousness and desire to walk every step with us. Even in our carelessness, you embraced us and welcomed us back into your presence as your children, holy and beloved. Thank you that we can rest in your embrace.

⁴ Nouwen, Henri. “God Longs to Bring Me Home.” *Henri Nouwen*, 7 Feb. 2022, <https://henrinouwen.org/meditations/god-longs-to-bring-me-home/>.

The Gospel Shaped Leader

Session #4: PLAN: Gospel-Shaped Leaders Design Their Lives with God's Purpose

Preparation: Read Chapter 4 of The Gospel Shaped Leader

Introduction

Jonathan Edwards said a person of ordinary abilities would accomplish more with enthusiasm and resolve than someone ten times more gifted without zeal and resolve.⁵ Regarding work and mission, the relentless effort to glorify God in all our endeavors is more important than intelligence, skill, or riches. Ephesians 2:10 ties our labor directly to the gospel: we were “created *in* Christ Jesus *for* good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (See also Eccl. 9:10 and Col. 3:23).

John Piper challenges us to pursue these “good works” with God-glorifying ambition: “Desire that your life count for something great! Long for your life to have eternal significance. Want this! Don’t coast through life without a passion” (John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*).

Discuss: How does the gospel shape your pursuit of God’s purpose for your life and ministry?

Self-awareness has three dimensions.

1. We are dying to ourselves as servants of Christ for the good of others (John 10:11).
2. We are walking with God, aware of our identity with our Father.
3. We know what we are to be and do as servants who belong to God.

Discuss: Which of these three is the most difficult for you to practice?

Envision, Design, Execute, and Trust: Four Ways We Glorify God with Our Passion

1. **Envision God’s purpose for your life with clarity.** The most fruitful people have a clear vision. Their quiet spirits can focus on what God calls them to be and do. They cannot follow God’s voice when they listen to the noise, critics, and

⁵ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: 1995), loc. 77788, Kindle.

unreasonable demands of others. A frazzled ministry volunteer or leader brings chaos, whereas a quieted spirit brings peace.

Discuss: How does reflecting on the gospel quiet your spirit? How does quieting your spirit help you realign with God's purpose for your life?

2. **Plan how you will accomplish God's purpose for your life.** Jesus said no one builds a tower without first counting the cost, and no king goes to war without having a plan (Luke 14:28–32).
3. **Execute the plan by faith.** Get busy and make no excuses.
4. **Trust God for the results and rest from your labors.** Paul says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but *God gave the growth*. So, neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, *but only God who gives the growth*" (1 Cor. 3:6–7, emphasis added).

Discuss: What difference would it make in your life if you followed the four steps above?

Disabled and Determined

Excuses are easy. Many disadvantaged people accomplish incredible feats. When God gives us a passion and vision to achieve something, we can set aside every reason and pursue it with courage. Make your life count by going for it. In the words of William Carey, "Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God."

Discuss: What keeps you from attempting "great things" for God??

Narcissism Is not a Ministry Style.

The Mayo Clinic describes narcissistic personality disorder as "a mental condition in which people have an inflated sense of their importance, a deep need for excessive attention and admiration, troubled relationships, and a lack of empathy for others." They

further add, “behind this mask of extreme confidence lies a fragile self-esteem that's vulnerable to the slightest criticism.”⁶

Discuss: What are the results of a narcissistic personality within the church?

Follow God's Purpose for Your Life

Jesus said, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). God has a purpose for his followers: they are to make disciples. And baked into this purpose is a promise: “I will *make* [transform, shape, resource, enable] you fishers of men.” The disciples immediately leave their nets, boats, and family and follow him (Mat. 4:20–22).

Discuss: How does God's promise instill confidence to obey his purpose?

Do not Quit

When we resolve to glorify God regardless of circumstances, we will overcome discouraging seasons. Press on, dear believer. God can use you, an ordinary man or woman with failures, flaws, and fears, if you understand your God-glorifying purpose in life and pursue it faithfully. It is not too late to “lead the life that the Lord has assigned to [you], and to which God has called [you]” (1 Cor. 7:17). Do not quit.

Discuss: What are ways we can fight discouragement?

Prayer for a Life with Purpose

Lord, we give you our lives for the gospel's sake. Quiet our souls. Help us follow your command to be fishers of men. We want to be and do what you desire. Help us submit to your plan for our lives. The Church belongs to you, Jesus, and we trust your outcomes by faith. We lay down our lives for your sheep. Help us persevere.

6

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/narcissistic-personality-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20366662>

PART TWO

Self-Management

You were taught, concerning your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:22-24 (NIV)

Five Principles of Self-Management.

1. I am submitting my mind, will, and emotions to the desires of the Spirit and not to the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16–26).
2. The gospel continually shapes me (Phil. 1:27) through the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:4–11).
3. I confess my sins and acknowledge my weaknesses (1 John 1:7–9).
4. I strive for holiness and renewing my mind, which leads to a transformed life (Rom. 12:1–2).
5. With my hope in Jesus, I am patient in hardships and constant in prayer (Rom. 12:12).

Discuss: How would a person begin practicing the five characteristics of self-management?

Discuss: Think outside of the obvious disqualifying sins. What does self-management look like for us?

The Gospel Shaped Leader

Session #5: STAND: Gospel-Shaped Leaders Pursue Integrity

Preparation: Read Chapter 5 of The Gospel Shaped Leader

Introduction

Integrity is the most critical asset of a Christian. Aristotle described integrity as truth in words and truth in deeds. Without integrity, we are useless and, in fact, toxic to everyone around us. Paul tells believers that his battle for integrity is won only through Jesus Christ and not by sheer discipline. Trying harder is not the solution. Jesus is the answer to our pursuit of goodness.

“For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate...Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God **through Jesus Christ our Lord!**” (Rom. 7:15, 24–25a, emphasis added).

Temptations come, but we do not have to succumb, no matter how weak or discouraged we feel. Integrity is not dependent on *our* ability to fight sin. We win by leaning on *Jesus*.

“But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer **through Him** who loved us” (Rom. 8:37, LSB).

Self-management is the second dimension of emotional intelligence. *Self*-management is a misnomer because we must have Jesus and a community of faithful friends to submit our minds, will, and emotions to the desires of the Spirit.

Discuss: What practical ways could your community become champions of integrity with one another?

The Danger of Success

Power without character results in chaos. Power with character results in gentleness.

Behold, your King is coming to you,
Lowly and mounted on a donkey,
And on a colt, the foal of a pack animal. (Mat. 21:5; cf. Zech. 9:9)

Discuss: How *powerful* is Jesus? How is his character displayed in this verse?

Sin Management

Hiding sin is self-deception. A person who repeatedly compromises their integrity will crash unless they repent. Sin has no engine governor to control its speed.

But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then, when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully matured, it brings death (Jas. 1:14–15).

Discuss: How does the gospel embolden us to kill our sin in its infancy? Do you have people you can confess your sins to before they grow “mature”?

Stop the Descent

Christians strive to live with integrity in every area of their lives, have no secret compartments, and walk in the light. This is a biblical ideal and a discipleship expectation. Walking in the light entails confessing sin and openly discussing one’s heart condition, frustrations, emotions, and longings.

Discuss: Read 1 John 1:5–10 and discuss the spiritual benefits of practicing this among other believers.

Gospel-shaped believers address disobedience to God by admitting sin, accepting forgiveness, and acting in line with their identity.

1. Admit your sin. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).
2. Accept God’s forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” 1 John 1:9). “The blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7b).
3. Align with your identity as a cleansed and forgiven child of God.

Discuss: Which of the three above is the most difficult for you? Why?

What is the Worst Thing That Can Happen?

Think of a sin you haven't been able to shake. Write down the worst things that can happen if that sin is *not* put to death through the Spirit's power. Be as comprehensive as possible. (An optional exercise is considering a common sin among your age, gender, and church.)

This exercise should sober you and motivate you to fight against your flesh. Still, we do not have to dwell on our sins and inadequacies. "For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely," said Scottish pastor Robert Murray McCheyne. Look to Christ's forgiveness, grace, and love as you address your sins.

Discuss: How have you been sobered by this exercise? How can you kill this sin? As you look at Christ, how does he give you hope in your fight of resistance?

Actions to Integrate Integrity

1. Own your mistaken words, failures, and mistakes.

The cross was required because of our sin (1 John 1:8). We do not disappoint others when we sin and subsequently confess and repent. But we frustrate others when we do not take responsibility and then blame someone or something else.

2. Stay honest with all people.

Be truthful with others and treat them with honor and respect. It is not easy, but it can be done gracefully rather than harshly. If we are offended by someone's actions, we must bring it to their attention (Mat. 18:15).

3. Expect to be misunderstood.

We must resist taking accusations personally. Very few people understand our motivation and intent. If our actions hurt someone—even if we did not intend to—we are to seek reconciliation quickly (Mat. 5:23-24).

4. Allow God to vindicate you.

Retaliation and a counter-attack will only intensify friction between people. Let the Lord vindicate you while you walk in integrity, "for it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing good rather than for doing wrong" (1 Pet. 3:17).

5. Flee sin and pursue holiness.

Integrity means knowing what sins we are most vulnerable to and running in the opposite direction. Timothy tells us to flee, run away, escape

youthful lusts, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace (2 Tim. 2:22).

Discuss: Look over the five principles for integrity above. Where do you need to walk by faith and practice with more intentionality?

The Other Side of Integrity

Integrity means living a whole and pure life before the Lord and others. It also means being faithful to the gifts entrusted to you. We are not to waste our talents. We identify ways to use our gifts, skills, resources, and time for the glory of King Jesus. In addition to natural abilities, each believer has a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12:7, 11), and Paul instructs us to use them within the local body for its benefit (Rom. 12:6–7).

Prayer for Integrity,

Lord, we are incomplete without you. We do not always understand why we think and do what we do. Thank you for delivering us from the failings of our wretched body. Help us walk in the light with you and with others. Help us confess our sins quickly. When our hearts are deceitful, may we trust in your Word and do the right thing. Keep us from wickedness and empower us to escape it as fast as possible. Let us walk with integrity at all times.

The Gospel Shaped Leader

Session #6: LEARN: Gospel-Shaped Leaders Explore New Ideas

Preparation: Read Chapter 6 of *The Gospel-Shaped Leader*

Introduction

The Church must proclaim the gospel, observe the sacraments, equip the saints, and exercise church discipline through biblically qualified leaders. Beyond that, there is a lot of latitude for innovation, and we can remain open to new ideas for proclaiming the gospel.

In fact, the Gospel-shaped leader is *more* than merely *open* to new ideas but is compelled by the value of the gospel and the spiritual needs around him to labor for effectiveness. Paul said that he toiled for the effectiveness of the gospel in his ministry, “struggling with all [Christ’s] energy that he powerfully works within me” (Col. 1:27). Surely using “all one’s energy” includes laboring to imagine ways to improve effectiveness. Change is inevitable in the local church. She must regularly adapt to meet the needs of the community. Therefore, learning agility is vital for followers of Christ. Learning agility is “the willingness and ability to learn from experience, and subsequently, apply that learning to perform successfully under new or first-time conditions.”⁷

Discuss: How have you seen churches get stuck using ineffective methods? How have you seen ministries apply “learning agility” in their labor to communicate the gospel?

Learning agility falls under the quadrant of self-management, which includes submitting mind, will, and emotions to the desires of the Spirit. Consider the following verses.

- 4 Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
 teach me your paths.
 - 5 Lead me in your truth and teach me,
 for you are the God of my salvation;
 For you I wait all day long.
- (Ps. 24:4–5)
- 7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;

⁷ Kenneth P. De Meuse, Guangrong Dai, George Hallenbeck, “Learning agility: A construct whose time has come,” *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 62(2) (June 2010): 120, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019988>.

fools despise wisdom and instruction.
(Prov. 1:7)

Discuss: What do the Scriptures above teach us about learning agility?

Four Characteristics of Learning Agility

1. **Change Maker.** Change-makers initiate and welcome change in an organization for the good of others. Jesus invited his disciples to leave everything and follow him.
2. **People Initiator.** Jesus initiated a conversation with a woman whom others would not interact (John 4). We must go beyond our “comfortable relationships” and listen to the least likely ones.
3. **Risk Taker.** We can take risks personally and organizationally. For instance, we can start a new ministry, add a service, or plant a new church.
4. **Problem Solver.** Followers of Jesus approach problems with a faith-based, relentless, can-do attitude and handle failures with healthy perseverance.

Discuss: Which of the above four do you demonstrate well, and which will need effort?

Learning Agility in the Church

The Christian life *begins* with learning the gospel. Belief in the accomplished work of Christ begins with knowledge about him. God gives believers “the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him” (Eph. 1:17b). At the base level, a disciple of Jesus is a learner and pupil of Jesus. They are learners (Greek, *mathetes*), devoted to learning (Greek, *manthano*), and striving to become a scholar (Latin, *discipulus*). The word *disciple* is found in the Gospels and Acts and always means the pupil or learner of someone.

Discuss: How would you define a disciple of Jesus?

Disciples can become idle in pursuing new ideas to advance the church. Idleness is the sin of burying a talent in the ground rather than investing it fruitfully. God entrusts his followers with an assignment to multiply God's kingdom.

Discuss: How does the parable of the steward apply to learning and being a disciple (Mat. 25:14—30)?

Discuss: What steps will you take to become a disciple with learning agility?

Renewing the Mind

R. C. Sproul reminds us, "Christianity is a faith of mind and heart. God does not call us to surrender our rational faculties when we trust His Son; rather, it is only in serving Him that we use our minds as He created them."⁸

Discuss: Read Romans 12:1–2 and comment on how learning helps one follow Jesus better.

Keep Learning

"Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but *sinners*" (Mat. 9:13, emphasis added).

Discuss: How does Jesus's rebuke of the Pharisees encourage us, as his disciples, to employ learning agility?

Learning about God and his Church never ends and never grows old. As you mature in Christ and age, demonstrate what it means to remain an agile disciple while you selflessly invest in the next generation.

⁸ R. C. Sproul, "Renewing Your Mind," <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/renewing-your-mind/>

Prayer for a Learning Spirit

Lord, give us a heart and mind that long to know your ways and your truth. Renew our minds through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the Helper. Use what we learn to be an example for others. Your Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Teach us, Lord, and lead us, for you are the God of my salvation.

The Gospel Shaped Leader

Session #7: REST: Gospel-Shaped Leaders Commit to Sabbath

Preparation: Read Chapter 7 of The Gospel Shaped Leader

Introduction

The author of Hebrews describes believing the gospel as “entering God’s rest” (Heb. 4:9). The point of the Sabbath in the Old Testament was to point to the *spiritual* rest that God offered his people—they anticipated it when they looked forward to the promised land. Still, we know that we enjoy it through belief in Christ. When the Jews celebrated the Sabbath, they celebrated God’s completed work of Creation. When we take time off as Christians, we too can let the day of rest serve as a metaphor that agrees with Christ’s words on the cross: “It is finished.”

Case Study: Mari is an energetic woman married to Stan, and they have three young children under the age of 10. They homeschool their children. Mari is a gifted teacher of children. She volunteers every week for one service. Stan, a nurse practitioner, is a deacon that leads the church’s medical emergency response team. Mari wants to start a midweek program for children at church, but Stan is afraid she is spread too thin. She spends all day Saturday preparing her lessons for church, and they are busy on Sunday mornings. Mari has a passion for leading this midweek program and believes it could lead to the spiritual conversions of many children.

Discuss: Mari asks for your counsel. What do you tell her?

Churches and ministries have a passion and vision to expand the gospel, make disciples, teach, train, and reach people outside the church. Often, we push people beyond a healthy rhythm because we value their contribution to the ministry. But when we do this, the individual and the organization suffer.

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. . . . For in six days, the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Ex. 20:8, 11).

Discuss: What do you understand about the Sabbath?

Theologian R. C. Sproul gives us insight into the reason behind the Sabbath.

Mankind was not made for restlessness. He was made for that inner peace, stability, and quietude that comes from the fulfillment of man's nature as it relates to God.

Bruce Waltke explains the Sabbath's origin.

By observing the Sabbath, Israel regularly confesses that their God is Lord of all. He made the Sabbath holy to rest "from all the work of creating that he had done" (Gen. 2:3). The Sabbath reminds God's image that they are his regents to serve him.⁹

While Christ fulfilled the Sabbath as a law, the principle of having rhythms of rest remains valuable for believers today. C. H. Spurgeon drew out this value for his young students:

Rest time is not waste time. It is economy to gather fresh strength...a little pause prepares the mind for greater service in the good cause...It is wisdom to take occasional furlough. In the long run, we shall do more by sometimes doing less.

Discuss: Look at the three quotes above. Compare and contrast how we function in life and church.

Rest Makes You Stronger

God is the Author and Creator of rest. He does not expect us to work nonstop. He gave Saturdays to Israel as a weekly refreshment and a pointer ahead to the gospel. How much more fitting is it for believers to take a day off as a reminder of Christ's work? A day of rest is a gift to be received from our benevolent Father.

Discuss: Why do you think rested disciples become more faithful followers of Jesus?

⁹ Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 71–72.

Self-management is a partnership with the Holy Spirit to control our emotions and act with transparency and integrity. To manage self means managing the whole person: body, spirit, and soul (mind, will, and emotions). Paul identifies this whole self in 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your *whole spirit and soul and body* be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (emphasis added).

You matter to God—your whole self. Rest matters to God. It is his gift to us for his glory.

Resting in Christ’s Finished Work

The work of the gospel means that we no longer have to strive for achievement, approval, or acceptance. God has already accepted us through the person and work of Jesus Christ. One day, we will rest in his presence. This eternal rest is the ultimate joy, but not in our accomplishments. It is the day when we will cease striving and receive eternal Sabbath rest. It will end all uncertainty, conflict, anxiety, fatigue, financial shortage, and relational angst. Unfettered peace will dominate our final Sabbath.

1. We walk in line with the gospel by practicing this rest from God.
2. The Sabbath was a shadow pointing to Christ’s finished work on the cross (Col. 2:16-17).
3. Our rest from work highlights that our hope is not in our work but in God, who gave us a purpose and plan for our lives.

Discuss: What life changes need consideration in light of the section above?

Restlessness Extends to Others

If we don’t learn to rest in Christ, we will impose that unrest on others. It will affect all our relationships, beginning with God and extending to those closest to us. Our restlessness evokes a perception that others are never good enough or doing enough to satisfy us.

Restless Disciple	Rested Disciple
<input type="checkbox"/> My work is up to me.	<input type="checkbox"/> I depend upon God, who gives me the ability and knowledge to accomplish work (Ex. 31:1-5).
<input type="checkbox"/> My work is my identity.	<input type="checkbox"/> I am a beloved child of God (Gal. 3:26).
<input type="checkbox"/> If I don't work, I won't produce.	<input type="checkbox"/> I am free to work heartily unto the Lord (Col. 3:23; Eccl. 9:10).
<input type="checkbox"/> I would prefer to burn out than rust out.	<input type="checkbox"/> I am focused on glorifying God in my work (1 Cor. 10:31).
<input type="checkbox"/> I am proud of my work and accomplishments.	<input type="checkbox"/> I find joy in my sovereign Lord, who assigns me work for his glory (Acts 17:26).
<input type="checkbox"/> I feel enslaved to my myriad duties.	<input type="checkbox"/> I am bound to Christ (Rom. 7:1, 4-6).

Discuss: Look at the chart above. Make a mark in the box next to the descriptor that best describes you between restless and rested. How will you move from restless to rest?

Confessing Our Restlessness

As with all sins, we can confess and repent of the sin of restlessness and be forgiven. We can start anew and act in faith that there is a time to work and a time to rest (Eccl. 3:1-8).

Manage Self Before Managing Others

Read this section in *The Gospel Shaped Leader*, pages 91–92. Write a summary of each of the following in your own words.

1. **God created rest *for* humanity.**
2. **Rest points to our eternal rest.**
3. **Rest is holy.**

4. **Believers need to reflect on their need for Christ.**
5. **Be watchful for our fellow church disciple-makers.**

Prayer for a Rested Soul

Lord, from this day forward, we relinquish control. We will rest in you and your will to build your kingdom. We will enjoy every aspect of the journey you are taking us. We will worship you and glorify you by taking a day off. We are declared righteous by the unmerited gift of Jesus. You love us despite our ongoing sins. Lead us to turn and see your glory—especially when the demands of ministry come like an avalanche. Help us to remember that you said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mat. 11:28–30). Lord, help our unbelief.

PART THREE

Relational Awareness

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal. 5:14).

Relational Awareness

1. I am being thoughtful of others around me (Phil. 2:3).
2. I am compassionate about the needs of others (Mat. 9:35–38).
3. I listen to others as an act of love (Phil. 1:9–10).
4. I can discern others’ unspoken actions, attitudes, and emotions (1 John 4:1).
5. I seek to communicate straightforwardly, transparently, and honestly (Mat. 5:37).

Discuss: How is this dimension of emotional intelligence extremely vital to the life of a church?

The Gospel Shaped Leader

Session #8: LOVE: Gospel-Shaped Leaders Love the Local Church

Preparation: Read Chapter 8 of The Gospel Shaped Leader

Introduction

Here is the good news: Jesus Christ died, was buried, and rose again . . . *to obtain the Church*.

Does that feel like a weird way to present the gospel? What about the forgiveness of sins and individual believers? Well, those are also good ways to present the gospel. But when Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, he tells them “to care for the church of God, which he obtained *with his own blood*” (20:28). If you do not recognize that Jesus died so that he could have the Church—and if you do not love the Church for this reason—you do not yet understand the gospel.

Discuss: How does that statement above compare to the way we view the Church?

Discuss: How do we conform our local assembly to this principle about the Church?

C. H. Spurgeon once said, “If I had never joined a church till I had found one that was perfect, I should never have joined one at all; and the moment I did join it, if I had found one, I should have spoiled it, for it would not have been a perfect church after I had become a member of it. Still, imperfect as it is, it is the dearest place on earth to us.”¹⁰

Discuss: What do you think about those claiming to love Jesus but not his church?

¹⁰ C. H. Spurgeon and Tom Carter, *Spurgeon at His Best: Over 2200 Striking Quotations from the World's Most Exhaustive and Widely-Read Sermon Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988).

“The church . . . is a hospital in which nobody is completely well, and anyone can relapse at any time.”¹¹ (J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, quoted in *The Gospel Shaped Leader*, p. 96).

Augustine said of the church, “Let us honor her, for she is the bride of so great a Lord. . . Great and unheard of is the bridegroom’s gracious generosity; he found her a whore, he made her a virgin.”¹²

Discuss: What is the way church attendees commonly perceive the church? How is that different from the way that committed disciples view her?

Love the Church

Christians are not exempt from being surly and stubborn. But God calls us to love even these sometimes saints.

A leader with spiritual maturity is relationally aware, thoughtful of others around them, and compassionate about their needs (Mat. 9:35–38). Relationally aware leaders listen to others as an act of love and can discern their unspoken actions, attitudes, and emotions (Phil. 1:9–10; 1 John 4:1). They can also apply biblical wisdom in relational circumstances (Jas. 1:5).

Discuss: Read Francis Schaeffer’s five guidelines about disagreeing with others on page 99 of *The Gospel-Shaped Leader*. Which one(s) is/are the most difficult to practice?

Jesus is Worthy of Our Love

And he [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (Col. 1:18)

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Mat. 22:37)

The church may not always be loveable, but Jesus loves her, died for her, and will sanctify and cleanse her as his bride (Eph. 5:25-27).

¹¹ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, quoted in *The Gospel Shaped Leader*, p. 96.

¹² *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Sermons III* (184-229Z), trans. Edmund Hill (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1993), 145.

Discuss: What does the following maxim mean? *If we love Jesus, we will love his bride.*

Leaders Lead by Loving

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: *just as* I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35, emphasis added).

God’s work cannot be accomplished through disciples who are devoid of love for Jesus or his bride. Jesus said, “Love others *just as* I have loved you.” Both must be present for followers to be made.

Discuss: Why is relational awareness necessary to exercise Christ’s love for the body?

Lead the Church as One Who Reflects Christ’s Love for the Church

Jesus is the hope of the world. His followers reflect his nature, most notably his love. Making disciples shows how much Jesus loves them and wants them to love Jesus and others. We set an example for them. After serving them through foot washing, Jesus says, “For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you” (John 13:15).

Discuss: How is sacrificial service to others demonstrating Christ’s love?

Prayer to Love the Church

Lord, help us love your bride as you do. Receive her with devotedness, mercy, and kindness. We, your cherished bride, once sought other lovers who could never satisfy us. Cleanse us with the water of your Word. Make us holy and without blemish so that we can love our local church body as you love her.

The Gospel Shaped Leader

Session #9: SERVE: Gospel-Shaped Leaders Lead with Humility

Preparation: Read Chapter 9 of *The Gospel Shaped Leader*

Introduction

To receive the gospel is fundamentally an act of humility. It is to agree with God's verdict: *Yes, Lord—I am poor, pitiful, and helpless. I need you more than anything. Without you, I can do nothing.* James puts it this way: "God opposes the proud, but gives *grace* to the humble" (Jas. 4:6).

To which every gospel-believing Christian says: *Amen. Yes, he does.*

Augustine, a fourth-century theologian and respected church father, was asked: "*What three graces does a minister need most?*" His answer: *Humility. Humility. Humility.*¹³

Discuss: Why would you think Augustine would give this answer?

Discuss: Is humility still a needed attribute of Christ's disciples? If so, how is humility expressed in the church today?

Humility is neither arrogant nor timid. An arrogant disciple needs to realize that "apart from me, you can do nothing" (John 15:5). On the other hand, a timid follower of Jesus is self-centered. This person may not be willing to risk personal loss. Therefore, they do not attempt anything of lasting value. "For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control" (2 Tim. 1:7).

Discuss: How could arrogance and timidity both be self-centered?

¹³ Augustine, "Letters of St. Augustine," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 1:445–46.

Utmost Evil—The Essence of Sin

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18). The Message Bible translates it this way: “First pride, then the crash—the bigger the ego, the harder the fall.”

C. S. Lewis calls pride the utmost evil. He correlates pride with the devil (see full quote on page 107).

John Stott calls pride our greatest enemy and humility our greatest friend.

Humility is not just a discipleship trait; it is the foundation.

Clay Pots are (Not) Amazing

Paul likens believers to ordinary jars of clay, like the styrofoam take-out containers of our current culture. “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Cor. 4:7).

Discuss: How does our weakness work in favor of the gospel?

The treasure we hold in our common container is the gospel of Jesus Christ, his saving message of hope through faith. The container cannot outshine the treasure.

Break the Container

A broken, sobbing, unnamed woman shows up at the home of Simon the Pharisee, where Jesus is dining (Luke 7:36–50). She has been a notorious sinner in the community. It appears that she has an alabaster flask of expensive ointment to anoint Jesus for forgiving her sin.

The Pharisees despise her for her sinfulness and for having the audacity to wipe the ointment on Jesus’s feet. But Jesus uses this incident to explain the gospel to the Pharisees by telling them a story about its forgiving power.

Jesus forgives the sinful woman and releases her in peace. The broken treasure lavishly releases the healing ointment. A gospel-shaped disciple doesn’t demand to be the pretentious vase in the house’s foyer but rather the humble clay pot that carries the treasure and that is broken to release the light of the glory of God through Christ. The pleasant aroma of the woman’s ointment fills the room in contrast to the stench of the

Pharisee's self-righteousness. The balm of forgiveness can heal, whereas self-righteousness only decays everything around it.

Discuss: What is one principle you can apply from the passage below?

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, *but emptied himself*, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, *he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross* (Phil. 2:5–8, emphasis added)

Prayer for Humility

Lord, apart from you, we can do nothing. We know this, and yet, pride creeps in like a slithering snake trying to convince us to take credit for what you do through our feeble efforts. Enable us to walk humbly before you. We are an ointment flask for your glory. You are the healing oil. Make us gentle and lowly in heart and empty of self. We revel that we can be your servant.

The Gospel Shaped Leader

Session #10: LOVE: Gospel-Shaped Leaders Communicate with Grace-Filled Candor

Preparation: Read Chapter 10 of *The Gospel-Shaped Leader*

Introduction

Since Jesus *is* Truth and Love, we must speak about what is true and loving when we proclaim Christ. We have united with Christ and one another as members of his body. What unites us? Truth and love. This is the basis for us speaking truth to one another:

Paul says in Ephesians 4:25 that we are to each “speak the truth with [our] neighbor, *for* we are *members* one of another.” Believing in the gospel unites us with other believers. Speaking falsely strikes at the very gospel foundation of that unity. If we believe and love the gospel, we will not speak falsely with one another—we will speak truthfully.

Any immature Christian can be forceful, unheeding, and unloving. Only a true man and woman of God can be gentle.¹⁴ “If anyone is caught in a transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal. 6:1). How a Christian speaks to other believers inspires or suffocates spiritual discipleship. Jesus said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mat. 11:28–30).

Discuss: How can we be gentle *and* firm when speaking to others?

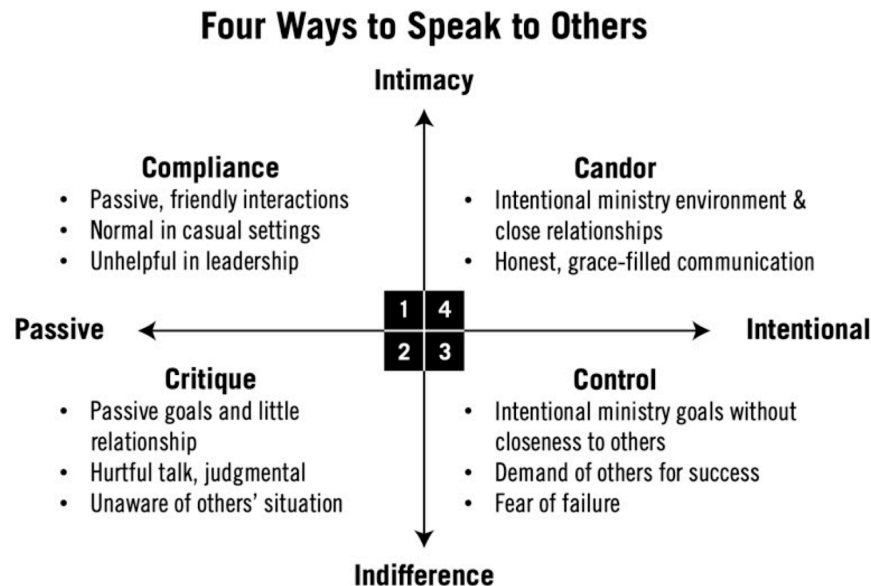
Discuss: In our daily communication with others, how closely does our speaking to others line up with the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23)?

1. Love
2. Joy
3. Peace
4. Patience
5. Kindness
6. Goodness
7. Faithfulness
8. Gentleness
9. Self-Control

¹⁴ Dane Ortlund, *Want to be Like Jesus? Be Gentle*, The Gospel Coalition, October 17, 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/want-jesus-gentle/>

Four Ways to Speak to Others

Discuss: In the diagram below, what quadrant do people usually communicate? Does our style change our communication at home, work, or church? See *The Gospel-Shaped Leader*, pages 117–122, for further explanation of this illustration.



Leadership is Always Relational

Discipling another person with grace-filled honesty requires that we first have a relationship with them. We must regularly invest time, energy, and emotion toward them. Gospel-shaped disciple-makers limit addressing conflict with people outside their relationship circle. The internet and social media warp this concept. We can only disciple those with whom we are in a close relationship. In other words, we have relational awareness.

Discuss: Why is it important to understand and apply this?

Apply Grace-Filled Candor as a Generous Encourager

We use grace-filled candor when we encourage others around us. We commit to the physical needs of a few people around us and ignore giving encouraging words everyone needs. Truett Cathy (founder of Chick-fil-A) was fond of saying, “How can you tell if someone needs encouragement?” His answer was, “They are breathing.” That is

also true for every Christian, whether they eat chicken or not. An encouraging word is something we possess. Why would we be stingy with words of affirmation, compassion, praise, and honor? “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in your power to do it” (Prov. 3:27). Consider this verse rewritten:

Never walk away from someone who is discouraged;
your words could be *God’s* encouragement for that person.
Do not tell your neighbor, “I do not know what to say,”
or “I am too busy,”
when the encouragement is right there on your lips.

(adapted from Prov. 3:27, MSG)

Discuss: Why are followers of Jesus, of all people, stingy with their words of affirmation and encouragement for others?

Grace-Filled Candor Keeps Pursuing Others

God’s love for us is relentless. He did not give up on Adam and Eve, the first sinners when they disobeyed in the Garden (Gen. 3). He did not give up on Abraham when he did not believe that God could fulfill his promise (Gen. 16). Jacob tricked his brother (Gen. 27), Joseph’s brothers sold Him into slavery (Gen. 37). Yet, God did not give up on them. Moses disobediently struck the rock (Num. 20), and David sinned with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11). God continued his pursuit of them. Moreover, he did not give up on Peter when he denied him three times (Matt. 26).

Discuss: How did God show this relentless love to Jonah when he ran because God wanted to show mercy to the Ninevites?

Grace-Filled Candor Displays the Gospel

“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (Col. 4:6).

When we speak with gentle honesty to others, it is a beautiful picture of the Good News of grace. It is honesty *with* grace, not *without* grace or grace *without* honesty. Relational awareness is necessary to communicate with grace-filled candor. See pages 127–128 for an explanation of the principles below.

1. Limit our candor to those with whom we have relationships.
2. Always speak with graciousness (Col. 4:6) and the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23).
3. Meet in person, if possible, but never confront in written form. Reserve that for praise.
4. Be straightforward, caring, and Christ-like as a gentle shepherd.

Discuss: In light of this chapter's content, how must we repent?

Prayer for Communication with Grace

Lord, we want to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit in our words: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Enable us to speak the truth in love, growing in every way to be more and more like Christ. Let our words always be gracious and valuable for the kingdom.

PART FOUR

Relational Management

I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:1–3

Relational Management.

1. I apply biblical wisdom in relational circumstances (Jas. 1:5).
2. I develop others (Eph. 4:11, 16).
3. I resolve relational conflicts (Phil. 4:2) and reconcile broken relationships (Mat. 5:23–24; 18:15; Rom. 12:18).
4. I build relationships to accomplish goals (Heb. 10:24–25).

Discuss: How vital is relational management in Christian ministry?

Discuss: What is the outcome in ministry when relational management is not practiced biblically?

The Gospel-Shaped Leader

Session #11: GUIDE: Gospel-Shaped Leaders Relate as Family

Preparation: Read Chapter 11 of The Gospel Shaped Leader

Introduction

The good news of the gospel is . . . that we have been incorporated into “the household of God” (Eph. 2:18). As we function in the home, we operate in the church. The parenthetical explanation at the end of verse five below emphasizes that the qualities of home and church require the same skill set.

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. . . . He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?) (1 Tim. 3:1, 4–5).

Every family has older and younger members. Paul provides the biblical perspective.

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity (1 Tim. 5:1–2).

Churches often adopt business principles in their functional operations, which puts pressure on the congregation and pastors. The minister uses the congregants to grow the church instead of the church growing the people, and the congregation pressures the minister to perform and produce results. Both cases lead to a transactional relationship rather than a familial tone.

Discuss: How common is this familial culture in churches today?

Guide God’s Family with Emotional Maturity

The Lord instructs us to function within the church with all humility, gentleness, patience, love, unity, and peace (Eph. 4:1–3). This environment is necessary to equip the body to serve and build one another (Eph. 4:11–16).

The family dynamic is the best teacher for managing relationships. We relate to our family differently than we do anyone else. It changes the tone and the outcome considerably.

God Adopts Us into His Family

Believers in Jesus Christ are sons and daughters, not indentured servants.

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God (Gal. 4:4–7).

Salvation means an orphan child becomes an adopted child that a family loves and welcomes as its own. Adoption is only possible through Jesus Christ.

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” (Rom. 8:15).

Discuss: How does this adoption change how we interact with others in the church?

Jesus Relates as Family

Jesus repeatedly exercises patience with his disciples. He refers to them as “children” (John 21:5) and to his followers gathered at the crucifixion as “my mother,” “my brothers,” and “my sister” (Mat. 12:48–50).

Further, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray to “our Father in heaven” (Mat. 6:9). The filial language informs our relationship with God, Jesus, and each other.

Paul Leads as Father and Brother

Discuss: What familial terms does Paul refer to others in the following passages?

- 1 Thessalonians 2:7–8, 11–12
- 2 Timothy 1:2–4
- Titus 1:4–5
- 1 Peter 5:12

Discuss: How would this kind of relationship bear spiritual fruit in our lives?

We Make Disciples as God's Children

Disciple-makers are children of God, unlike the children of the devil (1 John 3:1, 10).

Discuss: Look at the contrasting list on page 139 of *The Gospel-Shaped Leader*. Which ones are the most difficult to exemplify?

Time to Break the Cycle

Godly family members will sacrifice their lives for the good of others in the family. They would never sacrifice a family member for their own benefit, even if that person caused trouble.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others (Phil. 2:3–4).

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor (Rom. 12:10).

Discuss: Look at the passages above. What is the best way to deal with a church member sinning against another person?

Prayer for Relating as Family

Lord, the church is a family to love, guide, admonish, and encourage. Help us to regard those in the family as mothers, fathers, sisters, and brothers—all children of God. Let our disciple-making be characterized by humility, gentleness, patience, love, unity, and peacemaking. Thank you for adopting us into your family through the finished work of Christ. Thank you to the leaders of the family who are looking out for our best interests, including our holiness. We don't always act as your child, but you always approach us as our Father.

The Gospel-Shaped Leader

Session #12: COACH: Gospel-Shaped Leaders Develop Other Leaders

Preparation: Read Chapter 12 of The Gospel Shaped Leader

Introduction

The gospel is so utterly precious that we cannot keep it to ourselves. Love for God, zeal for his glory, and compassion for the world demand that we share not only the good news but also the *sharing* of the good news. The gospel is a paradoxical treasure: it must be both guarded zealously and given away generously. A key to both is entrusting it to others and equipping them to advance it with you.

Billy Graham said, “One coach will impact more young people in one year than the average person does in a lifetime.”

Discuss: What do you think Billy Graham meant by this?

Discuss: How does Dr. Graham’s comment compare with the Apostle Paul’s below?

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work (Eph. 4:11–16, NIV).

The job of a disciple-maker is not to teach, disciple, counsel, console, encourage, organize, administer, evangelize, and reach out on behalf of a group of people or as a personal ministry. The mandate for a disciple is to stay on the sidelines and develop others to build up the body of Christ to full maturity so that the organization experiences health.

Followers of Jesus commit to developing others without resorting to bullying or coercing others to get things done. Building others is selfless while bullying others is selfish. Psychologists consider bullying as physical or verbal abuse that occurs repeatedly and involves a power imbalance. We can manipulate people by using Scripture or our spiritual insight. In other words, we can wrongly use social power, positional power (coach, parent, boss, etc.), emotional power, or physical power to dominate another in a way that can intimidate them.

Six Building Blocks for Developing Others

Leaders must develop others with intentionality. Jesus developed the 12 disciples. He invested in them personally. See pages 145–146 for further explanation of the blocks.

1. Pray for God to send potential disciple-makers into his harvest (Luke 10:2).
2. Describe the kind of person you would like to develop.
3. Recruit people to a specific vision.
4. Become a follower of Christ that others can imitate (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:2).
5. Coach the potential disciple-maker in character, skill, and attitude.
6. Make yourself accessible and available to others (Mat. 5:1; Mark 9:35; John 6:3; 8:2).

Discuss: Which of the blocks above are challenging to practice?

Why are they a challenge?

What action will you take to overcome that challenge?

Throw in the Towel: What it Means to Develop Others

Disciple-makers commit to developing others, which means we are willing to serve them, even when it seems unreasonable. Jesus finds himself in such a situation when no one volunteers to wash the disciples' dirty feet before supper. Even after he knew his demonic intentions, Jesus washed the feet of Judas Iscariot.

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him (John 13:1–2).

Discuss: Think about someone who abused or betrayed you or another person. What kind of spiritual fiber would it take for us to wash the feet of our chief betrayer?

Jesus's washing of the disciples' feet (John 13:1–20) gives us insight into developing others.

1. We remove the outer garment of our earthly identity and eagerly embrace a servant's towel in our posture and attitude.

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments and, taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him (John 13:3–5).

Discuss: What are some things we need to “lay aside” to serve others?

2. We develop others by serving with joy. Baristas, restaurant personnel, church staff, and Jesus have all experienced rude customers.

Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward, you will understand.” Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.” Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.” For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “Not all of you are clean” (John 13:5–11).

3. We exemplify an eager attitude toward serving others around us. Serving others is not celebrated in our culture. It starts with the person who is the most esteemed. Jesus points out that everyone serves, even the teacher and Lord.

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example that you should do just as I have done. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them (John 13:12–17).

4. We serve God with a future perspective rather than a present circumstance.

I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place, you may believe that I am he. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me” (John 13:18–20).

Discuss: What present circumstance brought discouragement in ministry? How could a future perspective benefit our serving experience?

Discuss

1. Who are some people in your sphere of influence that you can intentionally develop?
2. What fears or reluctance do you have about intentionally developing others?
3. What attitudes or practices do you need to change to develop leaders in your context?

Prayer for Developing Other Leaders

Lord, you have entrusted people to our care to be equipped so they can strengthen your body. To produce much fruit, we must die to our desires and align with yours. Help us to empty ourselves and be a servant. Use us to accomplish your will among your people. Help us kneel down and serve others, taking the lowest job if necessary, without regard to recognition.

The Gospel-Shaped Leader

Session #13: YOKE: Gospel-Shaped Leaders Pursue Meaningful Friendships

Preparation: Read Chapter 13 of *The GospelShaped Leader*

Introduction

The gospel motivates friendships. So often, gospel presentations focus on what Christ offers us salvation *from* but neglect to draw out what he desires to save us *to*. We get a hint from John 15:15: Jesus tells his disciples.

“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you *friends*, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”

Since we are justified by Christ’s free gift, we can approach human relationships without needing to prove ourselves in the eyes of our friends, without fearing dismissal by others, and without seeking to use relationships for our own benefit.

Still, in God’s design, it is not good for man to be alone. We need meaningful friendships. It is often an overlooked principle in disciple-making. Proverbs 18:1 reminds us that loneliness is not a psychological experience but an unsound state of being.

Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire;
he breaks out against all sound judgment (Prov. 18:1).

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “The goal of all Christian community [is this]: they meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation.”¹⁵ This highlights another aspect of Gospel-formed relationships: it is valid that the gospel *compels* friendships and that the gospel *is the substance* of relationships. There is nothing more profound, nothing more revealing about ourselves, nothing more loving to share than the gospel. To share the gospel is the ultimate act of friendship. A gospel-sharing community of friends is vital to our well-being.

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

We have no doubt been burned by friends in the past. This is no excuse to stay alone and aloof. Such reticence for meaningful relationships leads to more loneliness. It may lead to moral failure, burnout, or depression, according to Thom Ranier, former

¹⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2009), p. 23.

President and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources.¹⁶ C. S. Lewis wrote in *Four Loves* about the folly of protecting ourselves from broken hearts:

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable.¹⁷

Discuss: Why does there seem to be a deficiency of intimate friendships among Christians today?

Discuss: How would you describe your relational network? Do you find it more challenging to open yourself up to new friendships (going horizontal) or to deepen connections within existing friendships (going vertical)?

Yoke Together with Friends

Amid the confusion, destruction, and the threat of enemy attack, Nehemiah said: “Do not be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, your daughters, your wives, and your homes” (Neh. 4:14). Our battle in this life is not isolated. It includes those around us.

Discuss: What does it mean when Christ implores us, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mat. 11:29–30)?

Scripture urges us to yoke together.

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel (Phil. 1:27).

One paraphrase emphasizes the need for other believers to stand by our side.

Stand united, singular in vision, contending for people’s trust in the Message, the good news, not flinching or dodging before the opposition. Your courage and unity will show

¹⁶ <http://thomrainer.com/2013/09/07/the-lonely-pastor-nine-observations/>

¹⁷ C.S. Lewis, *Four Loves*. (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Books, 1988), p. 121.

them what they're up against: defeat for them, victory for you—and both because of God (Phil. 1:27, MSG).

Discuss: How can we regain these kinds of relationships among believers?

Know Your Enemy: Seven Strategies of Satan

A Christian who fails to unite with a community of believers is vulnerable to an all-out demonic siege. As believers, we are in a spiritual war and are oftentimes undertrained, unprepared, and unguarded by fellow Christians. Each of us functionally stands alone, exposed to the attacks of Satan and his bloodthirsty legion of demons. We cannot fight the good fight of faith alone for prolonged periods.

The Apostle Paul warns us: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). Another paraphrase articulates it this way: “This is no weekend war that we will walk away from and forget about in a couple of hours. This is for keeps, a life-or-death fight to the finish against the Devil and all his angels” (MSG).

Discuss: Are the paragraphs above an overstatement, or is spiritual warfare a reality for believers? If accurate, how aware are we of Satan's schemes?

Before we can fight for one another, we need to obtain information about the tactics of our enemy. We must defend against seven common strategies of war. See pages 153–154 for further explanation.

1. **Doubt.** An attack on a rogue believer generally begins with doubt over the authority and reliability of God's Word. (Gen. 3:1).
2. **Diversion.** A person separated from the flock often turns aside from the primary mission and foundation of the faith to focus on secondary doctrinal issues.
3. **Deception.** Believers lacking real friendships in the local church are easily deceived into believing the tricks of Satan.
4. **Division.** Believers who are disunited produce chaos and frustration.
5. **Disruption.** Disruption occurs when we fail to submit to Christ as the head of the church.

6. **Dominance.** The believer, living outside of the protection of a community, is swarmed under heavy spiritual and emotional attacks.
7. **Destruction.** Devastation overcomes believers in many ways. Jesus said, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls” (Luke 11:17).

Discuss: Which of these seven strategies is most prevalent in the church today?

Gospel Friendship

To defend against war strategies, the Bible instructs elders to shepherd those people among us. While the instruction in the passage is primarily for elders, the application can be extended to all believers as gospel friends.

Discuss: Read 1 Peter 5:1-4 and comment on the responsibility of being a gospel friend to those around us.

The Apostle Peter identifies four critical characteristics of gospel friendship that are necessary as we fight for one another (refer to pages 154–156):

1. **A gospel friend is an image-bearer of Jesus.** “Shepherd the flock ... not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (vv. 2–3). Jesus modeled worshipful obedience to the mission of God. Making disciples means we live in such close proximity to unbelieving neighbors, relatives, and friends that they may observe us reflecting God in ordinary ways.
2. **A gospel friend relates to the people near him or her.** We do not have to look for others to befriend. They are all around us: homes, neighborhoods, offices, classrooms, and churches. “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight” (v. 2). Friends don’t let friends isolate themselves.
3. **A gospel friend serves despite personal needs.** “As a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed” (v. 1). Often, we have to fight as wounded soldiers because the mission and the defense of others’ lives demand it.
4. **A gospel friend willingly serves others’ needs.** “Not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you” (v. 2). We are not hired hands who are careless when danger comes (John 10:12–13). We willingly put our lives at risk to serve others.

Gospel friendship in the church displays Jesus' love for us and our validity as His disciples (John 13:34–35). When we love one another with brotherly affection, we commit to caring for others and being cared for by others, fighting for others, and being fought for by others. We must take this divine gospel friendship oath seriously, initiating true community with those whom God entrusts to us as comrades and standing by their sides to fight for the glory of God.

Discuss: How could we better become gospel friends to others, bringers of the message of salvation?

Three Types of Friendships

As disciple-makers, many of our friendships take the form of mentor-mentee. This is expected, but we also need mutual friendships to journey together with happiness in our hearts. “Mutuality is a two-way relationship of joy, comfort, and openness,” according to Dane Ortlund.¹⁸ Anglican theologian Richard Sibbes (1577–1635) describes friendship as “mutual consent, mutual sympathy, mutual solace, and mutual honor and respect for one another.”¹⁹

We need the gospel that our friends bring into our lives, and our friends need the gospel that we can get into their lives. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it more provocatively in *Life Together*:

“The Christ in their own hearts is weaker than the Christ in the word of other Christians. Their hearts are uncertain; their brothers and sisters are sure. At the same time, this also clarifies that the goal of all Christian communities is to encounter one another as bringers of the message of salvation.”

Discuss: How would Hebrews 3:13 inform our understanding of friendships?

Pursue Meaningful Friendships

We need friends who love us sacrificially and unconditionally, friends we can trust and with whom we can just be ourselves. These are the kinds of relationships that C. S. Lewis describes as somewhat preordained, “You have not chosen one another, but I

¹⁸ Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 118–119.

¹⁹ A. Grosart, ed., *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1862), 37.

have chosen you for one another.”²⁰ Ray Ortlund speaks of the value of an iron-sharpening friend (Prov. 27:17):

Biologically, you do not need a friend. Financially, you can thrive without a friend. And as busy as we are these days unless we seek Christ, friendship will end up at the bottom of the to-do list. However, you cannot be wise without a Christian friend speaking into your life. It can be painful. But the wounds of an honest friend are faithful to help you grow.²¹

The resurrection of Jesus has broken down the middle wall of partition between God and others (Eph. 2:13–22). Through Christ’s incarnation, we are no longer called servants but friends (John 15:15; Luke 12:4). Jesus calls us to “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Mat. 11:29–30).

As we pursue Jesus as our friend and yokemate, we must also pursue gospel friendships and yoke together to glorify God. Proverbs tells us, “A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24). That friend is ultimately Jesus, but you can be that gospel-friend for others, and they can be that friend for you. However, you have to pursue those friendships in Christ.

Discuss: What commitment can we take to begin pursuing friendships this week?

Prayer for Friendships

Lord, you sent your Son, Jesus, to befriend us and to be our yokemate. We need others who will partner with us to defeat the enemy. Provide bringers of the gospel in our lives to encourage, challenge, and support us as we strive side by side to advance your kingdom. Help us be aware of the enemy's strategies and provide those who will fight with us to overthrow demonic forces. Help us be friends with others in the ministry you have chosen for us.

²⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Four Loves* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Books, 1988), p. 89.

²¹ Raymond C. Ortlund Jr, *Proverbs: Wisdom the Works* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), p. 168.

APPENDIX A

Read the Gospel Shaped Leader Conclusion on pages 160–161 and rewrite it in the first person, in your own words, if desired.

For example, *I am the disciple-maker who will answer the call to lead the Lord's church in the Lord's way. I will mirror the gospel in my leadership, etc.*

APPENDIX B

GRO Worksheet (Gospel Reliant Overview)

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me, you can do nothing (John 15:5).

Score yourself in the following ten categories.	
Score 1 - 5 (5 = excellent, 4 = good, 3 = average, 2 = bad, 1 = inferior)	
1. Physical	
I have a healthy weight management (BMI between 19 and 25) ²²	
I am Eating Healthy ²³	
I Regularly Exercise (30 minutes a day)	
I abstain from or Moderate Alcohol	
I Limit tobacco (no cigarettes or vapes)	
I Get Adequate Sleep (7 - 9 hours)	
I Consistently Rest/Sabbath	
I Moderate stress, anxiety, anger, and work pressure	
I Have No major health issues (cancer, diabetes, kidney, heart, lungs, mental health, etc)	
I Have Regular Exams by my Physician, Dentist, and Optometrist	
Physical Score Avg (add all scores above and divide by 10)	
2. Marital/Singleness	
Love & grace abound in my marriage / Love and grace abound in various relationships	
I clearly & considerably communicate with my spouse / I have healthy and honest communication with others.	
I have clear roles and responsibilities in my marriage/ I have peace in my singleness.	
I Seek to Solve Problems Peaceably	
I am Physically and Emotionally Intimate with my spouse exclusively / I am Celibate and Emotionally Intimate with my Friends.	
I Connect Spiritually with my Spouse / I Connect Spiritually with my Friends	
We are Emotionally One / I Have Emotional Health in My Close Relationships (not co-dependent)	
I Have Fun Together with My Spouse / I Have Fun with Friends	
I am Learning to Suffer with Grace when Facing Challenges (setbacks, health, children, failures) / I am Learning to Suffer with Grace when Facing Challenges.	
I Practice Forgiveness and Reconciliation with my Spouse / I Practice Forgiveness and Reconciliation with my Friends	
Marital/Single Score Avg (add all scores above and divide by 10)	

²² Refer to CDC Guidelines:

https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/adult_bmi/english_bmi_calculator/bmi_calculator.html

²³ Here is a healthy example: <https://www.bluezones.com/recipes/food-guidelines/>

3. Financial	
I Have a Written Budget	
My Income is Greater than my Expenses	
I Have Minimal Short-Term Debt (credit card, etc)	
My Net Worth is Growing (See Net Worth Calculator Tab)	
I am Contributing to Retirement Fund	
I Have Cash Available for Emergencies	
I Give Generously to my Church and Christian Ministries	
I am Purchasing a Home	
I Have Wise and Diversified Investments	
I am on Track for my Retirement Need	
Finance Score Avg (add all scores above and divide by 10)	
4. Relational	
I have a few significant & supportive friends.	
I have mutually enjoyable friendships (rather than mentors or work colleagues)	
I regularly interact with others.	
I have intentional relationships with my neighbors.	
I have open, honest & confidential conversations with a few trusted friends.	
I am pursuing and cultivating friendships.	
I am finding encouragement from friends.	
I sacrificially serve my friends in areas of need.	
My friends are helping me to become a better person holistically.	
I understand emotional intelligence and its effect on my relationships.	
Relational Score Avg (add all scores above and divide by 10)	
5. Spiritual	
I am demonstrating an awareness of the holiness of God in my lifestyle.	
I am confessing and repenting of sin daily.	
I dedicate a regular time to prayer.	
I have a consistent bible study.	
I am uniting with a community of people to live out the gospel.	
I am walking in a demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit.	
I am intentionally making disciples.	
I am passionately learning about Christ and Christianity.	
I am dependent upon the power of the Spirit.	
I am growing in my sanctification with Christ.	
Spiritual Vitality Score Avg (add all scores above and divide by 10)	

6. Missional	
I have clearly identified my overall purpose.	
I am passionately pursuing my purpose.	
I read, research, and study to sharpen my understanding of the people and place I am serving.	
I have designed a specific strategy to reach my goals.	
I am trusting God with the outcomes.	
I experience fruitfulness in my work.	
I refuse to make excuses for idleness or failures.	
I persevere through setbacks and discouraging circumstances.	
I am intellectually growing in my vocation.	
I am open to dreaming about God-sized adventures or projects.	
Missional Score Avg (add all scores above and divide by 10)	
7. Recreational	
I am participating in life-giving hobbies or activities outside of work.	
I demonstrate a sense of humor.	
I am trying new things/places.	
I am planning an adventure (bucket list type).	
I am present in the moment with others.	
I often celebrate (birthdays, holidays, parties, accomplishments, etc.).	
I do interesting things regularly.	
I am meeting new people.	
I am inviting others to have fun together.	
I freely laugh at my human mistakes.	
Recreational Score Avg (add all scores above and divide by 10)	
8. Accountable	
I am opening my whole life to a few others for deep examination.	
I am sharing failures and weaknesses with others I trust.	
I give honest, vulnerable answers to the questions about my life.	
I take specific action to remedy any failure to reach goals or expectations.	
I regularly analyze my goals to align with my overall purpose.	
I receive correction and affirmation with emotional maturity.	
I am meeting regularly with my supportive accountability team.	
I seek feedback for my actions, attitudes, body language, and words.	
I focus on Jesus' good news of grace as the basis for all accountability.	
I am using accountability as a means to accomplish life goals.	
Accountability Score Avg (add all scores above and divide by 10)	

9. Emotional	
I am aware of my personality strengths and weaknesses.	
I am aware of how my emotions and attitudes affect others.	
I do not exaggerate my abilities.	
I am aware of my sinful behaviors and strive for holiness.	
I submit to the authority of Jesus.	
I am patient and prayerful in my hardships.	
I am thoughtful of others' needs and minister with gentleness.	
I use my words to encourage and build others up.	
Others view me as humble.	
I resolve conflicts and misunderstandings swiftly.	
Emotional Score (add all scores above and divide by 10)	
10. Sexual Integrity	
I honor the marriage covenant with my spouse and am free of non-physical emotional involvement, impurity, and vulgar joking with others.	
I am sexually faithful to my wife.	
I am not viewing pornography or any other sexual stimulation that contradicts God's plan for sexuality.	
When I lust, I am able, with the power of the Spirit, to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.	
I am accountable to trusted people for my sexual integrity.	
I cultivate emotional intimacy in my marriage.	
I ensure that all sexual interactions with my wife are based on her explicit and enthusiastic consent.	
I pursue holiness in all areas of my life.	
I respect my spouse's boundaries, and we communicate about unacceptable behavior.	
I use language and behavior that honors my wife, and I do not objectify or demean her in any way.	
Sexual Integrity Score (add all scores above and divide by 10)	
Total GRO Score Pct (add each section averages above)	

APPENDIX C - My GRO Personal Growth Plan

Review the GRO Worksheet in APPENDIX B and make two practical ways to improve in each of the eight areas.

1. Physical

- a.
- b.

2. Marital/Single

- a.
- b.

3. Financial

- a.
- b.

4. Relational

- a.
- b.

5. Spiritual

- a.
- b.

6. Missional

- a.
- b.

7. Recreational

- a.
- b.

8. Accountable

- a.
- b.

9. Emotional

- a.
- b.

10. Sexual

- a.
- b.