

# Week 1: The Gospel Changes Everything

## Meeting Prep:

- Listen to this sermon - "[Surprising Good News](#)" ([notes summary](#))
- Watch this short video - "[Kingdom of God](#)"

## Read this Overview

While many people think of the word "gospel" as a religious term, in the ancient world *euangelion*, or gospel/good news, was a military word used by political messengers making a royal announcement about the birth or enthronement of a new ruler. In effect, their message was "Good News! A new emperor has conquered your enemy and ascended the throne. Now everything will be different!"

When Jesus and his disciples used the word gospel, or good news, they employed it in a similar way. "Good News! Jesus the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, the one true King, has come into the world to defeat the evil powers of sin and spread the reign of rule of God on the earth. This kingdom is now available in Jesus, and now everything will be different. So reorient (repent) your life around Jesus!"

In our cultural moment, however, the good news of Jesus is often reduced down to versions that fall woefully short of the robust kingdom that he came to announce. Confusion about the message often leads to an incomplete model of discipleship. In this teaching we will attempt to re-narrate the surprising good news of Jesus, how it's been distorted, and how we recapture a new vision for holistic discipleship as life with Jesus in the tension of his now/not yet kingdom.

## Begin with Silence, Reflection, & Prayer

Create a space to meet where your community can be comfortable yet alert. Open your time with a few minutes for silent reflection on your day. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time together.

## Discuss the Teaching

1. What resonated with you from the teaching & video? What was confusing?
2. How were you raised to think about and live out the Gospel Story? What do you appreciate about this "inheritance" and what was missing that you need to wrestle with and consider expanding?
3. How would you answer the question, "So what is the Gospel?"
4. When and how have you experienced the Good News of the Kingdom?
5. When you think about letting Jesus transform your life, what are you most afraid of? How might things change if you began to look at the Gospel as the A-Z of your life and not just the beginning or the eternal future? How could we (both individually and collectively) grow in experiencing and sharing the Gospel this coming season?

## Practice: Telling Our Story

This week we want to encourage you to reflect on, write down, and share a brief version of your personal story with someone in your community. This is more than a traditional testimony (although you should include that!) - it's the broader story of what you've lived in all of life's beauty and brokenness. Learning to reinterpret our personal stories in light of God's bigger story of redemption is one of the most powerful ways God changes us. You can devote an entire meeting to this in smaller groups, or you can do it outside of meeting time.

If you're the one sharing, summarize the most pressing, painful, or relevant parts of your story using the resource below into a timeline or short narrative. If you're the listener, remember the goal isn't to evaluate the other person's story but simply to listen and love them with empathy.

Here are the resources to guide you through this exercise:

- [How to Make a Life Map](#)
- [Reinterpreting Our Story Within God's Story](#)

*For Families with Children:*

Consider using this time to walk through the Gospel Story with younger children using this [Bible Project Video](#). If you have elementary children or teenagers, you could share some threads of your story with them as a way to celebrate patterns of God's grace while naming some of the unhealthy patterns that they may need to contend with in your family system.

## Close with Intercessory Prayer

End your time with a few moments of silence to reflect on and be grateful to God for all that he has done in your community during this meeting. Listen for an invitation that the Holy Spirit might be impressing on your heart to take with you this week. Pray for your group, our church, our city, and our world. Consider closing your meeting by reciting the Lord's Prayer together.

*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*

## Week 2: Practicing the Way of Jesus

### Meeting Prep:

- Listen to this sermon - "[Practicing the Way of Jesus](#)" ([notes summary](#))

### Read this Overview

In the New Testament, "The Way" was shorthand for a powerful movement of beloved disciples who organized their lives around three priorities: being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and doing what Jesus did. By living this way together by faith in the person of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit these ordinary disciples turned their cities upside down, and it is our desire to see God do this renewing work again in us and our cities.

But this way of life doesn't come naturally or easily. Every human being is a disciple to someone or something, as we are always being shaped by socio-cultural narratives and practices that seek to capture our imagination and orient us toward some vision of the good life that is often at odds with God's vision of flourishing. Indianapolis, in that sense, is a formation machine, a "concrete rabbi" that is forming its citizens toward a particular vision of happiness and flourishing. Formation is never neutral.

Inherent in discipleship to Jesus, then, is both the possibility and inevitably of transformation as we unlearn old patterns and learn new patterns rooted in Jesus' kingdom vision. This is what we call spiritual formation or discipleship. In this teaching we will look at the Way of Jesus, why practice is essential to growing Christlikeness, and some of the forces seeking to deform us.

### Begin with Silence, Reflection, & Prayer

Create a space to meet where your community can be comfortable yet alert. Open your time with a few minutes for silent reflection on your day. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time together.

### Discuss the Teaching

1. What resonated with you from the teaching? What was confusing?
2. What did you learn about being a Christian growing up? How is that similar to or different from Jesus' vision of a disciple?
3. Have you ever trained for a marathon or team sport? What was it like? How could training for life with Jesus overlap with that concept?
4. Where are you personally in terms of being with Jesus, becoming like him, and doing what he did? What's going well and where do you need to grow?
5. What practices could we experiment with personally and collectively this coming season? What needs to change for us to become a community of practice?

## **Practice: Spiritual Formation Plan**

This week we want to encourage you to reflect on your spiritual formation journey using the Spiritual Formation Guide we created below. Walk through it together as a community in your group time, and then report back on your plan in the following weeks.

Think of both personal and communal practices that could help strengthen your discipleship together. One resource we've put together to support these habits is our "Community Rule of Life," which we strongly encourage for our entire church as a baseline commitment to personal prayer, Scripture meditation, and Sabbath. These are available in print at Midtown or in our digital format in our weekly e-news.

Encourage each other and continue to check in over the next several weeks until these practices become new habits. Celebrate the changes you experience, and encourage each other where you're struggling. Make adjustments as needed.

### [Spiritual Formation Guide](#)

#### *For Families with Children:*

Consider using this time to introduce your children to the basic concept of discipleship (being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, doing what Jesus did) and spiritual practices like prayer, bible reading & memorization, and family Sabbath. For more family resources, check out our practice guides available at <https://www.somamidtown.com/spiritual-formation>.

## **Close with Intercessory Prayer**

End your time with a few moments of silence to reflect on and be grateful to God for all that he has done in your community during this meeting. Listen for an invitation that the Holy Spirit might be impressing on your heart to take with you this week. Pray for your group, our church, our city, and our world. Consider closing your meeting by reciting the Lord's Prayer together.

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## Week 3: Together

### Meeting Prep:

- Listen to this sermon - "[Wholehearted Community](#)" ([notes summary](#))

### Read this Overview

When God declared at creation that "it is not good for man to be alone," he was acknowledging a fundamental design feature for humanity: we are created by and for relationships. We are relational beings who are created for and by a relational God to flourish in the context of a relational community called the church. If we are going to become all God has designed us to be as disciples, we cannot do it alone - we need wholehearted relational connections to know and love God, others, and even ourselves.

In this teaching we will explore a vision for authentic biblical community, talk about why it's so hard to find meaningful community in a cultural moment of individualism and tribalism, and discuss some pathways into the beloved community that we ache for.

### Begin with Silence, Reflection, & Prayer

Create a space to meet where your community can be comfortable yet alert. Open your time with a few minutes for silent reflection on your day. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time together.

### Discuss the Teaching

1. What resonated with you from the teaching? What was confusing?
2. Discuss the statement: "You were created by community (Triune God) and for community."
3. What have your past experiences with Christian community been like? How does that impact how you show up to community now in terms of hopes, fears, and wounds?

### Practice: Community Examen & Communion

In 1 Corinthians 11:27-34, the Apostle Paul encourages a community experiencing social divisions to examine themselves before participating in communion together. While this may sound intense, the purpose of this exercise is simply to surface any internal or relational sins that may threaten the unity of the community and deal with them before they become toxic.

Using this as a model, Christians for centuries have developed a spiritual practice called the "Prayer of Examen" to uncover areas where God has been present to them throughout the day while also uncovering areas in their lives that need repairing, cleansing, and healing. Our practice this week is an effort to modify the idea for a community purpose, conducting a "Community Examen" as a precursor to taking communion together. The goal of this exercise is to create space for clarifying expectations, honestly evaluating the health of the community, and inviting greater growth in the next season.

Step 1: Read the [MC Commitments](#) out loud and discuss expectations.

- How are we doing as a community living out these commitments to each other? What's going well and what needs some work? If you're a new group just discuss the commitments.
- Are these expectations realistic? Are we all in agreement? Are there other unspoken expectations that you're carrying that need to be named?

Step 2: Talk about hopes and dreams for the coming season.

- What are some hopes you have for our community this year? What kinds of things would you like to see us do together?
- What rhythms or practices need to be added, subtracted, or strengthened to help us grow this coming season?

Step 3: Take communion and recommit yourselves to one another.

- Create space for reflection, confession, and repentance. Following Paul's instructions, ask everyone to examine themselves in two ways: 1) Am I a baptized disciple who is trusting Jesus as my Savior, Lord, Teacher? 2) Do I have any sin that needs confession, repentance, or repair? If there are unresolved sin issues, spend time in confession to God and/or commit to pursuing a conversation with the other person in hopes of reconciliation before taking communion.
- Gather communion elements and read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Take communion together and have someone offer a prayer of recommitment for the group.

*For Families with Children:*

Children should refrain from taking communion until they have professed faith in Christ and been baptized. However, you could use this time to talk about the meaning of communion and help them examine how their relationships are going with parents, siblings, and friends.

### **Close with Intercessory Prayer**

End your time with a few moments of silence to reflect on and be grateful to God for all that he has done in your community during this meeting. Listen for an invitation that the Holy Spirit might be impressing on your heart to take with you this week. Pray for your group, our church, our city, and our world. Consider closing your meeting by reciting the Lord's Prayer together.

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## Week 4: For the Life of the World

### Meeting Prep:

- Listen to this sermon - "[For the Life of the World](#)" ([notes summary](#))

### Read this Overview

Jesus came to bring abundant life into the world. In his life, death, and resurrection, he shows us what it means to truly flourish as human beings - loving God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and loving our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus' sacrificial love is both the pattern and power for how his disciples are to live out their calling to bring flourishing into the world.

Tragically, God's people have a mixed track record when it comes to being a life-giving presence in the world. Instead of transforming the world, the church has often been transformed by the world and ended up transmitting the same hatred, violence, fear, anxiety, and injustice that she is supposed to heal. We see this dynamic at work in the parable of the Good Neighbor, where Jesus uses an unlikely Samaritan protagonist to call his people to a deeper encounter with God's mercy. In this teaching, we will look at Jesus' invitation to bring holistic life (spiritually, socially, culturally) to broken souls and societies, some of the barriers to loving well, and how spiritual practices can form us into the kind of people who love God and love their neighbor.

### Begin with Silence, Reflection, & Prayer

Create a space to meet where your community can be comfortable yet alert. Open your time with a few minutes for silent reflection on your day. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time together.

### Discuss the Teaching

1. What resonated with you from the teaching? What was confusing?
2. How have you been formed to think about the tension of loving God and loving your neighbor? Which was emphasized more frequently? Who were the people you learned to think of as "neighbors" and who were those who were to be avoided or even despised?
3. Where do you sense an invitation to grow in neighboring the vulnerable through seeing, feeling, doing as Jesus would do if he were living your life?
4. What spiritual practices could help you grow? How does seeing yourself as the man on the side of the road and Jesus as the Good Samaritan reframe your perspective?

### Practice: Joining God where he is working

Regardless of your vocation, we are all called to be missionaries who are working for the personal, social, and cultural renewal of our families, neighborhoods, city, and the world. Establishing a fruitful missional presence starts with recognizing that God is already present and working out his redemptive purposes in our city. We don't have to make stuff happen - we just have to wake up,

recognize where God is working, and join him in announcing the good news of Jesus in both word and deed.

For this week's practice, we simply want you to identify where God is at work and brainstorm how you can join him individually and/or collectively as a group. Some missional communities choose to have a shared mission that they engage in together each month, while others simply help encourage and challenge each other to live missionally in their own spheres of relationships.

- What is God's heart for your neighborhood, workplace, family, city? What do you wish would change? Where does your heart break? What gets you excited?
- Who do you know in this space that is favorable toward you? Who do you need to spend more time with? Pray for them by name.
- What are the barriers and bridges to this people and place knowing Jesus?
- What do you need to do in this next season to bring the presence & power of Jesus to this opportunity? Are you going to do this as a group or individually? How? Write it down.

As a church we want to provide regular corporate opportunities for people to share the good news of Jesus in word & deed. If you're struggling to come up with your own ideas, feel free to jump in with us:

- Pourhouse Welcome Home Team: every Saturday morning we help homeless neighbors move in to permanent housing
- Tutoring and Coaching students at Purdue Polytech HS in Broad Ripple
- Transitional Foster Care: receive training to open up your home to vulnerable refugee children, or come alongside to provide respite care for these hosts
- Alpha (coming soon): share the good news of Jesus with those who are curious through a meal and thought-provoking video discussion
- Missional Trainings: courses, workshops, experiences that help us practice holistic mission

*For Families with Children:*

Spend time praying for people in your family or community who don't know Jesus by name. Serve together as a family. Host a neighbor who doesn't know Jesus for a meal and pray for them.

### **Close with Intercessory Prayer**

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