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total CHURCH

A Radical Reshaping
around Gospel
and Community

study guide



by Veritas Community Church

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INTRODUCTION

“The theology that matters is not the theology we profess but the theology we practice” (18).

Our desire as a new church community is to live out what we profess in a way that brings glory to the Lord. The very essence of God’s people is that we are on a mission to follow Jesus and to carry out His continuing work on the earth. From its early days, God’s people, the church, has been a living body, expanding, preaching, discipling, teaching, and presenting Jesus to the cultures in which it lives. We see in the New Testament a people moving into new cities, making disciples, and doing the things Jesus taught them to do.

Jesus told his followers to be fishers of men, telling them to care for the poor, calling them outward, commissioning them as ambassadors to herald the good news to all the peoples and nations on the earth. This is the task of the church in every age, even our own.

Please take the next several months to explore how we can live out the gospel as a community. We ask that you would come prepared, reading the chapter ahead of time. Underline sections that stood out to you and make notes of areas you want to grow in, don’t agree with or want to explore further.

Pastor Nick Nye

CHAPTER 1 | WHY GOSPEL?

SCRIPTURE

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life” (John 5:24).

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Consider all the “work” that is done by the word of the gospel:

- “Through his *word* he brought order out of chaos and light of darkness” (25).
- “God is establishing his rule through his *word*” (25).
- “God’s *word* is sovereign” (26).
- “God’s *word* sets in motion events that cannot be altered” (26).
- “With a *word* Jesus heals the sick, and with a *word* he expels demons” (27).
- “He speaks a *word*, and people leave all to follow him” (27).
- “Jesus is the living *word* of God...He is both the promised messianic king and the *word* by which God rules” (27).

Lord, stir our hearts to understand the power of your word and the centrality of your gospel. We are sinners, God, who want to put everything else first. Give us the strength and desire to make you and your truth first. In Jesus’ beautiful name, Amen.

SUMMARY

The greater work we are called to is to bring people to eternal life through our proclamation of the gospel. The word of that gospel is powerful and living and faith-giving—as seen all throughout scripture. The growth of the Kingdom *is* the spread of God’s word—they are one in the same. The word and the spirit are *not* at odds; in the Bible, they always go together. The challenge for us and for our churches is to be both word-centered and mission-centered—going forth from our Sunday gathering to take the gospel into our communities.

APPLICATION & YOU

“There is a kind of faith that comes from seeing miraculous signs, but true faith comes through the words of Scripture and the words of Jesus” (27).

“The challenge for us is to make the gospel the center of our lives not just on Sunday mornings but on Monday mornings” (37).

Being honest with yourself, is your faith true and rooted in the gospel? Is the gospel really central in your life, or is it secondary to work/family/sex/money?

APPLICATION & THE CHURCH

“Paul says that ‘in [Christ] you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by the Spirit’ (Ephesians 2:22). This is not some theoretical entity, nor the perfected church. This is a real, local congregation with all sorts of problems. The community formed by the gospel for the gospel is the community in which God dwells by his spirit” (29).

What does community at your church look like? Is it “formed by the gospel for the gospel?” Do you desire to be part of a messy but “real” faith community, or are you looking for something neater and easier? How can we create that “messy” community in our congregation?

APPLICATION & THE WORLD

“We wrestle with ‘making the gospel relevant to the world.’ But in this story, God is about the business of transforming the world to fit the shape of the gospel” (35).

Do you see your greater mission as proclaiming the word of God to the nations so that the world itself begins to fit the gospel? How might that be accomplished? Are you called to have a broader, more global, vision for the going forth of the gospel?

FURTHER QUESTIONS

The authors state that “People today want a vision of the divine or proof that God exists or to know the meaning of life or just a sense of purpose” (23). What do people in our culture and context want?

Do you believe what God promises about His word? That it is living and active? That it is relevant? That He will give you the strength and the power to proclaim it? How would your evangelism change if you truly believed these promises?

The authors discuss the concept of “fair-weather faith” at length. What causes fair-weather faith? How does it compare to genuine faith—the kind of faith that sustains you in tragedy?

RESOURCES

The Cross Centered Life by C.J. Mahaney
The Gospel for Real Life by Jerry Bridges

CHAPTER 2 | WHY COMMUNITY?

SCRIPTURE

“Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Corinthians 10:17).

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Take a moment to look at the following verses that construct a Biblical model for community:

- 2 Corinthians 13:14
- 1 Corinthians 1:9
- 1 Thessalonians 2:8
- Acts 4:32
- Philippians 1:5
- 1 Peter 4:13

Lord, help us to understand community as you understand it. Humble us, that we might put the needs of others in our community before our own, and consider them greater than ourselves. Draw us into a deeper understanding of your Son's love for us as we try to love one another. We pray this in your Son's name, Amen.

SUMMARY

Western culture tends to define itself in individualistic terms, but the Christian life is meant to be lived out in community. Our identity is not first in our relationships or accomplishments, but in Christ. Many people fear Christian community because it can mean walking away from existing networks; often, though, those networks are destroying people and they need a new home anyway. A Biblical model for church is not that church is another burden to juggle in life, but that church community is at the center, with everything else revolving around it. True Christian community means that the concern of one member of that body is a concern to the entire body. The church community is constantly moving out and moving in: moving out to evangelize, while at the same time drawing people in.

APPLICATION & YOU

“An identity that I construct for myself is far removed from an identity I receive by grace. Churches are full of people trying to earn their identity or prove their worth...But the key defining relationship for Christians is our relationship with God” (40).

Is your identity in Christ? Are you defined by your relationship with Him? Or are you still trying to make a name for yourself and prove your worth?

APPLICATION & THE CHURCH

“In the same way, in the Christian community we belong to one another, and so we are responsible for one another and make decisions together. This is not a process of ‘heavy shepherding’ where the leader tells people what to do...It is a community process in which everyone is accountable to everyone” (46).

Do you feel cared for by the community at your church, as if you belonged to a family? Have you reached out to care for members of the body? Do you feel like your voice can be heard? How can your church conform more to the Biblical church model “in which everyone is accountable to everyone?”

APPLICATION & THE WORLD

“The church is to be a light to the world...God is a missionary God, and God’s primary missionary method is his covenant people” (47).

Do you see yourself as part of a community with which God intends to reach the globe? Is the Christian church operating as a true light in the darkness here in the United States? In the world? Or have we lost our “saltiness?”

FURTHER QUESTIONS

The authors state that “Christ died for his people, and we are saved when by faith we become part of the people for whom Christ died” (39). Do you agree with this? Can a Christian be saved and thrive spiritually apart from community?

In your experience, did a confession of faith in Jesus Christ mean distancing yourself from existing groups of friends or family? Was there hurt and confusion involved in this?

What do you fear most about being involved in deep community? Do you fear being known? Do you fear being rejected?

RESOURCES

Relationships: A Mess Worth Making by Timothy Lane & Paul Tripp
Grow In Grace by Sinclair Ferguson

CHAPTER 3 | EVANGELISM

SCRIPTURE

“We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:8).

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Meditate for a time on the three “strands” of evangelism:

- Building relationships (love)
- Sharing the gospel (word)
- Introducing people to the church (community)

Consider which of these areas come naturally to you, and which do not. Think how you might be used by the Lord to evangelize His people.

Lord, give us the words and the power to evangelize well and faithfully. Lord, give us the resolve to not avoid this great work because of pride or fear of men. Draw us into a community that loves in such a way that the gospel is preached to the nations. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SUMMARY

Christians should have an innate desire to commend Jesus to others. Both the gospel word and gospel community are central in any evangelistic efforts. The very love within a church community is, in itself, evangelistic. Evangelism involves three strands: building relationships, sharing the gospel and introducing people to community. The beauty of the church is that different members of the body can aid in different parts of the process. Gospel ministry does involve events, but much more centrally, it involves normal people going about their days with gospel intentionality. The love of the church community authenticates the word she preaches.

APPLICATION & YOU

“Most gospel ministry involves *ordinary people doing ordinary things* with gospel intentionality. Whether it is helping a friend, working at the office, or going to the movies, there is a commitment to building relationships, modeling the Christian faith, and talking about the gospel as a natural part of conversation” (63).

How intentional are you as you go about your day? Is work just work, or is it an opportunity to witness for the gospel? Does the gospel flow out of you naturally in conversation?

APPLICATION & THE CHURCH

“But evangelism is best done out of the context of a gospel community whose corporate life demonstrates the reality of the word that gave her life” (58).

Does your city look at your church and see a community “whose corporate life demonstrates the reality of the word” that is preached? How can the love in our church shine brighter in our community?

APPLICATION & THE WORLD

“Jesus gives the world the right to judge the sincerity of our profession on the basis of our love for each other. In other words, we should face with humility the challenge of unbelief. Our response should be one of repentance and faith resulting in lives of authentic corporate existence lived boldly before a skeptical and apathetic world” (68).

What is the world’s opinion of Christianity? Is our faith viewed with skepticism and apathy? If the world did indeed judge Christianity on the basis of our love for each other, how would we fare?

FURTHER QUESTIONS

The authors began this chapter with a case study example of evangelism and asked, “Did it make you cringe?” Do you generally cringe at the uncomfortable and difficult nature of evangelism?

Do you have relationships with unbelievers? Or do you spend most of your time in the “holy huddle?” How can you begin to form such relationships?

The authors state, “It is not enough to build a relationship between one believer and one unbeliever” (61). Do you agree with this? Does evangelism require more than a one-on-one relationship? Does it require the context of Christian community?

RESOURCES

Tell The Truth by Will Metzger

Out of The Salt Shaker by Rebecca Pippert

CHAPTER 4 | SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT

SCRIPTURE

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Isaiah 61:1-2).

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Consider the Beatitudes and how you minister to (or how you become) each of these marginalized groups:

Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied.

Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.

Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven...

Lord, help us to a deeper understanding of the Beatitudes. Our hearts desire fulfillment and exaltation in this life—help us to consider the fulfillment and exaltation that awaits us in the next. We are weak and we need your humbling, saving work. We ask for it in your Son’s name, Amen.

SUMMARY

Churches should be seeking to involve the poor and marginalized—Christ established this model Himself in His public ministry. The evangelical movement in this country has become something for the middle-class; we are failing to reach the working class with the gospel. Evangelism and social action are two necessary concerns for any gospel-centered church—they are not mutually exclusive. We often see the poor and marginalized as a problem that can be fixed; the truth is that many are normal people who simply want to be cared for by a community.

APPLICATION & YOU

“It is the same with the poor and marginalized. Love demands that I be concerned for their temporal needs. But the most loving thing I can do for the poor is to tell them they can be reconciled to God through Christ’s saving work” (79).

What do you think or feel towards the poor and marginalized? Would you rather just hand out a couple bucks, or does your heart long to initiate relationships for the gospel? How is God glorified in your treatment of the poor?

APPLICATION & THE CHURCH

“The big question is, why is the church in the West failing to reach the poor and marginalized in our society?” (84).

Is your church failing to reach the poor and marginalized, as many churches are? Why? What can be done?

APPLICATION & THE WORLD

“God has a strategy to exalt his Son and magnify his grace. That strategy is to choose the foolish, weak, and lowly people of the world as his own. The world esteems the intellect of professionals, the influence of the powerful, and the nobility of the upper classes. It thinks these things matter. But our boast is in Christ Jesus” (84).

What “matters” to the rest of the world? Why does the world only esteem success and power? How do we begin to boast in Jesus in a broken world?

FURTHER QUESTIONS

The authors speak of a “reversal of socioeconomic values” that places great priority on caring for the poor. Is such a reversal possible, or is the “power of money” too much for mankind?

The authors claim that “we are failing to reach the working class with the gospel. Evangelicalism has become a largely middle-class, professional phenomenon” (76). Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

This chapter quotes a woman as saying, “I know people do a lot to help me. But what I want is someone to be my friend” (80). Are you willing to befriend the poor? What makes it hard/awkward/uncomfortable?

RESOURCES

Ministry of Mercy by Tim Keller

Theirs Is The Kingdom by Robert Lupton

CHAPTER 5 | CHURCH PLANTING

SCRIPTURE

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Consider Paul’s words from 1 Corinthians (2:1-5) describing his missionary strategy:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Reflect on how Paul was steadfast in his commitment—first and foremost—to the gospel.

Lord, bless our efforts to carry your gospel and strengthen your church throughout the word. Keep us fixed on your gospel as our central purpose as we look to plant churches that bring glory to your name. The church is your bride—bless her time on earth. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

SUMMARY

Church planting is the natural overflow of a commitment to mission and community. The faith and love of the local church for one another is the greatest testament to the truth of the gospel. The New Testament sets the standard for congregations and missionaries planting local churches and building communities capable of going forth to plant again. The priority, then, becomes NOT one large congregation, but many smaller, deep communities. In everything, church planting must put the gospel at the center.

APPLICATION & YOU

“If individuals were at the heart of God’s purposes, then it would be quite natural to put the individual at the heart of mission, and many people do just that. But the heart of God’s plan of salvation are a family and a nation. And so the church should be at the heart of mission” (87).

Do you agree with this? Do you see God's mission as being about a family, and not just individuals? How do you balance that family-oriented mission with your own personal relationship with Christ?

APPLICATION & THE CHURCH

"But mission very easily becomes one activity among others in church life. It sits on the agenda alongside a list of other items, vying for attention...For some churches mission seems a distant dream as they struggle to keep the institution of church afloat. Putting on a weekly service is challenge enough" (86).

Is this true at your church? Does mission seem to get lost in the shuffle? How can we make missions and church planting more of a priority?

APPLICATION & THE WORLD

Lesslie Newbigin wrote the following: "It will only be by movements that begin with the local congregation in which the reality of the new creation is present, known and experienced, and from which men and women will go into every sector of public life to claim it for Christ, to unmask the illusions which have remained hidden and to expose all areas of public life to the illumination of the gospel" (90).

Are we going out into the world and claiming every public sector for Christ? Have we made the gospel known to our schools and workplaces? In our politics? What areas of public life continue to fight against gospel influence?

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Lesslie Newbigin wrote, "I am suggesting that the only answer, the only hermeneutic of the gospel, is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it." Do you agree? Are people living for Christ the best defense of the gospel?

The authors claim that "the local church is not just working with the poor—it is the poor" (90). What is the difference?

The authors write: "Mutuality—teaching, exhorting, caring for one another—can flourish in the family atmosphere of a small group" (94). Have you experienced this kind of mutuality in a small group? Do you experience this kind of mutuality in your community group?

RESOURCES

Planting Missional Churches by Ed Stetzer

Planting Growing Churches by Aubrey Malphurs

CHAPTER 6 | WORLD MISSIONS

SCRIPTURE

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28: 18-20).

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Consider how central Jesus Christ is to mission:

“*He* is the one to whom authority has been given; *he* is the one who commands his disciples to go; *his* name is among those into which people are to be baptized; it is *his* teaching that people are to obey; *he* is the one who will be with them as they go” (101).

Reflect on the need to keep Jesus the center in all things.

Lord, we must keep your Son in the very center. We are weak, and our tendency is to stray. Take us deeper and deeper into the beauty of the Cross. We will go forth with empty words if we go forth with anything on our lips other than your Son. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SUMMARY

A mission for the nations to hear the gospel is present all throughout Scripture. At the center of mission is Jesus Christ—mission begins with hearts that have been changed by Him. The local church, then, is the community from which mission flows. There has been a historical contrast drawn between the *missio Dei* (God’s mission) and the *missio ecclesiae* (the church’s mission). The reality is that the role of the church is to participate in God’s mission—there need be no distinction.

APPLICATION & YOU

“Integral to Christ’s community are people whose hearts have been changed and softened so that we reach out instinctively and sacrificially to those at the margins of society” (102).

Is your heart there? Have you been changed by the gospel, so that your heart breaks for the poor? How (and towards whom) is your heart still hardened?

APPLICATION & THE CHURCH

“We need to see the church as something beautiful, dynamic, and capable of reaching the nations with the gospel word” (104).

Do you see your church like this? How can you be more committed to world missions?

APPLICATION & THE WORLD

“But they expect the state to defend the interests of the church or legislate Christian values or protect the Christian heritage of their nation. So-called evangelical groups campaign to defend Christian influence in state education or a distinctly Christian coronation or inauguration oath. The cause of Christ, it is assumed, should be pursued through political means...But as the Great Commission makes clear, Christ’s people should expect to be persecuted by the world (Matthew 5:11-12). Our King does not reign from a throne but from a cross” (102-3).

Do we waste effort on forcing Christ into the world’s cultures and politics, when we should be preaching Him crucified? What does persecution from the world look like for us?

FURTHER QUESTIONS

The authors write, “The church is not a human invention or institution but reflects and expresses the triune character and saving purposes of God” (106). Have you been a part of a church that was too much of a human institution? What happens when churches cease to reflect God?

Does your heart burn for world missions? Might you be called to pursue that desire to evangelize the nations?

The authors talk about international terrorist networks as being an apt (if a bit ironic) model for how the church should be impacting the world. What kind of influence is the Christian church having around the world? Is this analogy helpful?

RESOURCES

Let The Nations Be Glad by John Piper

Transforming Mission by David Bosch

CHAPTER 7 | DISCIPLESHIP AND TRAINING

SCRIPTURE

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18-20).

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Consider all the “along the road” ministry done in Jesus’ life:

- He healed and taught while on His way to heal a centurion’s servant
- He taught and trained while answering entrapping questions from the Pharisees
- He modeled servitude as He ate meals
- He changed the life of a Samaritan woman while waiting at a well

Think about places in your daily life and routine where “along the road” ministry is possible. Consider how you might be more intentional with those opportunities.

Lord, stir our hearts to know and understand what real discipleship and real teaching look like. Remind us that every “along the road” moment is a chance to demonstrate mature, gospel transformation in our lives. Give us opportunities to disciple, and be discipled—to teach and be taught. We ask this in your Son’s name, Amen.

SUMMARY

As the church, we are called to intentionally pursue relationships and grow through discipleship and training. Teaching the word can be achieved through the Sunday sermon—but that is only the beginning. Most teaching of the word involves normal relationships, time invested and gospel intentionality. We are called to more than just hearing the word—we are called to *practicing* the word in our daily lives. Teaching and training both happen organically, “along the road.” We teach and train every day as we go to work, love our families and buy the groceries. In the church, discipline needs to reflect this organic nature; rebuke and correction should occur often and be handled maturely. Leaders in the church are not above the flock, they are a part of the flock, called to be obedient in leadership.

APPLICATION & YOU

“We should be teaching one another the Bible as we are out walking, driving in the car, or washing the dishes. People should learn the truth of justification

not only in an exposition of Romans 5 but as they see us resting on Christ's finished work instead of anxiously trying to justify ourselves. They should understand the nature of Christian hope not only as they listen to a talk on Romans 8 but as they see us groaning in response to suffering as we wait for glory..." (117-8).

Are you teaching the Christian faith in the way that you live your life? If someone observed you for a day, would they find evidence in your life for the Biblical truths you profess?

APPLICATION & THE CHURCH

"We rate churches by whether they have good teaching or not. But James says great teaching counts for nothing. What counts is the *practice* of the word. What counts is teaching that leads to changed lives" (116).

Are we, as a church, practicing the word that we preach? Is that evident in changed lives at our church? Is that evident in our service to neighbors, classmates and the city?

APPLICATION & THE WORLD

"In a sense, church is Eden. This is God's garden in which we find all we need for life and godliness" (121).

Is the church truly operating as an "Eden" in the world? What does the rest of the world make into an Eden?

FURTHER QUESTIONS

The authors claim that the larger a church body becomes, the easier it becomes for relationships to be superficial. Why does that happen? How can we reverse that trend?

The authors write that we need to create churches in which "rebuke and exhortation are normal" (122). How do you usually handle being rebuked? What do we dislike so much about rebuke? What is the Godly response to it? At the end of this chapter, the authors suggest that the church can become a place from which we sometimes want a vacation, not a place where we go for peace and solace. Is this true? If so, why?

RESOURCES

Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life by Donald Whitney
Fit Bodies, Fat Minds by Oz Guinness

CHAPTER 8 | PASTORAL CARE

SCRIPTURE

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:3-4).

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Reflect on the beauty and the power in these truths about our God:

- He is sovereign
- He is majestic
- He is good
- He is gracious

Consider how these truths might cast hope and joy into the dark and painful places of your life.

Lord, help us to know and experience you as sufficient. We spend so much time seeking “counseling” from the world. What we need is your word and your truth and your Son. Have mercy on us in our disobedience and draw us slowly and gently back into your arms. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

SUMMARY

Pastoral care has become a more relevant issue to Western churches with the growth of a “therapy culture.” An alternate view to seeking counseling outside of the church body is to trust that God’s word is sufficient, and that counseling within the church can bring about healing. Pastoral care is simply applying gospel truths to life’s problems. The church community is the context in which we learn how to live as persons in community. We need to continue to be intentional in speaking the truth of the gospel into each others lives.

APPLICATION & YOU

“Our problem is that we forget we have been forgiven. We forget that we have all we need for life and godliness. We forget the precious promises of the gospel” (138).

Is this true for you? Is this your root problem? How can you cling to the promise of forgiveness?

APPLICATION & THE CHURCH

“While the need for specific counseling sessions in a more formal environment will remain, healthy engagement with others in committed relationships will deal with so many of the presenting issues and underlying causes of...problems” (136).

Has our church created this environment successfully? Do you feel that you can find counseling and healing within the church body? Do you have relationships that will support you in this?

APPLICATION & THE WORLD

“One of the most significant issues faced by anyone involved in pastoral care is the explosion in counseling within contemporary Western society. There is something of a therapy culture developing” (128).

Is there a “therapy culture” developing in the Western world? What are the impacts of that culture? Why has the West become so individualized as a culture?

FURTHER QUESTIONS

The authors distinguish between two views of Scripture: that it is one source (along with nature) from which we understand our world, or that it is the only, sufficient source from which we understand our world. Which do you believe? What does that mean in your life?

How much merit do you place in secular counseling and the fields of psychology and psychiatry? Are they helpful paths to healing? Or are they falling short of what patients really need?

Calvin said, “The purpose of the gospel [is] to make us sooner or later like God; indeed it is, so to speak, a kind of deification.” Have you ever thought of the gospel in this way? How could thinking this way change your Christian walk?

RESOURCES

The Contemplative Pastor by Eugene Peterson

Death By Love by Mark Driscoll

CHAPTER 9 | SPIRITUALITY

SCRIPTURE

“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:1-3).

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Meditate on the words of Psalm 19:

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever.

Lord, we want to know you deeply. Stir in us a love for your word. Awaken in us a desire for prayer. Grow in us a yearning for community. Move us to draw near to you as one people, set apart. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

SUMMARY

Spirituality has largely been defined by contemplation, silence and solitude. A new way to consider spirituality is by word, petition and community. Rather than contemplation on the abstract, Christian spirituality means contemplation on God’s spoken word in Scripture. Rather than passive silence, God calls us to active, loud, bold petition and repentance. Rather than an individualistic pursuit of Christ, God calls us to pursue Him in community.

APPLICATION & YOU

“In the mystical and contemplative traditions, the goal of spirituality is union with Christ...Union with Christ is not the goal of spirituality; it is the foundation of spirituality. It is not attained through disciplines or stages; it is given through childlike faith” (143).

Is your spirituality based on a childlike faith? What does it mean that we are *already* united with Christ?

APPLICATION & THE CHURCH

“This community spirituality clearly requires a certain level of relationship. We need to be sharing our lives. We need to be with other Christians ‘daily.’ We

need friendships that are real, open, and intimate. We need to give one another license to dig into our lives and challenge our hearts” (151).

What is scary or messy about this kind of “community spirituality?” Would you prefer to keep spirituality private?

APPLICATION & THE WORLD

“Biblical spirituality is not a spirituality of silence; it is a spirituality of passionate petition. If we are engaged with the world around us, we will care about that world. We will be passionate about people’s needs, our holiness, and God’s glory” (148).

Are we that passionate for our world? Are we consistent in crying out in prayer on behalf of a broken world? Why do we too often lack that passion?

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Is there a place for contemplation, silence and solitude? When and where are those disciplines helpful? Have you been blessed by those disciplines in your walk?

The authors claim that “we should prioritize prayer with others over prayer alone” (149). Which do you find easier? How do we achieve a good balance of private and communal prayer?

Have you seen spirituality become a works-based source of pride for yourself or for others? What are the consequences of this kind of outlook?

RESOURCES

Holiness by J.C. Ryle

Righteous Sinner by Ron Julian

CHAPTER 10 | THEOLOGY

SCRIPTURE

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Hans Denck said, “No man can know Christ unless he follows after him in life.” That means following after Christ in...

- His love for the weak and oppressed
- His intentional service to His friends
- His steadfast obedience to His Father
- His suffering and death on the Cross
- His glorious resurrection from the dead

Consider the joys and sorrows that will come if we have the courage to follow after Christ in life.

Lord, give us the strength and the heart to share with your Son in suffering and in exaltation. Help us to seek knowledge of your Son in the Word. Help us make our theology Christ-centered and word-centered. May we not be puffed up with knowledge of facts, but be earnestly seeking knowledge of a Person: Jesus Christ. We will greatly need your strength and blessing in this. In Christ's name, Amen.

SUMMARY

Theology is more than just study, it is an encounter with the living God. Theology can never stray from the word, it can never be separated from the mission of the church and it can never be productively applied outside of community. We need to faithfully understand the message of the Bible, and faithfully proclaim it to each other. The greatest barrier to that is our own sin. Theology in community ensures an accurate understanding of the word.

APPLICATION & YOU

“Bible interpretation is not just about me and my Bible. It is about God's word to his people, a people with a responsibility toward the world” (158).

Do you agree with this statement? Is it hard to study the Bible alone? Do you prefer solitary study, or group study? How is God glorified in your pursuit of knowledge of Him?

APPLICATION & THE CHURCH

“Theology is also the task of the church because the only theology that matters and is worthy of the name is practical theology. Theology is the stuff of life. Theology is a service of worship that extends over the whole of life” (155).

Has your church made theology practical? Do we, as a community, view the study of God as the “stuff of life?” Does your church help you apply Scripture to your life?

APPLICATION & THE WORLD

“It demands of us that our Bible teaching should always look to explore the missionary implications of a passage—to make the truth plain and to make it real. To that end we need to explore how the text speaks to contemporary culture. At its most basic level, an integral part of the preparation process is thinking through how to articulate the truths being considered to a non-Christian” (157).

Do we teach Scripture in a way that it is plain and real to the world? Are we concerned with making the gospel understandable to culture, to non-Christians and to the world? How can we improve in this?

FURTHER QUESTIONS

The authors define theology as “an encounter with the living God in his word” (154). Is this an accurate definition? How would you define theology?

The authors claim this: “Unbelievers are not satisfied with the pat answers and unexplained terminology that Christians all too often readily accept” (156). Is this true? How can we better speak to and serve unbelievers?

“The main thing that prevents us from understanding the Bible aright is not a lack of hermeneutical skills but our sin. Our sin warps our understanding because we all tend toward self-justification” (160). How does your sin prevent you from drawing near to God and knowing Him?

RESOURCES

Renewal As A Way of Life by Richard Lovelace

The Knowledge of The Holy by A.W. Tozer

CHAPTER 11 | APOLOGETICS

SCRIPTURE

“For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Romans 1:20-21).

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Reflect on the words of Psalm 14:

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

Consider the grace of our Lord, that though we turned aside, He brought us back to Him.

Lord, forgive our corruption. Shower your grace upon rebellious hearts that do not honor you as they should. Give us the wisdom and the desire to speak the reason for our joy to those around us, that some may be brought to your feet. We ask this in Jesus’ name, Amen.

SUMMARY

The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement that believed reason to be the only acceptable way to truth. History has revealed, though, that objections to Christianity are often not problems of the head, but problems of the heart. Many reject Christianity because it seems restrictive to personal freedom. Apologetics, then, seeks to reveal unbelief as a heart problem. Postmodernism would throw all truth claims out the window, but this creates an even more power-driven society than the modern society. The truest testament to the gospel is relational apologetics: letting the world see the attractiveness and truth of Christianity lived out in Christian community.

APPLICATION & YOU

“What prevents us from knowing God is our rebellion against him” (167).

How have you rebelled against God? Is this your greatest barrier to knowing Him? What other barriers keep you from believing the Christian faith?

APPLICATION & THE CHURCH

“What will commend the gospel are lives lived in obedience to the gospel and a community life that reflects God’s triune community of love. People will not believe until they are genuinely open to exploring the truth about God. They become open as they see that it is good to know God. And they see that it is good to know God as they see the love of the Christian community” (175).

Is this “relational apologetic” the best way to persuade non-believers? In your church, does your city see that it is good to know God? How can we commend the gospel more to our community?

APPLICATION & THE WORLD

“[A]ll philosophy, however rational, is ultimately a justification for the way we want to live our lives. And modern people want to live their lives without God. So they construct a worldview in which God is either marginal (deism) or nonexistent (atheism)” (166).

Is this the world’s philosophy? Are the nations rejecting God because they prefer to live for themselves? How can we witness to such a world?

FURTHER QUESTIONS

The authors claim that the *idea* of a Savior is not offensive to people, but the fact that we *need* a Savior is. Why is need so offensive to us?

The authors say that the only way to know God is through the message of the cross. Is this true for you? How have you come to know God in your walk with Him?

Graham Tomlin said, “The crucial factor in persuading someone to believe, then, is not to present evidence, but first to awaken a desire for God in them.” Have you experienced this to be true? If it is, how do we awaken that desire in our unbelieving friends and family?

RESOURCES

The Bruised Reed & Smoking Flax by Richard Sibbes

Living As The People of God by Christopher Wright

The Reason For God by Tim Keller

CHAPTER 12 | CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

SCRIPTURE

“But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness” (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5).

REFLECTION & PRAYER

Recall Christ’s words: “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14). Consider that Christ counted children and young people worthy and welcome to come to Him.

Lord, soften our heart towards children and young people. Show us ways to bring the gospel to them in a real and applicable way. Guard us from the temptation to water down the message in hopes of making it more attractive. Remind us, God, that your gospel speaks for itself with power and beauty. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

SUMMARY

Young people around the world seem less and less interested in church. Kids are not interested in watered down church activities—they want serious Bible teaching. The church community needs to actively seek the involvement of young people in the life of the church.

APPLICATION & YOU

“But our experience suggests that more significant than peer relationships are relationships with Christians who are older than the teenagers but not as old as their parents” (185).

If you are younger, do you have relationships with older Christian brothers/sisters? Conversely, do you older folks guide and mentor those younger than you? What are the benefits of such relationships?

APPLICATION & THE CHURCH

“Young people matter, not because they are the ‘church of tomorrow,’ but because they are an integral part of the church today” (186).

How can your church go about including both young and old in the life of the church? Why is this important for the health of the community?

APPLICATION & THE WORLD

“Around one thousand young people walk out of the door of churches in the UK each week, never to return” (181).

Why is this a trend around the world? Why are churches failing to reach young people? What about church or the gospel is turning kids off?

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Do you think young people are fed up with “sugar-coated Christianity” and yearning for deeper Biblical teaching? Have you experienced this tension in working with youth?

The authors write: “We have a simple rule of thumb in our church: if we would not do this as a family, why do it as a church?” How could this rule be applied to our community? Is it a good rule of thumb?

In high school or college, do you recall being looked down on for your youth? What about in the church as a young Christian? How did you respond to this?

RESOURCES

Shepherding A Child's Heart by Ted Tripp
Age of Opportunity by Ted Tripp

CHAPTER 13 | SUCCESS

SCRIPTURE

“It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s 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” (Ephesians 4:11-13).

REFLECTION/PRAYER

Reflect on the *true* lyrics of Edward Mote’s famous hymn:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly trust in Jesus’ Name.

Consider how sure of a foundation we have in Jesus Christ, in whom we find all hope.

Lord, wash away our worldly notions of success, and remind us that we have only to trust in your Son’s name. Keep us firmly grounded in the Cross and draw us back when we stray from that Cross. God, we desire the kind of “success” that ends with the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Strengthen us for the road ahead. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

SUMMARY

“Success” has been dangerously defined in the evangelical world. With regards to growth, many would say that larger congregations equals success. On the contrary, churches that continually plant as they grow develop intimate communities of believers. With regards to leadership, many view leaders as “performers.” Leaders that are enabling other leaders, though, are held accountable as members of their community, rather than seen as above the community. Finally, with regards to success, many churches seem to be about worldly glory (big building, charismatic leaders, etc.). Healthy churches, though, embrace the truth of the gospel, and become churches of the cross. Success, in the Christian world, must be defined by faithfulness to Christ and to His gospel.

APPLICATION & YOU

“Our identity then is not rooted in grace but in the success of our ministry. And so we feel upbeat when we have performed well, and we feel down

when things are not going well. We become enslaved to other people's approval" (198).

How do you define success? Are you a slave to earning the approval/respect/admiration of others?

APPLICATION & THE CHURCH

"The church is always tempted toward a church of glory, whether that takes the form of grand buildings, political influence, global structures, charismatic personalities, or megachurches. But an approach to the church consistent with the gospel is an ecclesiology of the cross" (199).

Is your church a church of glory or a church of the cross? What can we do to focus more on the cross, and not our own glory? How will your church be tempted towards becoming a church of glory?

APPLICATION & THE WORLD

"Too many of our notions of success owe more to the world than to the God we worship. We measure success in terms of numbers, budgets, style, staff, prestige" (191).

How does the world measure success? In churches? In personal lives? In work? In families?

FURTHER QUESTIONS

The authors write, "True accountability is more about relationships than about hierarchies. It requires community more than structures" (197). What does accountability look like in your life? Does it need work?

The authors define success as faithfulness to Christ and his word. Is that an accurate definition? Would you alter it?

This chapter ends with a story about the Arms of Mercy church. Is your church functioning as the arms of mercy to your city? How can we seek more opportunities to be that to our community?

RESOURCES

Humility by Andrew Murray

Don't Waste Your Life by John Piper



Our identity is in the gospel; our mission is to reflect Jesus' glory and seek renewal for the city.

IDENTITY

The Gospel
We live our lives based upon, and within, the gospel message for God's glory recognizing that ALL our identity, beliefs and actions are connected to the gospel message. God has been unfolding his Story since before time began. We believe we are participants in the Story and need to understand it and see how our lives intersect with it. Therefore, we regularly reacquire ourselves with the Gospel by interacting with God's Word. We look for ways and times to tell the Gospel often. We also take time to listen to others stories and help them find their lives within God's Gospel. (Genesis 1:1-2; John 1:1; Psalm 1; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

MISSION

Reflect (word)	Renew (deed)
We, as a church, are rooted firmly in reflection on the Bible. In studying Scripture, we want to know who God is, and who we are. Our mission as a church is to reflect the one who is everything: Jesus Christ. We desire to give Him the glory, and reflect that glory before the world.	We do not want to simply hear the words of the Bible, but to DO the words of the Bible. As a church, our mission is to go forth from our church community to renew God's creation: our neighborhoods, our cities and our world.

RHYTHMS

Community	Servants	Learners	Missionaries
The Bible says followers of Jesus are God's children, and therefore we are brothers and sisters in Christ. This fact means we can enjoy deep and meaningful relationships with each other because we all share the same Father. As a community, it is our joy and calling to care for the needs of one another, both physically and spiritually. We disciple, nurture and hold one another accountable to this covenant life we live together. We experience community through our gatherings and community groups and simply trying to love each other as Jesus loves us in our daily lives. God desires that we live in such a way that the world would know what He is like, and He has equipped us to do this by the power of the Holy Spirit. (John 1:12-13,13:34; Romans 12:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:8; 1 Peter 1:22)	Jesus did not come to this earth to be served but to serve, and it was His plan from the beginning of time that we would be a people that served each other regardless of class, race or social status. We do not serve for the sake of serving or to set a moral example, but to emulate Jesus, and thus point others toward faith in Him. As both the Old and New Testaments give us repeated commands that we are to serve and love the poor, we do not want to neglect loving those who have nothing material to offer in return. It is our joy to bless others and to show mercy as we have been shown mercy. (Lev. 23:22; Mark 10:45; John 13:8; 1 Peter 4:11)	We read in the Bible that Jesus grew in both height and wisdom. He learned from religious teachers, by living in community, and through regular times of being with God. Jesus called others to be His disciples so that He could pass His learning on to them and they could also live in obedience to God and have renewed lives. He then sent His disciples out to make new disciples. Disciples of Jesus spend personal time with God and are involved in learning from the Bible. The Christian scriptures are frequently referred to as honey-sweet and flavorful. We come to God's word looking forward to it as a fine treat. (Matthew 28:18-20; Luke 2:52; Ephesians 4:11-13; 2 Timothy 2:2)	Jesus came to the earth to live among humans and help us realize our need for saving grace through Him. While here He connected with those around Him and lived life within their culture so they could encounter what God is truly like. Jesus came so that all people, places and things then and now could be restored to a right relationship with God. In the same way, we believe we are missionaries sent into our daily lives to see all things renewed by God through Jesus. (Matthew 28:19, 20; John 1:14; 20:21; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Colossians 1:19)

ACTIONS

Community Groups Sunday Gathering Arts Collective Mercy Church Planting Mission Trips Reflect Forum Community Development Gospel Classes

Our identity is in the gospel; our mission is to reflect Jesus' glory and seek renewal for the city.

COMMUNITY GROUP LISTING

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TUESDAY

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