



INTRODUCTION

1. Gospel meditation(s).

In your groups or breakout rooms, read this parable silently and then have a discussion on what this teaches you about your own beliefs in the gospel. Use some of these questions to help guide your discussion.

- How does this parable make you feel? About the gardener? About the nobleman?
- What does this parable tell you about your motives when it comes to approaching your relationship with Jesus?

a. A gospel parable.

“Once upon a time in an old kingdom, there was a gardener who grew an enormous carrot in his garden. Now this man loved his Sovereign, so he came and presented the carrot to the king, saying, “This is the best carrot my garden will ever grow. Receive it as a token of my love.” The king discerned his heart of love and devotion, and saw that he wanted nothing in return. This moved the king and he then gave the gardener far more land than he currently had for his garden, so the man went home rejoicing.

Now a nobleman at court overheard this conversation. And he thought to himself, “If that is the response the lord makes to such a small gift, what will he give in response to a great one?” So the next day he brought the king a fine horse, saying, “This is the best horse my stables will ever grow. Receive it as a token of my love.” But the King discerned the nobleman’s heart, and in response he just received the horse and dismissed the giver. When the king saw the look of confusion on his face, he said, “The gardener’s gift was a gift, indeed, out of love, but you are just trying to make a profit. He gave me the carrot, but you gave yourself the horse.”

Now do you see what this teaches? If you know God offers you his salvation freely, and that there is nothing to do but to accept the perfect righteousness of his Son, then you can feed the hungry and clothe the naked just for the love of God and for the love of people. But if you think you are getting God’s favor in return for these deeds, then it is yourselves you are feeding, yourselves you are clothing.



- Charles Spurgeon

I. THE FUNCTION OF THE GOSPEL.

A. INSTRUCTION.

While we may say that the gospel is important, it may actually function in a different way for us. We too often say what we want to believe, but we may not actually believe it, or we may not function as though we believe it. An example of this might be, 'We believe that the ice is thick enough to hold us up, but we will not walk on it, because we **functionally** don't believe that the ice will truly support our weight.' Our functional beliefs are not necessarily based upon reality, but they are the reality. In this way, we want to spend some time uncovering the function of what we actually believe about the gospel.

B. EXERCISE #1. On a sheet of paper, draw a simple picture or icon that helps to describe how the gospel tends to function in your life. On the other side draw an icon/picture of how you'd like the gospel to function in your life. Discuss in your groups after 3-5 minutes. Here are possible pictures. Use them, or create your own. Be prepared to discuss with your table. If you're really bold, be prepared to discuss with the larger group.

Once you have completed the discussion, take some time to look at how the Bible speaks openly about how the gospel should function in our lives. Below is a list of texts and verses that instruct us in this. In your groups, look at these passages, which will be assigned, and use these questions to guide your discussion. Choose one person from your table to summarize your teaching to share with the larger group.

- What does this text tell you about the actual function that the good news is supposed to have in our lives?
- How does that differ from how you see, or personally experience the gospel to function in your own life?
- What icon would you draw to symbolize how the gospel functions in these passages?

a. Colossians 1:4-6.

b. Colossians 2:6,7.

c. Romans 1:16-17



d. Romans 6:1-11

e. Galatians 2:20.

f. Mark 8:35.

Have one person from each group (designated in the rooms already), share with the rest of the group their findings.

II. THE HEART AND THE GOSPEL.

A. INSTRUCTION.

We need to take a careful look at something that many assume or are not aware of: the actual location where salvation is received and affected. God's Word describes this location as the heart. It is an elusive term that is often misunderstood by us mainly because of the contemporary definition. Merriam Webster defines the heart as, *'the emotional or moral nature as distinguished from the intellectual nature.'* From this definition, it is obvious that the heart is the opposite of the intellect. This is not true of the biblical definition however, that defines the heart as the human decision making centre that combines the emotions and the intellect into a comprehensive category. This is important because saving faith in Jesus is a decision that is made in the heart that involves both our mind and our emotions.

Many Christians experience a transfer of information about the gospel, but no daily transformation as a result of that information. In other words, we might know something to be true, but we still have no real sense of it. One of the most vivid illustrations of this comes from a word picture from an ancient but relevant preacher in 1800's in New England named Jonathan Edwards. He uses a word picture to describe the difference between knowing something is true and experiencing it as true in our hearts.

'There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet, and having a sense of its sweetness. A man may have the former that knows not how honey tastes; but a man cannot have the latter unless he has an idea of the taste of honey in his mind. So there is a difference between believing that a person is beautiful, and having a sense of his beauty.' (Jonathan Edwards, A Divine and Supernatural Light, Banner of Truth, 1992, p. 14)



It may be summarized like this: it is possible to 'know about' the gospel, without 'knowing' the gospel's reality in your heart. It is possible to have knowledge that does not functionally affect my decisions, emotions and will. Jesus warned against such 'knowledge' when He said, '*On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*' (Matthew 7:22,23) In other words, these were people that were serving others in His name, using spiritual gifts that He had given to build up His church (1 Corinthians 12:4-11, Ephesians 4:18) but the knowledge of the gospel did not have a 'saving' effect on their souls.

B. EXERCISE.

Break off into groups and have a discussion about a definition of the heart, and why its important in our understanding of the gospel. You will be given a few verses to meditate on as you consider these questions.

Use these questions to guide your discussion.

- A. What definition of heart do you typically use?
- B. When you hear the phrase, 'Follow Your Heart' (some of you may even have this phrase on a sign in your home!), what does that mean?
- C. Do you tend to these two things, the heart and the mind as opposites? Why?

C. EXERCISE.

Now that you have had a discussion about what your working definitions of the heart are, let's try to get an idea of what the Bible says about the heart.

In your groups or breakout rooms, have someone look up the text and read it out loud, and then write notes on what each group of texts tells us about the heart. Use these questions to guide your discussion. It may be helpful to have a couple of different Bible translations to see how various words are rendered. Pick one person from your group (one different than the first exercise) to share with the larger group when the small group exercise is completed.

What do all these verses have in common?

How do they inform the biblical definition of the heart?



A. Leviticus 19:17, Psalm 4:7, Psalm 13:2, John 14:1, 1 Peter 1:22.

B. Genesis 24:45, Matthew 12:33-34, Romans 10:8-9,

C. Genesis 6:5,6, Deuteronomy 8:17, Proverbs 16:1,9.

D. Leviticus 26:40,41, 1 Samuel 16:7, Deuteronomy 5:28-29, Hebrews 4:12, Ephesians 6:5-6, 1 Corinthians 4:5.

Q. What is your big takeaway from all of these verses?

III. THE APPLICATION OF THE GOSPEL TO THE HEART.

A. INSTRUCTION.

Now that we've spent some time talking about the geography of where change happens, we want to move on to a discussion of how that change takes place. It takes place when we replace what we wrongly believe about ourselves, Jesus and the world, with the truth of the gospel that is real and transformative for us. Often, disciple making processes only concentrate on the outward behaviour. Yet as we've learned, our outward behaviour is dictated by our 'inner being', or heart.

B. EXERCISE.

Now that we have spent some time understanding the location of the centre point of what the gospel changes--our hearts--we want to spend some time testing out our understanding of that change. Below are some case studies, fictional in nature, but collected from real experiences. You will be assigned a case study to think about and think through.

Keep in mind that the goal of this exercise is not to change someone's behaviour, but to understand what is going on in their hearts. In the process, you will likely uncover some of the things you functionally believe as well.

When the exercise is over, we'd love to talk about this experience together by asking some questions to lead our discussion.



1. Case Study: Levi

Levi would tell you that he had been a Christian his whole life. In truth, he had become a Christian through a gospel presentation given in a youth event in a small town where he grew up. He could remember drinking alcohol behind his parents back and chasing girls in order to reach as many bases as possible with them. All that had changed when he became a Christian. He stopped drinking alcohol and not-so-secretly disdained those who did. At times, Levi felt embarrassed that his testimony wasn't more sensational as some of the stories of those who had been converted out of deep sin and rebellion. Many times, Levi did not 'feel' saved and wondered how it was possible to experience the joy that seemed obvious during the great music and preaching at his local church. He loved his small group, was committed to his wife and celebrated the miraculous adoption of his two sons. In one of the small group discussions, Levi mentioned that he "lost his witness" by an outburst of anger during a hockey game in a local league. He's just shared this story with your men's discipleship group and has asked you as a leader if you'd be able to meet for coffee sometime next week to help him, "get his witness back".

- 1) What is your initial response to Levi?
- 2) What do you think he is believing about the gospel?
- 3) What do you think he is not believing about the gospel that's causing her to act like this?
- 4) What are some of the questions you might ask Levi to get to the heart of the matter?
- 5) What is the tone you would use in talking about this?



2. Case Study: Olivia

Olivia is a control freak. At least that's what her husband keeps telling her. She would have never described herself this way until her husband Mike said so a couple of years ago after a church message on the idols. She met Mike through an evangelistic outreach at her university and married him a couple of years later. She always understood herself to be someone who knew the right thing to do or say in any given situation and she made sure she took every opportunity to tell you. Often, she would respond harshly if you didn't take her advice seriously. Recently, Olivia had had a tough conversation at work. As a legal assistant in a high profile firm, Olivia was accustomed to blunt clarity in any given conversation. She regularly had lunch with her colleague Susanna and many times they would discuss her problem with loneliness. Lately, Susanna tried to change the subject if Olivia asked her about it. Olivia saw the solution as simple: Susanna lacked boldness to build friendships beyond her small circle. So she always told her, and was visibly irritated when Susanna didn't listen to her advice. Yesterday's lunch was the worst yet. When Olivia asked about Susanna's battle with loneliness, and she actually said to Olivia's face, 'Can we not talk about this?' Olivia just shook her head and moved on with the conversation.

Olivia is in your small group and has just recounted this story to you after most of the group had gone home. She doesn't seem to understand why Susanna does not want to talk about her loneliness anymore. She's expressed two things: 1) Susanna seems really stubborn and 2) She doesn't seem to be able to handle the real truth in life. Since Olivia never asks you for advice, you don't expect the pause and the puzzled look on her face. You have a chance to say something.

- 1) What is your initial response to Olivia?
- 2) What do you think Olivia is believing about the gospel?
- 3) What do you think she is not believing about the gospel that's causing her to act like this?
- 4) What are some of the questions you might ask Olivia to get to the heart of the matter?
- 5) What is the tone you would use in talking about this?



3. Case Study: Toby

Monday morning Toby showed up to work late and looked haggard. He had been up the previous night at a time he was rarely awake; 4:16 am. Having had a fight with his spouse the night before, Toby had left many things unsaid in an argument about expectations, or rightly put, missed expectations. His wife, Barb, was always asking him to do something he couldn't seem to accomplish. In her eyes, he over promised and under delivered. He was beginning to think Barb had grown deeply dissatisfied with her marriage and this was her way of telling him. He grew increasingly frustrated with the passive-aggressive behaviour that he saw in her. He realized that instead of honestly expressing how he felt, he sat there quietly and argued with her inside his head instead. From his perspective, that was the only way he could actually win an argument with her. He knew that they should have ended the night praying together, but instead chose to withdraw and civilly suggested that he sleep on the couch to give each other some space to cool down and think. He was still arguing in his head when he woke up. Toby wished he would have said something in the moment, but he knew he would have regretted it if he did.

Toby is in your small group, and has just asked you out for coffee. He shares this story barely holding back tears. He has just asked you if he is crazy, and would like some good counsel on what to do next.

- 1) What is your initial response to him?
- 2) What kind of questions would you further have for him to clarify what the real issues are?
- 3) What do you think he is not believing about the gospel?
- 4) How could you use the gospel to equip him?
- 5) What tone would you use in speaking to him?



4. Case Study: Mary

Mary always believed she was guilty of something. Even when she walked through the doors of Walmart, she was afraid that the alarm would go off, even though she had never stolen anything in her life. She loved her mother dearly, but would often end a phone conversation regretting her answers to her mom's questions, wishing she had been able to think and respond faster. Although most assumed Mary was shy, she often replayed in her head the conversations she had with others, second guessing her words, phrases and ideas. She daydreamed about being the bold, confident woman displayed in the magazines she bought and idealized. She also found herself fantasizing regularly about what she would do if her toddlers didn't demand so much attention. Most of the women in her neighbourhood had small children as well, but Mary felt like an outsider when it came to raising children. If she were totally honest, motherhood bored her. Although her friends, and her husband for that matter, told her how much her children mattered to Jesus, Mary couldn't seem to shake the nagging sense of unfulfillment in her life.

Mary has been one of the regulars in your small group and she lingered one evening after everyone else had gone home. She just shared this sense of unfulfillment with you through tears and has just said she feels guilty about saying this for fear that you will use this against her family.

- 1) What is your initial response to her?
 - 2) What kind of questions would you further have for her to clarify the issues?
 - 3) What do you think she is not believing about the gospel?
 - 4) How could you use the gospel to equip her?
 - 5) What tone would you use in speaking to her?
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- Was this exercise frustrating or helpful? Why or why not? How would you make it better?
 - What other information would you want to know about this person or the situation? What kinds of questions would you want to ask of these individuals.
 - What did you learn about how the gospel functions in your own life?
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V. CONCLUSION.

In your groups, discuss the biggest take away from session 2? Why? If you're comfortable, be prepared to share with the large group.