

4. What is the Gospel?

Twenty-minute discussion

HOOK:

- Have you ever been given an important message to pass on, but have then forgotten what it was? Share with the group.

LOOK:

- Why is it important that we, as Christians, know the substance of the core message God has given us to pass on?
- Revise the seven things that were suggested as the core content to include in a presentation of the Gospel.

BOOK: Ephesians 5:15-17 - Make the most of every opportunity

- Do you think you are ready to make the most of every opportunity that presents itself to encourage others toward faith in Christ? Or, to what extent are you ready?
- If you are not ready, what things might you need to learn, and in what ways might you need to change so as to become ready?
- Is our opportunity to do good in life limited – or are there second and third opportunities?
- How does this awareness affect our view of life?

TOOK:

- Discuss how much you think our general failure to share the Gospel is a heart issue, as compared to a skill or perspective issue.
- What do you think it is for you (a heart, skill or perspective issue)?
- If you could be shown how to concisely share the Gospel, would you be willing to work at revising it so that it gets into your long-term memory, making you always ready to share it?

Pray:

- ...for God to stir His love in your heart for others.
- ...for God to show you people you could encourage toward faith, and to begin to show you how you could do this.

- HANDOUT -

What is the Gospel?

Comment: The gospel message is a message. It has a content! *“But when he comes (the Holy Spirit) he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment” (John 16:8)*. The Holy Spirit can only convict people of the truth of the message if we first fulfil our responsibility to share it. This is not to deny the need to relate, show love, and deal with other matters such as the existence of God, reliability of the Bible and divinity of Christ. They are all part of the picture – but it still remains that there is a central message with a specific content. Doing all these does not excuse neglect with regard to the message. They go together. More so, the message is the most essential and important part of the picture. And we *should* build more things around it – *but can only do so if it is first put in its right place*. Knowing the message is a place to start. Only after this can the needed conversation about how to communicate it effectively in our culture make any real sense, and take us any truly useful direction. First things first – what is the message?

A possible thought outline

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|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. It is a message of love: | 5. Jesus as Saviour |
| 2. Sin | 6. Jesus as Lord |
| 3. Righteousness | 7. Share evidences for your belief. |
| 4. Judgment | |

1. Establishing our Sinfulness

The most basic definition of sin is breaking God's laws.

Scripture:

The Bible says, *“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23)*, and that, *“If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8)*.

Illustration

As an illustration, you could ask a person if they have ever stolen anything. It doesn't have to be a big thing. A biscuit from the cookie jar, or paper clip from a desk is enough. This would make them a thief!

You could then ask if they have ever told a lie, no matter how small. This would make them a liar (and you could admit your own guilt in these at the same time to help put them at ease).

You could then give an example Jesus gave of murder. They hopefully have not murdered, and yet Jesus said that if we hold anger or hatred toward someone, this is the same sin in God's view.

At this point you and your friend is already a lying, thieving murderer (as are you). There is no question that we are all guilty before a *perfect* God!

2. Establishing God's Righteousness

In simple terms, righteousness means perfection. God is holy and cannot tolerate sin.

Scripture

Romans 3:23, as quoted above communicates it well. The Scriptures tell us clearly of the high standard of God's righteousness. Consider also, *“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (Romans 3:20)*.

Illustration

Imagine you were thirsty and were about to drink a glass of cool, clear water. Then I reach over and put a small bit of sewage into your glass. Would you drink it? Of course not! And, would you be upset? Of course! While the sewage may be a small thing, such an impurity is a big deal to us. In the same way our sin may not seem a big thing to us, but it is a to a *perfect* God. He is holy, and cannot let anything imperfect into heaven.

3. The resulting Judgment

Simply defined, judgment is the *just* consequences of our wrongdoing, and hell is the place of punishment for all who have broken God's laws.

Scripture

Romans 3:23 again fits well here. Another simple verse is found in Hebrews 9:27. It says, *“...man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.”*

Illustration

Imagine a judge was ruling on a murder case. The accused admits that he did the murder, but then says sorry. He promises to never do it again, and asks to be let off. How would you react if the judge let him off? Would he be a *good* judge? In the same way God must see that our wrongs are punished.

4. Jesus as Saviour

It is at this point that we come to good news for them. The word Saviour simply means someone who saves us. Because God is just He must punish our sin, but because God loves us He has provided a way out. The gospel is a message of love. The way God saves us is by providing forgiveness for our sins through Jesus.

Scripture

Romans 6:23 says, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* In this verse our guilt is established, and our means of salvation revealed. It is a gift! Why did God have to *give* this to us? It is because we could not gain it for ourselves. Our righteous works could not ‘earn’ it for us, and so He provided it for us, because of His love!

How it works is described well by the most well known verse in the Bible. *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). Jesus’ death on the cross was to take the punishment for our sin, in our place.

It is also clear from the Bible that Jesus is the *only* Saviour (and no other religious lead has ever claimed to be our Saviour in any case). *“Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me’”* (John 14:6).

Illustration

Imagine you are in a fire, and have passed out, and someone saves you. Imagine you are drowning and someone saves you. This is the image of what God has done for us. We don’t always realise the seriousness or consequences of our sin – but God sees it, and has done what is needed to make it possible for us to be saved.

5. Jesus as Lord

The word ‘Lord’ simply means boss, or master.

Scripture

“That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). Our very confession in coming to Christ is that we make Him Lord (boss).

“Peter replied ‘Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins’” (Acts 2:38). To repent means to turn and change. Being a Christian is not just about forgiveness – it is about Lordship!

Comment on follow through – how do we best frame the message in our culture?

It is the growing conviction of many involved in evangelism in post-Christian countries like New Zealand that ‘selling’ this message as ‘come to Jesus for eternal life’ can result in responses for eternal life, *but with no follow through in their lives*. They accept Jesus as Saviour with no intent of making Him Lord.

Salvation is a considered decision! (See Luke 14:28-33). It is suggested that a better ‘framing’ of the Gospel for our culture is ‘come to Jesus for a **restored relationship/friendship with God**’. Our culture better understands friendship as ongoing. Restored purpose comes with that friendship. Eternal life comes as the result of being in that friendship. Does this make sense?

6. Share evidences for your belief

We see Peter doing this in his sermons in Acts 2 and 3. Prophecy, the resurrection, personal testimony, what caused us to believe a God existed, why we chose to trust the Bible, how God touched our hearts, what has changed... all evidence the message.

HOW TO RECEIVE CHRIST SUMMARISED [FOR EASE OF MEMORY]

- A – Admit you are a sinner. Ask for forgiveness.
- B – Believe in Jesus as your Saviour (the only one who can save you)
- C – Commit to follow Jesus as your Lord (your boss, teacher, leader) (Repentance = turning to God’s way)

PRAYER OF COMMITMENT: A.B.C. [FOR EASE OF MEMORY]

Dear Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner [*Admit*] and need Your forgiveness. I believe that You died for my sins [*Believe*]. I ask your forgiveness [*Ask*]. I give the remainder of my life to you [*Commit*]. I choose to trust and commit follow You as Lord and Savior. Because of Jesus. Amen.

**FOUR HABITS OF CHRISTIANS
[NEXT STEPS FOR NEW BELIEVERS - FOR EASE OF MEMORY]**

- 1. Read the Bible:** We read the Bible to understand what God is like and how God wants us to live.
- 2. Pray to God:** We talk to God in prayer because He is our friend and master. He can help us, and those we pray for, through prayer.
- 3. Make friends at a Church:** We attend a Church to learn about God from others and to have Christian friends so we can encourage each other in our commitment to love and serve God on earth.
- 4. Share and serve:** We then share of God's love, and show God's love through how we live, because this is what Christian life truly looks like!