

# INTRODUCTION

## ABOUT WORLD HARVEST MISSION

World Harvest never set out to write and publish curriculum. We are a missions agency that has always believed the power and motive for mission is the gospel of grace at work in the life of a believer. However, along the way, we've also discovered that it's a lot harder to do cross-cultural, team-oriented ministry than we thought. Eventually, we started writing material to keep the gospel front and center in our own lives and relationships. Before long we had pastors and ministry leaders requesting gospel-centered materials for use in their churches and ministries.

Over the years, it's been our privilege to partner with friends who share our passion for the way the gospel transforms both believers and unbelievers alike. This study is the result of one such partnership. Bob Thune and Will Walker wrote *The Gospel-Centered Life* to help their church grow in the gospel. We're partnering with them to publish it because we think it may do the same for you.

Some of the content has been adapted from earlier World Harvest materials. If you are familiar with *Sonship* or *Gospel Transformation* you may recognize a few key themes and concepts. If you haven't heard them presented before, Bob and Will have done a great job of articulating the gospel in simple, deep and transformative ways here. One of the strengths of this curriculum is the way that their experience of church-planting influenced the development of *The Gospel-Centered Life*, which is just one of the reasons that we're so pleased to make it available.

## FROM THE AUTHORS

*A few years ago, we planted a church. It's a wonderfully messy church, where mature Christians, newer Christians, and lots of non-Christians and skeptics are all mixed up together. Our church is structured around these groups called missional communities, which are kind of like traditional church small groups, only completely different.*

*The ideal missional community consists of a small band of Christians living on mission together, and inviting their non-Christian friends to join in conversation and interaction about the gospel of Jesus. This seemed like a really great idea...until we started doing it. We quickly discovered two significant problems:*

- 1. Most traditional "church small group" material was written for a Christian audience, and therefore non-Christians relate to it about as well as a cattle rancher relates to vegetarians.*



*2. Many Christians have a weak and anemic understanding of the gospel, so asking them to talk about how the gospel is transforming them is like asking a teenage boy band to talk about the finer elements of Mozart's work.*

*So we wrote *The Gospel-Centered Life* in order to shape "gospel DNA" in our church in a way that was accessible to both Christians and non-Christians.*

*The Gospel-Centered Life is intended to help Christians understand how the gospel shapes every aspect of life and conduct. Colossians 1:6 says that the gospel is "continually bearing fruit and increasing" in and among us, even after we first believe it. How does that happen? Why is a continual rediscovery and application of the gospel so important? How will our personal growth and missional life be stunted if we don't grasp the gospel deeply? These are the questions that GCL seeks to answer.*

## ABOUT THIS STUDY

The biggest advantage to *The Gospel-Centered Life* is its flexibility. It's appropriate for missional church-planting contexts, established churches, and parachurch or campus ministries. It creates good dialogue among groups of mature Christians as well as among new Christians and non-Christians. It can be led by an experienced small-group leader or by a high school student. And because the concepts are basic and biblical, it adapts easily to different cultural settings (it's already been used with international students, African refugees, and Chinese house-churches).

### THE GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE IS IDEAL FOR:

- » Pastors and leaders who want to spur gospel renewal in their churches and ministries
- » Church-planters who want to form gospel DNA in the churches they start
- » Students and campus ministers who are looking to live out the gospel on campus
- » Christians who want to be more deeply formed around the gospel
- » Small group leaders who are looking for content that "works" with diverse groups of people
- » Missionaries who are looking for simple material to disciple new Christians

## HOW THIS STUDY IS ORGANIZED

*The Gospel-Centered Life* contains nine lessons that are grouped around three themes. This Leader's Guide contains all the information needed to facilitate the group, as well as copies of the materials in the Participant's Guide.

## *What is the gospel?*

### **LESSON 1: THE GOSPEL GRID**

If the gospel is constantly “bearing fruit and growing” (Col. 1:6), then everything has to do with the gospel—God, humanity, salvation, worship, relationships, shopping, recreation, work, personality...everything! The objective in this lesson is to establish a framework for talking about the gospel. This framework will get worked out in greater detail over the next two sessions.

### **LESSON 2: PRETENDING AND PERFORMING**

Each of us tends to “shrink the cross,” which is to say that something is lacking in our understanding, appreciation, or application of Jesus’ sacrifice for our sin. This manifests itself in two main ways: pretending and performing. Pretending minimizes sin by making ourselves out to be something we are not. Performing minimizes God’s holiness by reducing his standard to something we can meet, thereby meriting his favor. Both are rooted in an inadequate view of God’s holiness and our identity.

### **LESSON 3: BELIEVING THE GOSPEL**

We have been focusing on the ways we minimize the gospel—the negative. This lesson turns our attention to the positive: What remedies has God given in the gospel to keep us from shrinking the cross and depending on our own effort?

## *What does the gospel do in us?*

### **LESSON 4: LAW AND GOSPEL**

Continuing to think about how the gospel interacts with our lives, but now we now turn to consider the gospel’s relationship to the law. What is the law? Does God expect me to obey it? What is the purpose of the law? How does the law help me to believe the gospel? How does the gospel help me to obey the law?

### **LESSON 5: REPENTANCE**

This lesson deals with repentance. In our culture, this usually sounds like a bad thing, but repentance is the norm for gospel-centered living. Becoming more aware of God’s holiness and our sinfulness leads us to repent and believe the gospel of Jesus. Biblical repentance frees us from our own devices and makes a way for the power of the gospel to bear fruit in our lives.

### **LESSON 6: HEART IDOLATRY**

The Christian walk consists of two repeated steps: repentance and faith. Turning our attention to the topic of faith, we focus on how we grow through believing the gospel. This week’s goal is to take “believing the gospel” out of the abstract and make it concrete.

## *How does the gospel work through us?*

### **LESSON 7: MISSION**

The gospel is simultaneously at work in us and through us. Inwardly, our desires and motives are being changed as we repent and believe the gospel. As we experience Christ's love in this way, we are compelled to engage those around us with the same kind of redemptive love. God's grace brings renewal everywhere, in us and through us.

### **LESSON 8: FORGIVENESS**

The gospel that works in us always works through us. It shows its power in our relationships and actions. One key way this happens is when we forgive others biblically.

### **LESSON 9: CONFLICT**

Conflict is something we all experience (regularly), but often handle in very fleshly ways. The gospel gives us a pattern and a means to healthy conflict resolution.

## **HOW TO USE THIS STUDY**

*The Gospel-Centered Life* is designed for small group study, although it is possible to work through the study independently or in a larger group. The tone of the material assumes a small-group format, because this is the setting we've found to be the most effective.

**Each lesson is designed to take around 1 hour to complete.** If your group has more time available, you can simply spend a little longer in the Discussion and Exercise sections. Our experience has shown that this content often creates deep and substantive conversation that can easily last longer than an hour. So plan accordingly, and be sure to honor the time commitment that your group has made.

Because *The Gospel-Centered Life* is designed as an introduction to the dynamics of gospel renewal, there is no outside work required by the participants. Each person should simply receive a copy of the Participant's Guide for the lesson at hand. The content will often stimulate further reflection over the following days, but no preparation is needed for subsequent lessons.

Likewise, it is not assumed that the group leader will be an expert theologian or longstanding Christian. Ample direction and content is provided in the Leader's Guide to help the leader facilitate the group's time together. The material also provides the content for the study, so there is no need for the group leader to try and "teach" the group. Just relax and guide a good conversation.

*Each of these lessons follows a similar format including these elements...*

#### **BIBLE CONVERSATION**

We want to start by talking about the Bible together. As the name suggests, this section is designed to stimulate your thinking and prepare you and your group for the ideas that will be presented in each lesson.

#### **ARTICLE**

The written articles are the primary source of the teaching content for each lesson. They are short, clear teachings of the concepts being presented in the lesson. Each week, your group will take a few minutes and read the Article out loud together.

#### **DISCUSSION**

This section is where we communally process the concepts being taught in the Article. Often the Discussion will work in conjunction with the next section (Exercise) to help flesh out the teaching and apply it to our lives in concrete ways.

#### **EXERCISE**

Each of the exercises in this study are designed to help you make practical applications of the concepts being taught, or help you understand the content at a deeper heart level. Be sure allow enough time for your group to adequately work through and discuss the exercises as directed.

#### **WRAP-UP**

The Wrap-Up gives the leader the chance to answer any last minute questions, reinforce ideas, and most importantly spend a few minutes praying as group.

## **WHAT TO EXPECT**

#### **EXPECT TO BE CHALLENGED...**

most of us have reduced the gospel to something much less than it is. As you work through each lesson, expect your thinking about the gospel to be challenged and expanded.

#### **EXPECT THE HOLY SPIRIT ...**

to be the one ultimately responsible for the growth of your group, and for the change in each person's life—including your own. Relax and trust him.

**EXPECT YOUR GROUP'S AGENDA TO INCLUDE...**

an open, give-and-take discussion of the article, the questions, and the exercises. Also expect times of prayer at each meeting.

**EXPECT STRUGGLE...**

and don't be surprised to find that your group is a mixture of enthusiasm, hope, and honesty, along with indifference, anxiety, skepticism, guilt, and covering up. We are all people who really need Jesus every day. So expect your group to be made up of people who wrestle with sin and have problems—people just like yourself!

**EXPECT A GROUP LEADER...**

who desires to serve you, but who also needs Jesus as much as you do. No leader should be put on a pedestal, so expect that your group leader will have the freedom to share openly about his or her own weaknesses, struggles, and sins.