

SMALL GROUP RESOURCE

G O S P E L

growth

BECOMING
A FAITH-FILLED
PERSON

SERGE

“Many Christian resources focus either on biblical study to the neglect of deep personal life transformation or on life application based on a very flattened understanding of the gospel. World Harvest has drawn upon their history of rich gospel-based training to produce a series that targets real-life transformation grounded in a robust, grace-based theology. Only a resource saturated in the gospel can lead to the kind of meaningful life change promised to us in the Bible, and I am thrilled to see such a resource now available.”

Rev. David H. Kim, Director of the Gotham Initiative, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, NYC

“I love the series of small group resources, *Gospel Identity*, *Gospel Growth*, and *Gospel Love*. They are theologically rich, but not stuffy; practical, but not pragmatic. They are life-transforming resources that will be used to transform communities on mission with the gospel.”

Scott Thomas, Pastor of Pastoral Development, The Journey Church

“This study brings a powerful experience of gospel truth and a personal relationship with Jesus and all those that he has placed in your life. Using biblical truths, written to open the eyes of all hearts to sins, and full of challenges by the Holy Spirit to change and grow, this is the study you need. User-friendly, even for a first time leader, it is progressive, time-sensitive, and will invite the most timid participant into heart application. I highly recommend this to all who are committed to growing closer to God and being a gospel tool to help others.”

Nancy Puryear, Women’s ministry director (more than eleven years), Christ Community Church; cross-cultural counselor

“God used Jack Miller to help Christians, and pastors especially, to recover the gospel of Jesus Christ as the functional core of the Christian faith. Jack’s famous line, ‘Cheer up, you’re worse off than you think,’ reopened the door to many of us with an invitation to drop the pretense of a good life and to admit and delight in our continuing, desperate need for Jesus. As a church planter and trainer of church planters, I have often wished for a concise series of Bible studies that would help churches to not only know this gospel of grace, but to experience it as well. That’s precisely what this series of gospel studies offers. It is a great way to biblically and relationally ground Christians in the gospel of Jesus Christ and I heartily recommend it.”

John F. Thomas, PhD, Director of Global Training, Redeemer City to City

“I’m probably the most “religious” person you know. I make my living teaching religious students (in seminary) to be more religious, doing religious broadcasts, writing religious books, and preaching religious sermons. It’s very easy to lose the “main thing” about the Christian faith in a religious morass. These studies remind me that it’s all about Jesus and Jesus is all about the Good News (the gospel). They are refreshing, informative and life changing. In fact, these studies are like a refreshing drink of cold, pure water to a thirsty man. Read and use these books from World Harvest Mission and get out of the way as you listen to the laughter and relief of the redeemed.”

Steve Brown, Key Life radio broadcaster; author of *Three Free Sins: God Isn’t Mad at You*

“*Gospel Growth* is unique in that it works at the very heart of our faith. It is a marriage course, a discipleship course, and a Bible study, but it is so much more. It is all about getting the central passion of Christianity—the cross of Jesus Christ—at the center of your life. And not just your thinking life, but your doing and experiencing life. So it is good theology and good practice combined. If you get the cross right, then everything else works.”

Paul Miller, Director of SeeJesus (www.seeJesus.net); author of *A Praying Life*

“I’ve dated a lot of different curriculum in the past, but there’s very little worth taking home to meet Mom. Too often, the writing is too high (too theoretical—have you actually met a sinner before?), too emotive (talk to my head and my heart!) or too clunky (really? can I accomplish this in a week—much less an evening?). WHM’s new Gospel Series small group materials are rifle-ready for the foot soldier in the church to use without a lot of training, and they seem to have been written by real sinners/strugglers for fellow sinners/strugglers. Thanks, WHM, for something I can actually use!”

Geoff Bradford, Pastor, Christ the King Presbyterian Church, Raleigh, NC

GOSPEL GROWTH

BECOMING A FAITH-FILLED PERSON

Book Two in the
Gospel Transformation Series

Serge



www.newgrowthpress.com

Gospel Growth: Becoming a Faith-Filled Person

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Gospel Growth: Becoming a Faith-Filled Person!* The gospel transforms us more into Jesus' likeness each day (2 Corinthians 3:18). This study will help you experience that more abundantly as you grow deeper in your relationship with Jesus and see how the Spirit desires to extend that growth far *beyond* you.

Gospel Growth, the second book in the “Gospel Transformation” series, focuses on the transformation of Christians by the power of the gospel. Over the course of this study we'll examine such topics as living by faith, spiritual disciplines, the role of faith and repentance in transformation, the meaning and importance of living in the power of the Spirit, the goal of sanctification in our lives, and our increasing identification with the suffering, death, and resurrection life of Christ.

As you work through *Gospel Growth*, as well as the other two books in the “Gospel Transformation” series—*Gospel Identity: Discovering Who You Really Are* and *Gospel Love: Grace, Relationships, and Everything That Gets in the Way*—you'll be encouraged to lead a life of greater faith, repentance, and love.

So, how does “gospel transformation” occur? How does it relate to life? What *are* the essentials of the Christian life, and how do they change us? That's what this series is about. Let's summarize it in four foundational points that we'll return to again and again:

- 1. Cheer up! The gospel is far greater than you can imagine!** The gospel of Jesus Christ—and his power to transform our lives and relationships, communities, and ultimately, the nations—is the best news we will ever hear. It gives us a new identity, not based on race, social class, gender, theology, or a system of rules and regulations, but on faith in Jesus—and it's an identity that defines

every aspect of our lives. Because of this we no longer have to hide from our sin and pretend we have it all together. We now have a new way to live and relate to God and others every day. The good news is not only relevant to us when we first believe, but it continues to work in us and through us as we grow, visibly expressing itself in love (Galatians 5:6).

2. **Cheer up! You are worse than you think!** One of the great hindrances to Christian growth, healthy relationships, and strong communities is a life of pretense—pretending that we don't struggle with a multitude of sins, such as self-righteous attitudes, foul tempers, nagging anxieties, lustful looks, controlling and critical hearts, and a general belief that we are better than other people. Part of the good news is that God knows all this—knows *us*—already, and he wants to be the one who changes us. Because our sin blocks our intimacy with God and others, we need God's Spirit to show us our many fears and offensive ways, and we need the insights of others to encourage us and speak into our lives.

Our first two points work together in a cyclical fashion. On the one hand, none of us wants to look at our sin without knowing the good news of forgiveness and deliverance from it. On the other hand, our view of the gospel is severely limited if we do not continually see the depths of our sin. The gospel cannot soak deeply into us unless it addresses our ongoing need for it. And that brings us to the next point.

3. **Cheer up! God's Spirit works in your weakness!** We not only have a new identity, but we have been given the Spirit, who is more than sufficient to lead, guide, and empower us in our new life. The power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in our new lives as well (Ephesians 1:19–20). Nevertheless, the power of the Spirit does not work automatically, but through repentant, obedient faith. Furthermore, this power is made evident through our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9; 13:4). Along with Paul, we can delight in our weakness, for then we are strong and God is glorified. The result is a wonderful freedom to forget about ourselves and stop wondering whether we have enough ability—we don't.

But we can rejoice in the knowledge that God uses and empowers the weak. Therefore, we have the hope discussed in point four.

- 4. Cheer up! God's kingdom is more wonderful than you can imagine!** The kingdom of God is the new and final age that began with Jesus' coming. It is the age of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Romans 14:17). The kingdom of God is about the renewing of all things, and God has made us a part of this great story of salvation. This kingdom is about the reconciliation of relationships, about the restoration of justice and equality, about freedom from every lord except Jesus, about forgiveness, and about the defeat of Satan. It is about compassion for the poor and powerless, about helping those who are marginalized and rejected by society, and about using our gifts and resources for the advancement of others. It is about new communities and the transformation of society and culture. For Paul, to preach the gospel is to preach the kingdom, and therefore to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:24–27).

The goal of each study, therefore, is not simply to master the content, but to allow the gospel to master you and your group more fully. Knowledge is like bread—unless it is digested, it will go stale. The content of this course needs to be chewed, digested, and assimilated, so that true *spiritual* growth can occur. It's easy to slip into the routine of just completing the lesson, but don't. Our ultimate goal here is love—love rooted in a growing faith in Jesus, which leads to more love (Galatians 5:6).

Our prayer is that through your time together, your love for Jesus, and the people God brings into your life, you will grow deeper daily. May God bless and encourage your group as you work together through this study!

ABOUT THE SESSIONS

The sessions in this study are built to take 75 minutes apiece. They've been built so there's plenty of good content, but also plenty of room for discussion. There are suggested times for each section, but again do what you need to as a group—the goal isn't to master the content, but to allow the gospel to master you and your group.

Sessions follow a logical order, so be sure to cover them in the sequence given. Often, one session builds on what has been previously covered in the session or sessions before it. Furthermore, each session follows its own sequence so that your group can get the most impact from it. Each time you get together you can expect to see the following:

Overview—This introduction of the session includes the one point to take away from the session. Reading it as part of your group time is optional, but by stating the focus up front everyone knows what's coming.

Opening the Discussion—In this brief opening section, take time to unwind and transition from your previous environment (home, work, or some other place) and into the theme of the session. The questions here are intended to help the entire group interact. They also help set up what comes later in the session. And maybe, because you are so busy having a good time discussing a “light” question, you won't even realize you've *already* gotten down to business.

Opening the Word—This is the heart of each session, and typically the longest section. You'll spend some serious time digging into God's Word and discovering its meaning in ways you hadn't before. More importantly, you'll discover how the information you're studying applies to your life right now, and what God wants to do with it.

Opening Your Life—In this closing section you’ll move from *understanding* how the Bible applies to your life to actually *applying* it. At the end of each session you will break into smaller groups or pairs to share how you will apply today’s lesson and commit to following up with each other during the week. This way everyone’s involved, engaged, and committed to one another. The lesson will usually give some suggestions for its application, but if God’s telling you to do something else, *go for it!*

In short, in each session you’ll be challenged to share, to think, and to act. And as you do, gospel transformation will be more than just the title of a Bible study series. It will be a reality you live every day.

FOR LEADERS

We strongly suggest working through each session on your own first, prior to your group time. Your prep time shouldn’t require more than one-half hour, but take as much time as you need. Your goal is the same your group’s—to grow in faith, repentance, and obedience. As you review the material, honestly answer each question. Ask the Spirit to reveal your own heart, and be prepared to share what the Spirit reveals with the group, as long as it’s appropriate. Your own transparency and vulnerability will open the door for others.

You’ll notice that there are times during the session (especially during “Opening Your Life”) when we suggest getting into pairs or smaller groups. Feel free to do this at other times during the session when we haven’t explicitly told you to do so. It’s a great way to make sure everyone remains engaged with the material and with each other, and it frees people to share about matters they may not want to discuss with the entire group.

Also, in the back of the book are suggested answers and reflections relating to each session’s questions. Don’t use this section as a crutch or a

shortcut. Wrestle with each question and passage on your own and as a group. Figure out its meaning for yourselves. Then, if you like, look in back to add further insight to your discussion time.

Finally, here are some expectations we encourage you to have for your group members, and to share openly with them:

1. **Expect to be challenged.** The answers will not come quickly or easily. If they do, we haven't done our job properly. As you work through each question, expect that it will take some time, thought, and soul-searching to complete each session.
2. **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.
3. **Expect your group time together** to include an open, give-and-take discussion of each session's content and questions. Also expect times of prayer at each meeting. In fact, plan for them.
4. **Expect struggle.** Don't be surprised to find in your group a mixture of enthusiasm, hope, and honesty, along with indifference, anxiety, skepticism, and covering up. We are all people who need Jesus every day, so expect your group to be made up of people who wrestle with sin and have problems—just like you!
5. **Expect to be a leader** who desires to serve, but who needs Jesus as much as the rest of the group. No leader should be put on a pedestal or be expected to have the right answers. Give yourself the freedom to share openly about your own weaknesses, struggles, and sins. Covet your group's prayers.
6. **Expect confidentiality**, and be prepared to ask the group to make that commitment with you. Anything personal must be kept in confidence and never shared with others outside the group. Gossip will quickly destroy a group.

You are ready to begin. May God bless your group's journey together!

WHAT MAKES A CHRISTIAN GROW?

OVERVIEW

In this session you'll come to understand the centrality of faith in the Christian life, and to know and experience faith as the instrument for receiving the power of God.

In answering the question “What is the one thing you think you should do to grow as a Christian?” people will invariably mention the need to be more dedicated, to witness more, to read the Bible more, to pray more—in general, to *do* more things. These are not bad things! However, there is often no mention of faith and our need to develop a deepening trust in Jesus. This lesson emphasizes that faith is the instrument for receiving the power of God in our lives.

20
MINUTES

OPENING THE DISCUSSION

Leader: If this is your first time together as a group, ask everyone to introduce themselves, and to take a few moments to share what they each hope to get out of this study. (You can ask this second question even if you've been together for years.)

The sections in *italics* are for you, to help you and your group transition from one part of the session to the next. Read them verbatim, put what's here in your own words, or just move on to the next section—whatever works best for you and your group.

Since this session—this entire study, in fact—is about spiritual growth, let's take a few moments to understand what that means to each of us, and what it looks like.

Discuss the following questions:

1. What comes to mind when you hear the word *growth*? Come up with as many ideas as you can.

2. Talk about a time when you experienced a “spiritual growth spurt.” What was different? Why?

Thank you for sharing about what was clearly an important time in each of your lives. In doing so, you’ve shown each of us that God is always at work in our lives, sometimes even when we’re not aware of it. Try to keep the answers you shared (or thought) in the back of your minds—we’re going to come back to them later on.

As we’ve also shared today, growth means different things to different people. Growth can be exciting. The results of our growth are beautiful. Growth is also uncomfortable, maybe even incredibly painful. Sometimes it’s all these things at once. Spiritual growth is always an adventure, and it’s an adventure that begins and ends in faith. That’s why we need to allow God to take the lead, rather than thinking we somehow can make ourselves grow. So let’s start the next part of that adventure together.


 30
MINUTES

OPENING THE WORD

Read aloud John 6:28–29; Galatians 3:2–3, 10–14; and Hebrews 11:1–6.
Then discuss these questions:

3. Based on these passages and others you can think of, how do we grow in Christ? How are your answers similar to or different from the ones you came up with in question 1?

4. Look over the following chart. What stands out to you? Why?

Believe who you are in Christ	→ Live by the Spirit	→ Become who you are in Christ
Believing effort	→ Engages the Spirit	→ Love, joy, peace
Unbelieving effort	→ Engages the flesh	→ Lust, hatred, anger

5. What makes it difficult for us to recognize when we're slipping to the bottom of this chart—in other words, when we're engaged in an unbelieving effort or trusting in things other than God?

*“Our struggle in living the Christian life
is not doing, it is believing.”*

— John Owen

*“Grace is opposed to earning,
not effort.”*

— Dallas Willard

6. Look at the two quotes above. How do we reconcile them? When we put both these messages together what do we learn about living by faith?

Read aloud Galatians 5:4–8; 2 Thessalonians 1:11; and 1 John 5:2–5. Then discuss the following questions:

7. How *does* faith lead to growth? What are some outward signs that spiritual growth truly is taking place within us? Give examples.

OPENING YOUR LIFE

25
MINUTES

Read Ephesians 1:13–21. Then discuss the following questions:

8. What have the Father, Son, and Spirit already done for you, based on this passage alone? Which of these things do you most wish you could know and experience more deeply right now?

We use the phrase a “leap of faith” for a reason. Picture this: A little girl is trapped upstairs in a building that’s on fire. She sees her father, calling out to her to jump. But before she’ll jump, what has to happen? First, she needs

*the **knowledge** that her father is strong enough to catch her. She must also **believe** that it's true, and not some lie the neighbors made up. Finally, she has to **trust** that her father will catch her. Only then will she jump.*

*It's like that with us too, even after we come to Christ. Faith is clinging to, resting in, relying on, and believing in Jesus. It is the opposite of self-reliance. It is giving up on our own resources and fleeing to Christ. It is accepting who Christ is, who God is, what he has promised, and who we are in Christ. It is receiving the truths of the gospel into our lives and hearts. And as much as Christ has done for us, it's never **only** for us.*

9. Think back to the “spiritual growth spurt” we discussed in question 2. Who helped you most in taking that leap forward? What did he or she (or they) do to keep you moving forward?

10. Who do you know right now who seems ready to take the next step of faith in their lives? How can you become the person you just described for *that* person? Come up with some practical steps, if possible.

Divide into smaller groups of three or four.

*Any work we do with eternal value involves other people. Everything we do can potentially have an eternal impact on others. Think about it: how others have loved you—or failed to—is part of the reason **you** are who you are today.*

*To grow in faith, we need to exercise faith. That's why, each week, you'll get the opportunity to respond to what God wants to do in your life. Below you'll find a few options, to help you think through how to put what you've learned today into practice. Choose one of these ways to step out in faith, so that you **really** have to rely on Christ—or if God has prompted you to do something else through this session, by all means do **that!***

*In the space that follows, write down the one thing you'll do this week to apply today's lesson to your own life. Take ten minutes to share about your choices with those in your group, and then make plans to touch base with each other before the next session, to check in and encourage one another. Your touch-base time can be face-to-face, by phone, or online, but make a commitment you can keep—and **keep** it.*

- Have you ever put into words why you believe in Jesus? Write down your testimony, your faith story in Jesus (no more than two to three pages). Then get together with a friend (Christian or not-yet Christian—it's up to you) and share what God has done in your life. Do more than just talk. Afterward, listen for opportunities to encourage and pray for your friend.
- Think of a practical way to share the blessings God has given you with someone else. It could be something as small as texting a word of encouragement to someone or cooking a meal for them, or as big as making a rent payment for a single mom who is trying to make ends meet.
- What might you do in your group to reach out to your community? Volunteer to help out at a local event? Make a special meal for your local fire department or other civic organization? Come up with a plan, and then do it!

This week I'll take a faith-filled leap by: _____

After ten minutes, get back together and close in prayer. Pray something like this:

Dear God, We thank you for the relationships that are already beginning and growing in this group. We pray, as Paul does in Ephesians 1:18–19, “that the eyes of [our] heart may be enlightened in order that [we] may know the hope to which he has called [us], the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.” Amen.