



GOSPEL COMMUNITIES

Our Priority: The Gospel

A practical statement of the gospel:

The gospel is that you are more sinful and flawed than you ever dared believe, yet more accepted and loved than you ever dared hope at the same time because Jesus Christ lived and died in your place.

Perhaps the best example of the use of the word gospel comes from Martin Lloyd Jones. He says that when a king went to war and lost, he would immediately send generals throughout the cities and villages to prepare the common people for war. Because the battle had been lost, the enemy would advance to take the people captive, and if anyone wanted to live they were going to need to fight for their lives. Their livelihood, their hope, their future was, essentially, in their own hands. On the other hand, Lloyd Jones says, when the king won a great victory on the front lines, he would send “gospelisers” or “good-news messengers” (literally, evangelists!) to proclaim the victory throughout the cities and villages of the Empire. These men were not generals telling the people to prepare for battle; rather, they were simply messengers, carrying a “gospel” message that the livelihood, hope, and future of the people had been secured on their behalf by the king, though they themselves had not lifted a finger!

Lloyd Jones says that every religion sends generals; in other words, every religion is a system of belief and practice that promises eternal blessing, nirvana, or enlightenment to the degree that you are willing to believe, obey, and perform. In religion, you are given a set of instructions, a list of practices, or a methodology of reform, and it is all up to you to make it happen.

Gospel Christianity, on the other hand, sends messengers – evangelists – who proclaim that the victory has already been won by the king on behalf of his people. Though the people themselves have not gone to battle, they reap the rewards of the king’s risk, courage, and skill. Gospel Christianity is not advice, information,

or a set of practices or doctrines that you need to adhere to in order to earn eternal life. Gospel Christianity is the announcement of a victory won on your behalf by King Jesus, which you have only to receive, believe, and celebrate!

The gospel puts us into a community with a purpose to live for Jesus' mission. We are formed by the gospel and for the gospel.

The gospel needs to shape and inform all the areas of our lives.

As we focus on our purpose, we do not first ask the question, "What works best?" Instead, we ask, "How do we best display who God is and what He has done in and through Jesus Christ appropriately within the culture we are sent to?"

Our goal is not to convert people to our church. Our goal is to see them converted to Jesus through the gospel so that they can BE THE CHURCH on mission that truly declares and demonstrates the gospel in all of life.

The Gospel is not just about my individual happiness or God's plan for my life. It is about God's plan for the world. The gospel is not just the ABC of Christianity, but the A to Z. It is the way in which we are to live every day of our life. The reason why so many Christians fail to experience ongoing transformation is because they have forgotten what God has done for us in the Gospel (2 Peter 1:3-9).

Our Gospel Identity

We don't go to Church. We are the Church. We want people to experience church as a network of relationships rather than a meeting you attend or a place you enter. We want our people to see church as an identity instead of a responsibility to be juggled alongside other commitments.

We have a new identity because of what He has accomplished and it is in light of what He has done for us and who we are in Christ that we do anything rightly. Our Sanctification comes out of our Justification. We live differently because of what he has done and who we are in Christ. Our doing comes out of our being.

The gospel is the center of everything we are and do, and could be summed up like this: Through the person and work of Jesus Christ, God fully accomplishes salvation for us, rescuing us from judgment for sin into joyful fellowship with him, and then restores the creation in which we can enjoy our new life together with him forever!

This radical reality has 4 specific implications for who we are as God's Church. Each of these implications flows directly from what God has done for us in the gospel. As Christians, we don't do anything to earn God's love, favor, blessing, or forgiveness; rather, God has given those things to us as a gift when he gave up his Son to pay the penalty for our sin and to heal the brokenness of the world caused by our sin.

As you read these 4 implications - what we call our Core Identities - take careful note of how each focuses first on what God has done, and then secondly on who we are as a result.

We are His:

Family – Because God has restored us to himself, forgiven our sin, and removed his wrath from us by placing it on his own Son, we have become children of God, holy, and dearly loved by our Father! Therefore, we are God’s children and his people in the world, a community that does for each other what God has done for us in Jesus, that the world might taste and see the goodness of our Father. (John 1:11-13; Eph. 3:15)

Missionaries – Because God has come to restore and redeem all of creation through Jesus, his healing work extends to people, systems, cultures, and all of creation! Therefore, we are God’s ambassadors or representatives, sent into our culture by the Holy Spirit, commissioned to proclaim and demonstrate that God is restoring the world to Himself through Jesus. (2 Corinthians 5:17-21; John 17:18; 20:21)

Servants – Because God has sent his Son as a sacrificial servant, taking our place on the cross and thereby healing and forgiving us in his substitutionary death, we then are freed from our self-love and self-reliance and empowered by him to serve those around us. Therefore, we model our lives after the Servant-King, increasingly being freed by Him from slavery to self and so empowered to serve others. (Matthew 20:25-28; 25:31-46; John 13:1-17; 1 Peter 2:16)

Learners – Because God has begun this work in us and by His Spirit promises to bring it to completion one day, we recognize the need to continuously be learning together from him and being changed by him. Therefore, we are students and followers of Jesus, learning from him how to live life the way God intended, and helping one another to do the same. (Matthew 28:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:1-2; Eph. 4:11-16; 2 Tim. 3:14 - 4:5; 2 Peter 3:18)

*We are a **family** of God sent on **mission** to **serve** our world and continually **learn** how to live in the way of Jesus so that the joy of the gospel fills our city and beyond!*

Gospel Communities Defined

Sometimes in addition to **Gospel Communities**, you may also hear the term Missional Communities used. Missional means that we see ourselves as a missionary people, sent by God into our neighbourhoods, workplaces, and schools; blessed to be a blessing. Community implies that we will be this people together, partnering in order to do the work God has sent us to do in our city and lovingly caring for one another in the process.

What we envision with our Gospel Communities is the church of Jesus being taken into the mission field here in and around Saskatoon.

- We envision the church being so committed to bringing redemption and wholeness to our city that our city begins to ask questions, giving us the opportunity to proclaim Jesus.
- We envision people walking in humble obedience to the radical call of Jesus to love our neighbors as ourselves.
- We envision Christians pooling their resources and energies for the good of the city, actually making the city a better place to live for everyone, as a testimony to the way God will one day make all things right.

We want to see Jesus' Church doing what it was put here to do rather than just trying to stay afloat, remaining aloof from the culture, or burning people out through churchy programs. Most of all, we want to see our neighbors come to know and experience the powerful love of God in Jesus, find hope and joy in Him, and join us in this great mission to our city!

If you are a Christian, my guess is that there is something about this that both resonates with you and yet frightens you. Take heart - both are appropriate responses!

A Gospel Community is a committed core of believers (FAMILY) who live out the mission of Jesus together (MISSIONARIES) in a specific area or to a particular people group by demonstrating

the gospel in tangible forms (SERVANTS) and declaring the gospel to others – both those who believe it and those who are being exposed to it (LEARNERS).

To Clarify...A Gospel Community is NOT primarily:

A Small Group,

A Bible Study,

A Support Group,

A Social Activist Group, or

A Weekly Meeting

Mission Through Community

A Gospel Community is a partnership of Christians for the mission of Jesus, who demonstrate the gospel tangibly and declare the gospel to each other, to our neighbors, and to the world. We want to live out the reality of being the Church together as we walk through life together and live out mission together.

We are formed by the gospel as community to live in step with the gospel in community while declaring the gospel to one another and the communities we live in.

Gospel-centered Life on Mission: Making disciples – not consumers.

RHYTHMS — Ordinary people living ordinary lives with Gospel intentionality

STORY-FORMED

We understand, experience and intersect with God's Story and others'. 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 reacquaint ourselves with the Story by interacting with God's Word. We look for ways and times to tell the Story often. We also take time to listen to others stories and help them find their lives within God's Story. (Genesis 1:1-2; John 1:1; Psalm 1; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

LISTEN

We set aside regular times to listen to God
Jesus prayed to God seeking to know his Father's will. We are also called to set aside time to commune with God in prayerful silence to reflect and re-orient our lives to Jesus and His mission for us. An implication of organizing the church around the Mission of Jesus is that you must learn to pray! Because we don't have a ton of internal ministries going on, you have to actually go to Jesus in prayer and ask him to lead you.

You have to be actively connected to Jesus in order for mission to become a reality in your life. Only through the Spirit will you have your eyes opened to the needs around you and begin to be able to get involved in God's Kingdom work in our city. In addition as we listen to others, God enables us to better understand how we can bring the Gospel to bear on potential idols and lies keeping them from ultimate and eternal joy in God. (Mark 1:35-37; John 16:7-15; Hebrews 1:1-3; Romans 1:20)

CELEBRATE

We gather together to celebrate God's extravagant blessings.

God calls people to regularly celebrate his goodness and grace. We gather weekly in Gospel communities and regularly as a larger family, to share stories and celebrate all that God is doing in and amongst us. We invite everyone to these celebrations as a way of displaying and declaring God's glory, exhorting each other in the Gospel, and encouraging each other in mission. (Leviticus 23; Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:24-25)

BLESS

We intentionally bless others through words, gifts or actions.

God desires that all nations—all people—would be blessed through Jesus. And now, as his Body, we believe we live out this mission as we bless others. We intentionally seek God's direction for who he would have us tangibly bless each week. (Genesis 12:1-3; Ephesians 1:22-23, 2:8-10; 1 Peter 2:12)

EAT

We regularly eat meals with others to invite them into the community of God.

Meals are a daily reminder of our common need for God and his faithfulness to provide both physically and spiritually. Jesus called us to remember him and his sacrifice for us through a meal. When we eat together, we commune around this truth. We regularly eat meals with those not in our immediate family or circle of close friends, discipling them toward a life of dependence on God. (Leviticus 23; Matthew 6:11, 26:17-30; Acts 2:46-47; Romans 12:13)

RECREATE

We take time to rest, play, create and restore beauty in ways that reflect God to others.

After powerfully and joyfully creating the universe, God rested. We were created in his image and therefore were made to joyfully create and rest as well. We regularly take time to rest, play, create and restore beauty in ways that reflect what God is like to our community. (Genesis 1-2:3; Deuteronomy 5:12; Mark 2:23-28; Hebrews 4)

Church is not an event. It's a Community.

Mission is not an event. It's a Lifestyle.

We are called to live ordinary life with Gospel Intentionality.