

 INTRODUCTION

It's good news! It's the gospel! And it is a battle ground. We fight over the meaning. We debate the theology. We argue over its implications. But we apply it only rarely. In the midst of battles which divide the church, we brawl over law and grace. We call each other names, form our exclusive clubs and isolate ourselves in our theological palaces, comforting each other that we are right.

Yet at the same time we often struggle with lives of quiet desperation—seeking to do what is right and hoping to someday find the peace Jesus promised. The average contemporary Christian has a brain full of information, but a head full of confusion and a heart full of pain.

The gospel has been debated theologically for centuries. And we are not exempt from those debates. While it is so profound we will study it for eternity, it is simple enough for a child to understand. While the gospel can be defined or stated in many different ways, with many different theological nuances, the simplest is the best:

DEFINITION: THE GOSPEL IS THE GOOD NEWS THAT JESUS HAS SOLVED THE SIN PROBLEM—PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE! HE HAS DONE EVERYTHING NECESSARY TO SAVE US!

In a day when the world seems to have lost hope, the gospel is still “good news.” The gospel still brings a new reality to lives desperately seeking understanding and hope. Where sin binds human hearts and lives, the gospel still has the power to shatter the shackles that chain us.

Paul states that we are “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1). However, simply knowing the concept of the gospel is not enough. Even the devil knows the theory. Being stewards of this mystery of the gospel means we must go beyond the words to understanding, accepting, and integrating this incredible “good news” into our daily lives.

The term “mystery” implies there is something about the gospel that transcends human understanding or explanation. We cannot know the fullness of God's love or the depths of His pain in saving us. We cannot comprehend the incredible wonder of heaven descending to earth—God made flesh. We can only accept it by faith. Yet, we can experience the reality of salvation. We can know eternal life the moment we believe (1 John 5:13).

How then can the gospel attain this power in our lives? How can we reach this experience? It all begins with accepting it ourselves—accepting by faith the reality of Christ dying for us and Christ loving us. So this week we will explore the gospel and how it makes a difference in our lives.

The experience of salvation is the starting point of the Christian walk. Without the assurance that God accepts us, forgives us, and saves us, everything we do will be done for the wrong reason. The security of God's love and forgiveness is the foundation for the disciple's daily journey.

▷ OBJECTIVES FOR THIS WEEK

As we study this week we want to accomplish the following objectives:

- Honestly face our sinfulness and need for salvation.
- Understand that salvation is a gift of God's grace.
- Accept and/or affirm our acceptance of salvation and rejoice in that salvation.
- Accept the new life that is ours in Christ when we accept Him as Savior.

▷ HOLY HABIT—PRAYER

Prayer is the *Holy Habit* or spiritual discipline we want to focus on for this week. Of course, prayer is a vital part of our daily devotional walk with God, but we want to explore this practice in order to understand it better and to become more intentional in our use of this powerful tool in our daily lives.

Prayer at its highest is the meeting of a holy God with his child who hungers for holiness. It is a cleansed child, aching for clean values before the God who fills the hungry disciple in the first place. Prayer is good souls asking for good things—and the best of all good things is Jesus himself.— Calvin Miller, *Into the Depths of God*, p. 111

Prayer is action. It means going to God. As sinful human beings, we have the opportunity of coming into the presence of the Holy God. Prayer means being open with God as we share ourselves with Him. It is being transparent and vulnerable with God—willing for Him to see and know us as we are. Prayer means sharing ourselves with God and allowing Him to share Himself with us.

Most of all, prayer is dialogue with God. It is a two-way communication in the intimacy of our relationship with Him. It is God who initiates this dialogue with us. As dialogue, it means we have the privilege of listening to Him as well as talking to Him. Thus **active** prayer has two dimensions—listening to and sharing with God.

Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him.— Ellen White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 93

Prayer is a vital part of the **Steps to Discipleship** process. It is a primary tool in seeking God. So we will want to use prayer in two different ways:

We will use prayer as an integral part of the daily study. We begin and end each study session with prayer. We also invite you to pray throughout your study. Ask God to help you find a deeper relationship with Him.

We want to use prayer as part of our life throughout the day. Let's make a point of talking to God throughout the day about the details of our day.

▷ SUGGESTED PRAYER

Here is a suggested prayer guide for today:

Dear Lord, Speak to my heart today. Help me to know you. Help me to trust you for my salvation and to accept by faith the assurance of your forgiveness and of eternal life. Lead me deeper into your love. Teach me to open my heart and life to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

LIST BELOW THREE PERSONAL GOALS FOR YOUR QUIET TIME WITH GOD FOR THIS WEEK:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

▷ TODAY'S OBJECTIVE

Our objective today is to face our sin and sinfulness honestly and openly. At the same time, we want to face this reality in the context of God's grace. We want to understand our problem, and we want to recognize God's solution.

▷ INVITATION PRAYER

Father in Heaven, I come to you as a sinner in need of your grace. Help me to be honest with myself and you. At the same time, help me accept your offer of forgiveness and mercy. Help me to understand how great your love for me really is. Amen.

▷ MEMORY VERSE

We start this week with memory verse #3. Once again, follow the same process from last week. Write the verse and reference on a card to help you review and reflect on this passage throughout the day.

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)—“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 (KJV)—“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

We also need to review memory verse #2, from last Wednesday. That passage is Psalm 34:8. This ongoing review is designed to help us transfer the passage into our long term memory. It also helps us integrate this truth into our thinking and daily lives.

▷ BIBLE READING AND REFLECTION

Now it is time to open our Bibles and explore what God wants to teach us about our sin.

READ THE STORY OF ZACCHAEUS IN LUKE 19:1-10. What does this story tell you about how Jesus dealt with sinners? What would it be like for you to have Jesus come to your home today?

READ ROMANS 3:23-24—How do you see yourself as you read this passage?

READ 1 TIMOTHY 1:15—If Paul saw himself as “chief of sinners,” how should we see ourselves? Why did Jesus come to this world?

READ EPHESIANS 2:1-9—What does this tell you about God’s love for you as a sinner? What is the basis of the salvation God offers to us?

▷ **COMMITMENT PRAYER**

Loving Father, You offer salvation to us as a free gift. I confess my sin and my need to you. I accept your forgiveness and affirm that my salvation is by grace alone. Teach me to live in the context of your grace. Help me to know your love. Amen.

▷ TODAY'S OBJECTIVE

The purpose of our time today is to explore the reality of God's forgiveness. This is a topic we find throughout all of Scripture. We especially want to identify the condition for experiencing that forgiveness.

▷ INVITATION PRAYER

God of Love and Forgiveness, Help me to understand how real your forgiveness is. I am confronted by my sin and guilt. My shame threatens to overwhelm my heart and my hope. I long to know that I am forgiven. Speak to my heart today. Amen.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

We now want to review Ephesians 2:8-9, Memory verse #3 which we began memorizing yesterday. Use the card on which you wrote the verse. Review and reflect on this passage. What does it say to you today?

▷ BIBLE READING AND REFLECTION

Once again it is time to go to God's Word and learn what He has to teach us about forgiveness.

READ PSALM 32:1-8—What does this passage tell you about God's forgiveness?

What areas of your life do you want God to forgive?

READ THE STORY OF THE PARALYZED MAN FOUND IN MARK 2:1-12. Have you ever felt desperate for healing? What were the circumstances? Which would be more important to you, physical or spiritual healing? And why?

How do you think this man felt when Jesus told him his sins were forgiven?

READ 1 JOHN 1:9 AND 1 JOHN 2:12—What do these passages tell you about the basis of our forgiveness?

READ PSALM 103:12; MICAH 7:19; AND HEBREWS 8:12—What do these passages tell you about the extent of God's forgiveness?

(For additional study on this subject, see Isaiah 43:25; 44:21; 55:6-7; and Micah 7:19.)

▷ **COMMITMENT PRAYER**

God of Forgiveness, Thank you for your love and grace. I accept your forgiveness today and commit myself to live in the wonder of your love. Help me be open to your presence in my life today. Amen.

READ GALATIANS 4:4-5—How does this passage by Paul parallel what Jesus said to Nicodemus? What insights do these verses bring to your understanding of salvation and your relationship with God?

READ ROMANS 5:1-2 AND 6-8—What do these verses tell us about our standing with God, and about His plan of salvation? When does salvation come to us?

STUDY EPHESIANS 2:1-10—What do these verses tell us about the basis of our salvation? What do they tell us about the extent of our salvation? What does it mean to be “God’s workmanship?”

▷ **COMMITMENT PRAYER**

Close your time with God today with a prayer like this one:

Dear God of Love, I am amazed by your salvation. Help me to believe the simple truth that salvation really is a gift that I accept by faith. Help me to understand what it means to be saved by grace. I thank you for your love. I praise you for your grace. I rejoice in the salvation that is mine because I believe your promise. I pray this in the incredible name of Jesus, Amen.

▷ TODAY'S OBJECTIVE

In today's study, we want to **understand** the reality of our assurance in Christ. We cannot overemphasize how important this assurance is to our daily living in Christ.

▷ INVITATION PRAYER

Father, I come to you today seeking to know you better. Help me to understand how great your love for me really is. Help me to understand the assurance that can be mine today. Help me to trust your promises and understand your grace. Amen.

▷ MEMORY VERSE

Today we begin learning memory verse #4. Once again we will write the verse on a card to help us remember and review it.

1 John 5:13 (NIV)—“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

1 John 5:13 (KJV)—“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life . . .”

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

We also need to review memory verse #1, Jeremiah 31:3, and memory verse #3, Ephesians 2:8-9. Use your card to review and reflect on these passages.

▷ BIBLE READING AND REFLECTION

Now its time to explore the subject of assurance in God's Word. We want to have a solid foundation for our discipleship walk.

READ THE STORY OF JESUS' TEMPTATIONS AS FOUND IN MATTHEW 4:1-11. How did Jesus resist these temptations? What was the basis of His success in resisting sin?

READ HEBREWS 2:18 AND 4:14-16—What do these passages tell us about Jesus? And how do they give us confidence that He can help us?

READ JOHN 5:24-29—What do these verses tell us about what happens to us when we believe in Jesus?

READ 1 JOHN 5:11-13—What does this passage tell us about the reality of our salvation? How can we know that we have eternal life?

▷ **COMMITMENT PRAYER**

*Amazing Father and Loving Lord, I come to you today with wonder at your love. I am overwhelmed by the reality that salvation is mine. Help me to live in the reality of this amazing truth. Help me to remember that my sins are forgiven. Help me to explore and understand what it means to know this love today. I **thank** you for the assurance that is mine. In the wondrous name of Jesus. Amen.*

▷ TODAY'S OBJECTIVE

Our purpose today is to explore the cleansing from sin that is ours as we believe in and walk with Jesus. Let's revel in God's grace and rejoice in His love.

▷ INVITATION PRAYER

Almighty God and Loving Father, I come to you this morning eager to understand what you have for me today. Help me understand what you offer in cleansing as part of your gift of salvation. I want to stand before you clean and transformed. Help me see your love. Help me understand your Word. Amen.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

Today we review memory verse #4, 1 John 5:13. Please take your card and review the verse. Then reflect on the impact of this promise in your life. What key points come to your mind as you review this verse?

▷ BIBLE READING AND REFLECTION

Once again, it is time to open the Bible and see what God has to say to our hearts today. We want to catch a greater vision of what God gives us in salvation.

READ THE STORY OF THE LEPER IN MATTHEW 8:1-4. Have you ever felt like an outcast, and why?

Have you ever felt "filthy" in God's presence, and why?

How do you think the leper felt when Jesus touched Him? What did it mean to him to be cleansed? What can it mean for you to be clean in Jesus' presence?

READ ISAIAH 6:1-8—How did God cleanse Isaiah? In what ways would you like for God to do something similar for you?

READ 1 JOHN 1:5-9—In what ways can this passage apply to your life?

READ AND REFLECT ON THE REALITY OF JEREMIAH 33:8—What do these words mean to you today? How does it feel to know that God can cleanse us completely, and that He wants to do so?

▷ **COMMITMENT PRAYER**

Father of Love, I thank you today for the cleansing that is mine. You have forgiven me. You have saved me. And today I want to serve you with all my heart. Help me to live this day in the reality of the clean heart you have given me today. Amen.

▷ TODAY'S OBJECTIVE

Today we explore the incredible reality that is ours in Christ. We are new creations—new creatures. We are no longer the same. We have met Jesus and we cannot be the same. He has promised us a new reality. Let's explore it together.

▷ INVITATION PRAYER

Lord, Help me to catch a vision of the reality that is mine in Jesus. Help me understand how He has changed me because I have come to Him and accepted the gift of salvation. Speak to my heart today. Open my mind to understand and believe. Amen.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

Today we need to review memory verse #4, 1 John 5:13, once again. This ongoing review and reflection process helps us to grasp the reality of this passage and integrate it into our lives. How is the assurance of salvation changing your thinking and your feelings about yourself and your future?

▷ BIBLE READING AND REFLECTION

It is now time to return to the Bible. We want to catch a new and greater vision of who and what we are in Jesus.

READ THE STORY OF SAUL'S (PAUL'S) CONVERSION IN ACTS 9:1-19. What was the essence of Paul's conversion? How was his life changed by accepting Jesus?

READ JOHN 1:12—What does John say is ours in Christ?

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5:14-17—What does it mean to you to be a “new creation” in Christ?

READ AND REFLECT ON JOHN 5:24-29—What do Jesus’ words in this passage say to you about your new reality in Him?

READ PHILIPPIANS 1:3-6—What does this passage tell you about your future? How would you like for God to work in your life as He continues to transform and change you?

▷ **COMMITMENT PRAYER**

Almighty God, Truly you have begun a wonderful work in my life. I thank you for the reality of forgiveness and salvation. Help me remember and affirm this truth each day. Help me accept by faith the reality that in Christ I am a new creature today. Help me live this day in the newness of life that is mine. Open my mind to your presence throughout this day. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

We have spent this week exploring the reality of our salvation in Jesus Christ. We have studied what the Bible has to say about how God has given us the gift of salvation. We have also explored the assurance that is ours in Jesus when we confess our sins and believe in Him. Spend a few minutes in quiet reflection to wrap up the last seven days of study and reflection.

What difference has your daily quiet time with God made in your life this week?

How has salvation become more real to you during this week?

How do you deal with the distractions that come during your quiet time with God? How can you integrate those distractions into your prayer and study life?

How has the assurance of eternal life impacted your life and thinking during this week?

What spiritual goals would you like to have for the next week? How would you like God to work in your life during the next seven days?
