

45-Minute Small Group Bible Study

THE GOSPEL

The Christian Faith, pages 22-24

Purpose: To hear the Gospel as genuinely Good News: the announcement that the Creator God, in grace, has acted to save sinful and lost humanity through Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit, and to see how this promise runs from the fall to its fulfillment in Christ and is freely given to sinners for faith.

Main Truth: The Gospel is the Good News of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. The Father sent his Son to defeat sin, death, and the Devil, reconcile us to himself, and give Christ's righteousness, forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. This Gospel is God's saving power and is received by faith, not achieved by our works.

1. Opening Prayer - 2 minutes

Gracious Father, open our ears to hear your Gospel as Good News for sinners. Keep us from turning your promise into a demand or making salvation depend on what we accomplish. Fix our faith on Jesus, who gave himself for us, defeated the Devil, and gives us forgiveness and life. By your Spirit, strengthen our trust in your saving promises. Amen.

2. Opening Discussion - 3 minutes

Begin with one or two questions:

1. When Christians use the word "Gospel," what do people sometimes mean by it - advice, a message, a way of life, or Good News?
2. Why is it important to distinguish between what God commands us to do and what God announces he has done for us?
3. Which part of the Gospel - forgiveness, reconciliation, rescue from evil, or eternal life - most immediately sounds like Good News to you?

3. Read the Doctrinal Statement - 2 minutes

Have one person read the doctrinal statement for "The Gospel" on page 22. Listen for the Gospel's source in God's grace, the long promise that leads to Christ, what Jesus accomplished, what the Gospel gives, and how its gifts are received.

4. The Gospel Is God's Saving Power - 5 minutes

The chapter begins by calling the Gospel the central message of Scripture and the Christian faith. It is not merely information about salvation; God works through this Good News to save and to reveal the righteousness that comes from him.

Read: Romans 1:16-17

Paul calls the Gospel “the power of God for salvation” and says that in it God’s righteousness is revealed for faith.

Discuss:

1. What does Paul say the Gospel actually does, rather than merely describe?
2. How does receiving righteousness by faith differ from establishing a righteousness of our own?

Read: Romans 5:8

God’s love is revealed in Christ dying for sinners, not in waiting for sinners to make themselves worthy.

Discuss:

1. What is the timing of God’s love in this verse - before or after sinners improve themselves?
2. How does this verse keep the Gospel centered on God’s action rather than ours?

5. The Promise Begins in Eden and Leads to Christ - 4 minutes

The Gospel is not a late addition to the Bible. The chapter traces one saving promise from the fall into sin through Abraham to Jesus the Christ.

Read: Genesis 3:15

Immediately after the fall, God promises a male offspring of the woman who will crush the Serpent, even as he is wounded.

Discuss:

1. Why is this promise Good News in the very setting where sin and judgment have just entered the world?
2. What does the conflict with the Serpent tell us about the scope of Christ’s saving work?

Read: Galatians 3:8, 16

Paul says Scripture announced the Gospel beforehand to Abraham and identifies the promised “seed” as Christ.

Discuss:

1. How does Paul connect God’s promise to Abraham with the Gospel?
2. What does this continuity tell us about the unity of the Bible’s saving message?

Key Insight: The Gospel is a promise before it is a program. From Eden onward, God is the one who promises, acts, and fulfills. Faith receives what God gives; it does not complete an unfinished salvation.

6. The Father Gives His Son for the World - 4 minutes

The long-promised rescue comes from the Father's love and reaches its fulfillment when the Savior is born for us.

Read: John 3:16

God loves the world by giving his only-begotten Son so that whoever believes in him has eternal life.

Discuss:

1. What is the source of salvation in this verse?
2. How do gift and faith fit together without turning faith into payment for the gift?

Read: Luke 2:10-11

The angel announces "good news of great joy" for all people: a Savior has been born, Christ the Lord.

Discuss:

1. Why is the wording "a Savior was born for you" so important for hearing the Gospel personally?
2. How does the announcement combine universal scope with a gift given "for you"?

7. The Savior Gives His Life and Defeats the Devil - 4 minutes

Jesus saves not by demanding that sinners first rescue themselves, but by serving them, giving his life, taking away sin, and destroying the works of the Devil.

Read: Mark 10:45

The Son of Man came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Discuss:

1. How does Jesus redefine greatness and kingship around service and self-giving?
2. What does the word "ransom" imply about our condition and his saving action?

Read: 1 John 3:5, 8

John says Jesus appeared to take away sins and to destroy the works of the Devil.

Discuss:

1. What two enemies are named here?
2. How does this broaden the Gospel beyond simply receiving a second chance?

8. Christ Reconciles Enemies and Brings Us to the Father - 4 minutes

The Gospel announces a restored relationship that sinners could not repair for themselves. The Son reconciles enemies to God and is himself the way into the Father's presence.

Read: Romans 5:10

While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, and we will be saved by his life.

Discuss:

1. Who takes the initiative in reconciliation?
2. Why does the resurrection life of Christ give confidence beyond the forgiveness of the past?

Read: John 14:6

Jesus identifies himself as the Way, the Truth, and the Life and says that no one comes to the Father except through him.

Discuss:

1. Why is Jesus himself - not a technique or religious path - the way to the Father?
2. How does this claim fit the chapter's emphasis that the Gospel is centered in Christ?

9. The Gospel Calls Us to Repent, Believe, and Receive Life - 4 minutes

Because God's kingdom has come near in Jesus, the proper response is repentance and faith. Yet even this response is directed toward a gift that already exists in Christ.

Read: Mark 1:15

Jesus announces that the time is fulfilled and the kingdom has come near: "Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Discuss:

1. What does repentance turn us away from, and what does faith turn us toward?
2. Why does Jesus command belief in Good News rather than confidence in ourselves?

Read: 1 John 5:11

God's testimony is that he has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Discuss:

1. Where does John locate eternal life?
2. How does the word "given" guard the Gospel from becoming a reward we earn?

Key Insight: Faith does not make the Gospel true. God has already acted in Christ and gives eternal life in his Son. Faith is the empty hand that receives the gift announced in the Gospel.

10. The Cross Is the Saving Power of God - 4 minutes

The Gospel overturns ordinary human ideas of power and wisdom. What looks like weakness and defeat in the cross is the very means by which God saves.

Read: 1 Corinthians 1:18

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those being saved it is the power of God.

Discuss:

1. Why does the cross offend ordinary expectations of how God should display power?
2. How does this passage help keep Christian faith centered on the proclaimed message of Christ crucified?

11. Bringing It Together - 2 minutes

The Gospel is God's Good News for sinners. Promised after the fall, announced to Abraham, and fulfilled in Jesus, it proclaims the Father's love, the Son's self-giving death and victorious life, the defeat of the Devil, reconciliation with God, and eternal life. The Gospel gives what it announces, and its gifts are received by faith.

12. Application Questions - 5 minutes

Choose two or three:

1. Which passage most clearly helps you distinguish the Gospel from advice about what you should do?
2. Where are you tempted to turn faith itself into something you must accomplish before God will be gracious?
3. How does tracing the Gospel from Genesis 3 to Christ strengthen confidence in the unity of Scripture?
4. Which image of salvation in this study - ransom, reconciliation, victory, righteousness, or life - most helps you hear the Gospel personally?
5. How might your witness to another person change if you begin with what God has done in Christ rather than with what that person must first do?

13. Closing Prayer - 2 minutes

Father, thank you for the Good News that you loved the world and gave your Son for us. Lord Jesus, thank you for serving us, giving your life as our ransom, taking away our sins, defeating the Devil, and reconciling us to the Father. Holy Spirit, keep this Gospel from becoming mere information to us. Through it, create and strengthen faith, comfort guilty consciences, and fill us with the joy of eternal life in Christ. Amen.