

THE  
GOSPEL  
IN  
TEN  
WORDS

# STUDY GUIDE

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## The Gospel in Ten Words: Study Guide<sup>1</sup>

*The Gospel in Ten Words* can be used for individual or group study using the questions listed below. In a group setting, a time frame of 12 weeks would permit one week to review and discuss each chapter. Have the group read a chapter prior to meeting. Then when you come together (or meet online) use the questions as launch pads to discussion. There is no test and no marks will be recorded. If the discussion veers off into unexpected directions, be open to the possibility that this is where the Spirit wants to take you. Our aim is to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. For this reason I recommend concluding each study session with a prayer of thanksgiving and praise for Jesus and what he has done. If you wish to have a moment of reflection, I have provided some suggestions for that as well.

One last thing; we are all on a journey and we all see things a little differently. If you have a good grasp of grace, be gracious towards those who don't. Treat people as though Jesus loves them, because he does. You do not need to change people in your group. That's not your job. Your job is to let the Holy Spirit do his job, and you can best do that by loving others and following his lead.

### Prologue – Out of the Jungle

- a. What comes to mind when you think of “the gospel”? Can you summarize the gospel in one short and sweet sentence?
- b. If the gospel means good news, is it possible that some people in the church have never heard it? How have we mixed bad news with the good news? What is an ash-tray gospel? Is the law the gospel? What price tags have we attached to the free grace of God?
- c. Discuss this statement: “Christianity isn't a list of do's and don'ts. Christianity is Christ. Christianity isn't a test, it's a rest.” In your experience, are Christians and church leaders operating from a posture of rest?
- d. Paul says the one thing that can stop you from walking in the love and grace of God is unbelief. What is an unbelieving believer? How do Christians exhibit unbelief in the goodness of God?
- e. When Charles Spurgeon spoke of the dangers of outgrowing grace, he was referring to Christians who think grace is for sinners and not for them. Discuss some of the ways we “outgrow” or wander from grace.
- f. Take a moment: Romans 1:16 says there is power in the gospel. As you begin this period of study, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal this gospel power in your life. “Father, set me free from death-dealing traditions that distort your character. Help me to see you through your Son Jesus. Break off the shackles so that I may dance on the wide open spaces of your grace.”

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<sup>1</sup> Version 1.0 (March 2020).

## 1. Loved

- a. How do we know that God loves us? Where's the proof? Complete this sentence: God loves me because \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. Have you ever thought God would love you more (or less) if you acted a certain way? Have you ever believed your heavenly Father might stop loving you? What does the parable of the prodigal son reveal about the love of God? What stopped the elder son from experiencing his father's love?
- c. Paul says it is rare to hear the love of God preached without hooks and qualifications. "It's unconditional love – with conditions." In your experience, how true is this statement?
- d. What does it mean to leave your first love? How do we return?
- e. If you fully grasped the breadth and depth of your Father's relentless love for you, what might change in your life?
- f. Imagine you've been given a chance to address the whole world. What One Big Truth do you wish to impart?
- g. Discuss this statement from the book: "The only thing that can come between you and his love is your refusal to receive it. The only thing that can separate you from the love of God is you."
- h. Take a moment: Since God is love, read 1 Corinthians 13 substituting the word love for God. What does this exercise reveal about the character of God?

## 2. Forgiven

- a. What does forgiveness literally mean? What is the connection between grace and forgiveness?
- b. According to John 1:29 and 1 John 2:2, whose sins did Jesus carry on the cross?
- c. In the Sermon on the Mount, why did Jesus say we must forgive others before God will forgive us? How did the cross change the message of forgiveness? In the new covenant, what does God say about recording or holding our sins against us? (Hint: see 2 Corinthians 5:9.)
- d. Is there something we must do before God will forgive us? Do we need to maintain our forgiveness (e.g., by regular confession of sins)? Are we forgiven because of what we do, what Jesus has done, or both?
- e. What is God's remedy for condemnation and guilt? What are some things that stop us from receiving his forgiveness? If you've done something unforgiveable, what can you do to receive his forgiveness?
- f. Take a moment: Have you received your Father's forgiveness, or are you beating yourself up for past mistakes? Read Psalm 103:11–12. Bring your regrets and guilt to the cross and leave them there. As you receive his grace, release those who have wounded you. Be better, not bitter.

### 3. Saved

- a. A revelation of God's goodness and love inspires us to trust him. So why do some people distrust God?
- b. Some people view faith as something they must manufacture, but faith is simply a positive response to something God has said or done. It is saying yes to Jesus. What does it mean to continue in the faith? How do we fall from grace?
- c. Jesus welcomed everyone who came to him, yet he also said that he came "to turn a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother." What did he mean? In what sense is truth divisive?
- d. What does it mean to work out your salvation with fear and trembling? Have you ever stepped out in faith despite your anxieties? What happened?
- e. Take a moment: In this age of uncertainty, doubt is chic. Even in the church there are some who will feed your doubts and starve you faith. Yet Jesus said. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in me has everlasting life" (John 6:47, NKJV). Do you have an assurance of your salvation?<sup>2</sup> The New Testament writers wrote so that you would believe *and know* that you are saved. Do you know? Are you fully persuaded? If not, ask the Spirit of Grace to reveal God's goodness and utter commitment to us. Ask him to show you that Jesus is fully trustworthy and fully able to save all who call on him.

### 4. Union

- a. This may be the most important chapter in book, because once you understand your union with the Lord, everything else falls into place. "In union with Christ you are loved, forgiven, saved, accepted, holy, righteous, dead to sin, new, and royal." Do you think Christians fully understand their union with the Lord?
- b. Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches." What does this metaphor reveal about our relationship with the Lord?<sup>3</sup>
- c. Jesus said the Holy Spirit would make his home with us (see John 14:16-17, 23). So why do some people think the Holy Spirit might leave us or withdraw his fellowship?
- d. One of the most underrated scriptures is surely 1 John 4:17: "As he is, so are we in this world." Unpack the implications of being one with the Lord by filling in the blanks: Jesus is \_\_\_\_\_, so I am \_\_\_\_\_.
- e. In the old covenant, David spoke of standing on the solid rock (Psalm 40:2). We even sing songs about standing on the Rock. But you are one with the Lord, in the same way a branch is one with the vine or an arm is part of a body. You are not merely standing on

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<sup>2</sup> Since writing *The Gospel in Ten Words*, I've had readers ask me, "How do I know that I am saved?" My answer can be found here: <https://wp.me/pNzdT-2R3>.

<sup>3</sup> If you're worried that Jesus might cut you off because you are an unfruitful branch (John 15:2), it's not going to happen. Jesus doesn't amputate body parts. Unfruitful branches are lifted, not removed. For more, see my article, "What happens to unfruitful branches": <https://wp.me/pNzdT-Wd>

the rock like a fisherman in danger of waves; you are part of the Rock. As you grasp the intimacy of your oneness with the Lord, how do you think this will influence your sense of security and peace?

- f. Take a moment: Do you feel connected to Christ? Are you struggling to produce his fruit? Stop struggling. Relax. Renew your mind and believe what Jesus says about your union with him. How do we participate in that divine Oneness? 2 Peter 1:2–4 says we do it by believing his precious promises to us. Find a promise in his Word that speaks to your situation and stand on it. Start with Philippians 4:19 and Ephesians 1:3.

## 5. Accepted

- a. Jesus practiced radical acceptance, but people can be picky. What are some of the ways churches communicate rules for becoming “one of us”? What sort of people do we marginalize? Who is left on the fringes? How would Jesus treat these people?
- b. Since God loves the whole world, why do some believe they must earn his approval? What are some of the ways we promote performance-based churchianity? Discuss some of the ways your church reveals the radical acceptance of Jesus.
- c. When you think of God, do you envision him as your employer or Father?
- d. What pleases the Lord? How do we please the Lord?
- e. Why does Paul say it’s impossible to disappoint God?
- f. Most Christians would never sacrifice to the idols of career or materialism, yet they don’t hesitate to burn themselves out on the altar of ministry. Why? What do you think Jesus might say about this?
- g. When Jesus was baptized, words of loving acceptance and divine pleasure flowed down from heaven (see Matthew 17:5). These words were uttered before Jesus had done anything to show us that our Father’s love is unaffected by what we do. “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” Close your eyes and imagine your heavenly Father saying these same words over you.
- h. When you have grasped how much your Father is for you and how he is inclined to your success, how do you think this will change your sense of self-worth? How will it affect the choices you make and the risks you take?
- i. Take a moment: From where do you get your sense of value? Does it come from your performance and what you have to offer? Or do you get your self-worth from the unconditional affirmation of your heavenly Father? Do you compare yourself with others or are you secure in your own skin? Is your peace determined by performance? Meditate on the powerful words of Romans 8:31–34. God is for you. God justifies you. God will graciously supply you. See your Father shining upon you and be free from expectations and the unholy to prove yourself.

## 6. Holy

- a. Just as light is not the absence of darkness, holiness is not the absence of sin. God is holy, but what is holiness? What are some inferior definitions of holiness?
- b. Are Christians holy, or are they becoming holy? What does it mean to “be holy”?
- c. Does the law show us how to live holy? Are we made or kept holy by keeping the commands of Jesus?
- d. Paul says, “Practical holiness is a term to beware of because it often hides a fishhook.” Discuss.
- e. Take a moment: Have you been sweating for Jesus in an endless quest for self-improvement? Do you see yourself running a moral marathon with no finish line other than death? Put your confidence in Jesus. Allow his Spirit to persuade you that you have been made holy through Christ’s perfect sacrifice. Sure, you have some rough edges. But you are part of “a holy nation,” and “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” (Philippians 1:6, 1 Peter 2:9).

## 7. Righteous

- a. Paul says many Christians sort of know they are righteous, yet they do not *feel* righteous. Do you feel righteous? Where does the righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees come from? On what grounds can we say we are righteous?
- b. What must you do to inherit eternal life? What does Jesus want us to bring to his banqueting table?
- c. How many sins did Jesus commit before he was made sin? How many righteousness acts did you commit before you were made righteous? (Hint: see 2 Corinthians 5:21.)
- d. Why do some believers think the Holy Spirit is convicting them of their sin, when Jesus said he would convince them of their righteousness?
- e. Proverbs 24:16 says, “Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again.” It is not our falling that makes us righteous or unrighteous. It is by the grace of God that we stand and rise again. Think about the last time you stumbled. Which voice was louder: your condemning conscience or the comforting Comforter? (Hint: The former will point to you and your badness; the latter will point to Jesus and his goodness.) How do we train ourselves to listen to the Lord’s uplifting voice when we fall?
- f. Take a moment: Are you paralyzed by an inability to discern the Lord’s will for your life? Do you have a gnawing sense of falling short or not having done enough? Seek first his kingdom and righteousness first and you won’t put a foot wrong. “The plans of the righteous are right” (Proverbs 12:5). If God were to bless the work of your hands, what might happen? Start dreaming with the Holy Spirit about the plans he has already hidden inside you – in your desires, your talents, and your dreams.

## 8. Died

- a. What does it mean to say God is Lord of your *past*? How does Christ give us a new history? What is God's plan for dealing with your old self?
- b. What did Jesus mean when he said "If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me?" What is wrong with the expression, die to self?
- c. Why do some Christians act like different people on Sunday and Monday? What is the cure for this sort of double-minded Christianity?
- d. Why do some Christians continue to sin? Does sinning prove we still have a sinful nature? What does it mean to walk after the flesh?
- e. Paul says, "If the average believer could grasp hold of this truth—I *died*—half of our church programs would cease immediately." Discuss.
- f. Take a moment: Do you struggle with sin? Are you pestered by old temptations? Reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to Christ. Don't fight temptation with your puny moral muscles. Walk by faith in the One who became sin so that you might be made righteous. Don't heed to the siren song of sin or the chorus of condemnation. Feed on God's good words. Start by proclaiming Galatians 2:20 over yourself

## 9. New

- a. If the old has gone and the new has come, why do some Christians see themselves as on a lifelong journey to the Promised Land?
- b. "You are born of God," said John. "You are a new creation," said Paul. What is the evidence of this new life?
- c. What did John mean when he said, "No one who lives in him keeps on sinning"? What does it mean to be Sonful, not sinful?
- d. Learning to walk in the new way of the Spirit takes time. There will be missteps and setbacks. When you stumble, what message will you hear from an old covenant preacher? How is this different from what will you hear from a new covenant preacher? Which message are you hearing?
- e. Take a moment: Meditate on 2 Corinthians 5:17: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: The old has gone, the new has come!" Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what is new about you. Read aloud the poem, "Who am I?"

## 10. Royal

- a. Do you see yourself as a king or a servant? One with the Lord, are you a pauper or a prince? Do you think the church has a good grasp of what it means to be a royal priesthood?
- b. When bad things happen, who do we tend to blame? What stops us from rising up in our God-given authority and confronting our giants?

- c. What is the connection between walking in his righteousness and reigning in life? From where does a king's confidence originate?
- d. When the scriptures refer to Jesus as the King of kings, they are not saying he's the first among of earthly royals. He is the King of the kings of his kingdom. Since his kingdom is made up of royal priests, he is the King of you, but you are a king as well. The scriptures also say it is the glory of kings to search out a matter. Discuss some of the ways kings (i.e., Christians who are walking in their royal identity) solve problems that stump ordinary people.
- e. What is the "show and tell" gospel?
- f. Take a moment: Ask yourself, what lions and bears am I facing today? Pray, "Father, help me to walk in your royal paths of grace, to speak when others stay silent, and to command life where there is death. May your will be done in my life as it is in heaven." Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to you and then speak to your giants about Jesus, the King above all.

### The Test of Your Gospel

- a. How do we recognize a counterfeit gospel? What are the signs? Have you encountered a counterfeit gospel?
- b. How do we recognize the true gospel?
- c. Paul says "in the church there are two ways to deal with sin: (1) preach law or (2) reveal grace." Why does preaching law never work? How does grace empower us to sin no more?
- d. Am I resting in Christ's righteousness or am I trying to establish my own? If I stopped working for the Lord, would I feel anxious and guilty? Do I fear those in authority?
- e. Take a moment: Ask yourself, "Have I bought into a counterfeit gospel? Do I view grace as something meant for other people, or have I acknowledged my own need for grace every day? When I think of Jesus, is my mind filled with peace and joy, or guilt and condemnation? Am I free or obligated, resting or restless?" As we close this time of study, ask the Holy Spirit to help you detox from any message that mixes his grace with your works. "Father, I pray that my heart would be firmly established in your love and that my identity would be grounded in your righteousness. All those things I have done to impress you, I count as dung. Thank you for your Son and all he has done for me. Help me to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. Give me the confidence to live fearlessly and the grace to shine in dark times. Help me to be a beacon of your love so that others might be free. Amen."

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