

GOSPEL

Recovering the Power of Christianity

JD GREER

Bible Study Developed by

SPENCE SHELTON

LifeWay Press® • Nashville, Tennessee

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Published by LifeWay Press® • © 2011 J. D. Greear • Revised 2018

Previously published as *Gospel Revolution*

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ISBN 978-1-5359-2566-2 • Item 005808004

Dewey decimal classification: 248.84

Subject headings: DISCIPLESHIP \ CHRISTIAN LIFE \ BIBLE—N.T. GOSPELS

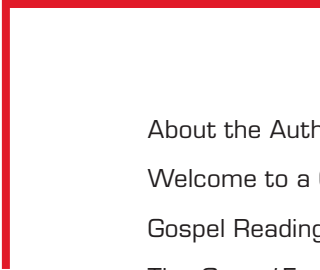
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Printed in the United States of America

Groups Ministry Publishing • LifeWay Resources • One LifeWay Plaza • Nashville, TN 37234

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About the Author



At the age of twenty-seven, **J. D. Greear** became the pastor of a forty-year-old neighborhood church. In the years since, that congregation of four hundred has grown to more than five thousand in weekly attendance. Today the Summit Church, located in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, is one of the fastest-growing churches in North America.

J. D.'s messages aren't intended just to show people how to live better lives. His goal is to leave people in awe of God's amazing love. Because of his belief in the power of the gospel, J. D. has led the Summit to set a goal of planting more than one thousand gospel-centered churches in the next forty years.

J. D. holds a PhD in systematic theology from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also lived and worked among Muslims in Southeast Asia for two years and wrote *Breaking the Islam Code*. J. D. and his beautiful wife, Veronica, have four ridiculously cute kids: Kharis, Alethia, Ryah, and Adon. Unless God calls him elsewhere, J. D. plans to stay at the Summit Church until he preaches his last sermon at his own funeral before saying goodbye and hopping into the casket.

Spence Shelton developed this Bible study. Spence is the lead pastor of Mercy Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. Mercy Church launched in September 2015 with the vision of seeing a gospel awakening move through the people of Charlotte and extend to the ends of the earth.

Spence has coauthored several books, including *The People of God* and the small-group studies *Jesus the King*, *The Meaning of Marriage*, *The Gospel according to Jonah*, and *Presence: Overwhelmed by God*.

Spence earned a BS in business administration from the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and an MDiv in Christian ethics from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Spence and his wife, Courtney, have four children: Zeke, Ben, Ellie, and Haddie.

Welcome to a Gospel Revolution!

For many years my Christianity seemed to consist of a list of things to do and not to do. The results were spiritual frustration and weariness. Learning to dwell on the gospel changed all that. It produced in me the one thing religion couldn't: a *desire* for God.

The gospel isn't just the way we begin in Christ; it's also the way we grow in Christ. Dwelling on the gospel produces freedom, joy, radical sacrifice, and audacious faith. The gospel has revolutionized my life, and it has revolutionized our church. I believe it will revolutionize yours too.

In light of that conviction, I'd like to encourage you to do a couple of things concurrently with this Bible study. For the next eight weeks, pray the four parts of the gospel prayer and read along with me the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Why? Because I want you to saturate yourself in the gospel every day. The most gospel-centered books ever written are the Gospels. You'll find Jesus there. Dwell with Him in the Gospels for eight weeks and let the gospel prayer saturate your heart and mind with His beauty and love. I think you'll never be the same.

Here's the gospel prayer that we'll learn more about in the weeks ahead.

Part 1: "In Christ there's nothing I can do that would make You love me more, and there's nothing I've done that would make You love me less."

Part 2: "Your presence and approval are all I need for everlasting joy."

Part 3: "As You've been to me, so I'll be to others."

Part 4: "As I pray, I'll measure Your compassion by the cross and Your power by the resurrection."

Blessings to you as you begin your gospel revolution!



J. D. Greear

Gospel Reading Plan

Begin the following forty-day Gospel reading plan after your first small-group session. To stay on track, read and check off five passages each week.

DAY	READING		DAY	READING			
<input type="checkbox"/>	1	Matthew 1–2	Week 1	<input type="checkbox"/>	21	Luke 5–6	Week 5
<input type="checkbox"/>	2	Matthew 3–4		<input type="checkbox"/>	22	Luke 7	
<input type="checkbox"/>	3	Matthew 5–7		<input type="checkbox"/>	23	Luke 8–9	
<input type="checkbox"/>	4	Matthew 8–9		<input type="checkbox"/>	24	Luke 10–11	
<input type="checkbox"/>	5	Matthew 10–12		<input type="checkbox"/>	25	Luke 12–13	
<input type="checkbox"/>	6	Matthew 13–14	Week 2	<input type="checkbox"/>	26	Luke 14–16	Week 6
<input type="checkbox"/>	7	Matthew 15–16		<input type="checkbox"/>	27	Luke 17–19	
<input type="checkbox"/>	8	Matthew 17–18		<input type="checkbox"/>	28	Luke 20–21	
<input type="checkbox"/>	9	Matthew 19–20		<input type="checkbox"/>	29	Luke 22–24	
<input type="checkbox"/>	10	Matthew 21–23		<input type="checkbox"/>	30	John 1–2	
<input type="checkbox"/>	11	Matthew 24–25	Week 3	<input type="checkbox"/>	31	John 3–4	Week 7
<input type="checkbox"/>	12	Matthew 26–28		<input type="checkbox"/>	32	John 5–6	
<input type="checkbox"/>	13	Mark 1–3		<input type="checkbox"/>	33	John 7–8	
<input type="checkbox"/>	14	Mark 4–5		<input type="checkbox"/>	34	John 9–10	
<input type="checkbox"/>	15	Mark 6–7		<input type="checkbox"/>	35	John 11–12	
<input type="checkbox"/>	16	Mark 8–10	Week 4	<input type="checkbox"/>	36	John 13–14	Week 8
<input type="checkbox"/>	17	Mark 11–13		<input type="checkbox"/>	37	John 15–16	
<input type="checkbox"/>	18	Mark 14–16		<input type="checkbox"/>	38	John 17	
<input type="checkbox"/>	19	Luke 1–2		<input type="checkbox"/>	39	John 18–19	
<input type="checkbox"/>	20	Luke 3–4		<input type="checkbox"/>	40	John 20–21	

The *Gospel* Experience

Welcome to an eight-week journey through the Gospels that we hope will lead you, as well as your church, to a gospel revolution. Here's how the study works.

Introduction. Each week begins with a narrative overview of the weekly topic. You'll probably want to read this introduction before your group meets so that you'll better understand the topic and the context for the group session.

Start. Your actual group session will most likely begin here with an icebreaker that's designed to help you ease into the study and get everyone talking. A brief description of J. D.'s teaching helps set the stage for hearing from God during each video teaching segment.

Watch. Key statements from the video session are provided so that you can follow along and take notes as J. D. teaches.

Discuss. These questions help the group study passages that reinforce J. D.'s teaching in the video. Each question is designed to lead the group deeper into the gospel so that the gospel becomes foundational in members' lives. These questions facilitate the work that the Holy Spirit is accomplishing in the lives of individuals and the group.

Respond. These gospel exercises allow group members to enjoy a smaller group experience, which increases the likelihood that everyone's voice will be heard. Although some of these activities introduce further opportunities for Bible study, some focus on prayer, meditation, and encouragement.

Close. This section concludes the group session and summarizes key points. It also offers a final challenge and a time to pray together.

Personal study. Three or four devotions are provided each week to be completed after the group session. These devotions complement the Gospel reading plan so that group members are immersed in the pool of the gospel throughout this *Gospel* experience.

Week 1

GOSPEL CHANGE



God doesn't *need* anything from us.





Hear this plainly. God doesn't *need* anything from us. What God *wants* is the affections of our heart.

Our opening week's study explores the core concepts of living a gospel-centered life. Many Christians are living in a difficult tension. They're fighting to follow the teachings of Jesus and the commands of Scripture, yet the result isn't the abundant life they long for. They may be bringing their behavior in line with God's rules, but their hearts are still running from Him. Usually without realizing it, they've let God their Father take a back seat to God their Judge. As a result, they're left in a daily grind trying to appease God. The end of this road is either empty religious routine or abandonment of the Christian faith altogether. Both are a far cry from the revolutionary power of the gospel that Jesus unleashed on earth.

The primary aim of this first week's study will be to develop a clear distinction between religious change and gospel change. The common theme in the Scriptures and in this week's study is that God doesn't want more religious conformity; He wants our love. We have a tendency in religious circles to fill our lives to the brim with religious activities. For the most part, these activities in themselves are good, God-honoring pursuits. The reality, however, is that habitual Christianity may be the number-one killer of the joy-filled life Christ has offered us. A good question for us is, Are we trying to earn God's love and affection, or are we living in the joy of God's love that's been declared over us in the gospel?



Start

**If you grew up in church, what do you remember most about it?
If you didn't, what was your impression, if any, of church?**

**Do you recall anything about your past church experience that
now seems antiquated, funny, or out of place?**

Begin this week by answering a few questions below. Ask everyone to record their answers. We'll return to these questions in group session 8 to observe ways we've changed. Think of this activity like preparation for a workout or a diet. Though it's painful, good wisdom says to get on the scale and see where you are so that later you can celebrate how much you've changed. In this case, however, we'll celebrate how much *God* has changed us!

In your own words, what's the gospel?

Why did you become a Christian, or why would you want to?

**What do you hope to gain from this study during the next
eight weeks?**

When you hear the word *gospel*, what comes to mind? Many of us have some exposure to this word, whether from church, media, or pop culture. But do any of us really grasp the significance that the gospel could have on our everyday lives? Do we understand the power available to us in the gospel? In video session 1 J. D. Greear introduces the concept of a gospel-centered life and its power to unlock the power and joy we may be missing.



Watch

Watch video session 1.

Mechanical change is change from the outside. That is how you change things that aren't alive.

Religion changes you externally by adding things to your life.

In organic change, your behavior changes because you change.

You worship whatever you deem essential for life and happiness.

What God desires is a heart that desires Him.

The gospel tells you not to change in order to earn the approval of God but because you have the approval of God.

The gospel reveals God's beauty in a way that we begin to desire Him.

The gospel reveals God's mercy so that we begin to love Him.

Gospel-centered change is not about giving you a list of things you need to go and do for God but making you stand in awe of what He has done for you.

Video sessions available at lifeway.com/gospel
or with a subscription to smallgroup.com



Discuss

Use the following questions to discuss the video teaching.

How would you summarize the key message of this session's video teaching? Did anything surprise you or challenge you in a way you didn't expect?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. Based on these verses, what's the gospel? Work together to arrive at a scriptural definition for the group moving forward.

The gospel, in its essence, is the message that Jesus lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death, was buried, and rose on the third day in victory over sin and death. The whole Bible centers on this revelation.

Let's start looking at what the apostle Paul had to say about the gospel.

Read Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:16-21. What requests did Paul make on the people's behalf?

What does the nature of Paul's requests tell you about what he believed to be central to the Christian life? How might his beliefs differ from what we often believe to be the primary purpose of the Christian life?

Paul tells us that God initiates and grants us the ability to know and love Him. Hearing the gospel informs us, but the Holy Spirit transforms us. How does this understanding affect the way we approach life change?

The love of God for us is an abundant well we draw from to live our lives for His glory. Jesus Christ taught and embodied this love.

Read Matthew 22:37-39. Here Christ quoted Deuteronomy 6:4-9, which was a central prayer for the Jewish community. Why do you think Christ called this the greatest commandment? How did Jesus expand the commandment given in Deuteronomy?

Read Luke 7:44-48. Jesus affirmed the faith of a sinful woman by showing how much she loved God because of how much she'd been forgiven. What obstacles keep us from having faith like this woman on a daily basis?

The love of Christ, most visibly displayed in the gospel, is more valuable than anything else. Now we'll investigate ways His love plays out in daily life.

Which statement tends to be truer of the way you operate on a daily basis—"I love because He first loved me" or "I love because I'm supposed to"? What's the difference between these two ideas?

Although the Christian life is supposed to be freeing, many times we feel burdened by it. What do you find to be the most difficult part of being a Christian? What are some possible reasons? How does the gospel bring a fresh perspective?



Respond

Divide into same-gender groups of two or three people. As each group discusses the prompts below, everyone should write down his or her answer. After ten minutes reconvene as a group.

In three words describe what the gospel means to you personally.

Discuss with your smaller groups why you chose those three words. When you reconvene with the rest of the group, a couple of people should share their responses.



Close

The center of the Christian faith isn't a set of rules to follow but a loving Father who rescues His children from death and gives them new life. Once we start to realize His love for us, the natural response is to love Him in return. Love for God is the core of Christianity. In this love we joyfully live in step with the design for living that He has given us in the Scriptures. We aren't under the rule of an exacting dictator who demands that we earn His favor but under the care of a Father whose instructions flow from His love for us.

Pray together.

This Week

MATTHEW 1-12

This Week's Reading Plan

- Day 1 > Matthew 1-2
- Day 2 > Matthew 3-4
- Day 3 > Matthew 5-7
- Day 4 > Matthew 8-9
- Day 5 > Matthew 10-12

Day 1 Matthew 1

THE FAMILY TREE

The opening chapter of the Gospel of Matthew begins with a look at Jesus' family tree. Verse 1, "An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham," wouldn't have been lost on the first-century Jewish audience to which Matthew's Gospel account was tailored. David and Abraham were two of the most prominent figures in Jewish history, and God gave both men a covenant promising that the Savior of the world would come through their lineage. Although the announcement in this verse may appear to us to be nothing more than opening movie credits, we'd be better served to see this genealogy as credentials—proof that Jesus is who He said He was in Matthew's Gospel. These verses establish Jesus' royal right to the throne of God's people.

Now that the significance of Jesus' lineage is clear, notice the makeup of the people listed in the first sixteen verses. It wouldn't be uncommon in that day to establish someone's lineage through a genealogy like this. What's uncommon is acknowledging women in such a list. This honor was normally reserved for men because they were the heads of households. How astonished readers must have been to see King David's name in the same sentence as Rahab's and Ruth's! Five women in all, two Gentiles and three of questionable character, are included in the genealogy of the Messiah. Heroes, kings, Gentiles, prostitutes, adulterers—Matthew was being very intentional with his list.

We then cut right to the announcement and brief birth scene of Jesus Christ. The miraculous is introduced just eighteen verses into our reading. Think about it. An angel came to tell a virgin woman that she would be with child from the Holy Spirit. The child's name meant "God is with us" (v. 23), and He would save us from our sins. The supernatural hand of God was all over this setting. What a scene! It feels unbelievable, but should we expect any less from God Himself? We're only in chapter 1, but Jesus has arrived, and as you may expect, it's kind of a big deal.

REFLECT

What does the inclusion of women and Gentiles alongside kings and heroes in Jesus' lineage foreshadow about the kingdom that Jesus was inaugurating? How have you personally benefited from that kingdom?

Look at the angel's announcement in verse 21. What was to be Jesus' primary purpose? What does that purpose mean to you?

PRAY & MEDITATE

Pray that God will allow this one purpose of Jesus to rest in your mind and that it would declutter the various notions of Jesus that swirl in our culture. In a gospel-centered mind Jesus is first and foremost our Savior and Lord.

Day 2 Matthew 4

LOVE CONQUERS ALL

Jesus had just heard the words of His Father: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased” (3:17). This is what every son longs to hear from his father. Immediately after His baptism, Christ was led out to be tempted by the Devil (see 4:1). What was Christ’s motivation for resisting Satan? It was the words of His Father. Because His Father love Him so much, the temptations of Satan lost their luster, and Jesus revealed them for the frauds they were. The best way you and I can fight temptation is by resting deeper in Christ’s love for us. When we have all of our needs met in His love, temptation no longer has a hold over us.

A friend of mine gave me an idea I’ve begun to use with my kids to help get this concept across. Every so often I look at my children and tell them I love them. Not too revolutionary, I know. But I follow that with the question “Why does Daddy love you?” They’re still young, so their answers vary from “I don’t know” to “I love Daddy” to “Pretzels!” After a moment or two I tell them the answer: “Because you’re my children!”

Only a couple of months into this practice, they’re already beginning to catch on. I want them to know as they grow up that their father’s love isn’t based on a merit system but on their identity. As they grow up, opportunities to question that love will come from every angle. Whether they reject me by lying to me or disobeying me or sense rejection from me because they feel they’ve let me down, Satan will use such seasons to cause my children to run from me. In those moments I want them to hear something familiar from me: “Why does Daddy love you? Because you’re my children.” I don’t love them because they deserve it but because of who they are. I want that understanding to drive them back into my arms, not farther from me.

This is God’s call to us. In Christ we’re God’s children, and we can rest in His unwavering love for us.

REFLECT

Satan began his attack on Jesus by questioning the very identity that God had just spoken over Jesus: *“If you are the son of God ...”* (Matt. 4:3, emphasis added). Satan does the same to us. How can you remember your identity as God’s child this week?

In what ways are you currently being tempted? How does the truth that God is pleased with you (because of Christ) help you in that struggle? Or if you have a hard time believing God is pleased with you, what truth in today’s Scripture can you depend on?

God calls us to carry one another’s burdens (see Gal. 6:2) and to promote love and good works (see Heb. 10:24). Who’s another believer you could practice those ministries with on a consistent basis? Try to take those actions this week.

PRAY & MEDITATE

Romans 8:1-2 says:

*There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus,
because the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus
has set you free from the law of sin and death.*

Will you take time now to thank God that you’re free from the power of sin over you? Ask Him to help you live today, especially in difficult moments, in a constant awareness of and satisfaction in that freedom.

Day 3 Matthew 6

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY?

This is the question the disciples asked Jesus. In truth, it's the question that keeps many people from developing rich prayer lives. Most people want to believe prayer works, but they have no idea where to start. So when the need to pray arises, they offer God a skeptical but desperate plea to fix what's broken in their lives. Often a lack of confidence in prayer turns into a mundane routine with little or no variance and little or no connection with God.

How did Jesus respond to this question? While the question that the disciples asked is recorded in Luke 11:1, the full response Christ gave is recorded in Matthew 6:5-13. We refer to this famous passage as the Lord's Prayer, though it would be far more accurate to call it the Disciples' Prayer since it's Jesus' prescription for our prayer lives. I hope a look at this passage will free you to begin praying with confidence in the way God designed prayer to be practiced. Here are some ways Jesus instructed us to pray.

- Pray to an audience of one (see w. 5-6).
- The heart matters, not the tongue (see w. 7-8).
- Prayer is first God-centered (see w. 9-10).
- Pray as if your life depended on it (see w. 11-13).

Of course, prayer flows from a heart captivated by the gospel.

REFLECT

Does your prayer life feel vibrant or mundane? Which of the four elements on the previous page is your weakest link? How will the gospel change your perspective?

I've recommended that you read the gospel prayer every week throughout this Bible study (see p. 5). How is the gospel prayer already challenging your prayer life? How does praying it affect the rest of your day?

PRAY & MEDITATE

There would be no better passage to meditate on today than Matthew 6:5-13. Pray the way Christ called His disciples to pray, but don't just recite the Lord's Prayer. The psalmist's prayer was:

*May the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.*

PSALM 19:14

Meditate on these words. Let them become your words from your mind and heart, not just words on a page. Then pray them to God.