

considered himself the worst of sinners. But God showed him mercy so that, “Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who believe in him for eternal life.”

If God has the power to change Paul, God has the power to change you. If you struggle with pride, with anger, lust, bitterness, gossip, selfishness, entitlement or anything else, the Scriptures tell us that God has the power to show you mercy and has the power to change you. For some changes, it may happen quick. There are testimonies of dramatic changes in a person’s life. For others, it may take a lifetime. Paul used his own life not in a way to boast about himself, but to put Christ on display. May the Holy Spirit give you faith to believe and trust that as Jesus changed Paul’s life; Jesus can change yours too.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. What is an area of your life that you struggle with? What is a weakness or stubbornness that your family or friends have been pointing out to you?
2. Have you gotten used to a certain way of doing something that you can’t imagine living without it?
3. Do you believe that God has the power to transform you? What holds you back from believing? What are some ways that God has already changed you?

GCCSI DEVOTIONAL



LENT

2020

Week 1

*Repentance*

Week 2

*Gospel Basics*

**Day 1: Preparing the Way***Read Luke 3:1-18*

How do you get ready to meet a king? That was John the Baptist's task. His job was to prepare the people to receive the Messiah. Luke quotes Isaiah who describes himself as someone who will prepare the way of the Lord. John takes that identity. His responsibility was to be like a construction crew that goes through a land to make it smooth so that a highway can be built.

How did John the Baptist prepare people for the coming of the Lord? We're told that John preached a baptism of repentance. What is that? The origin of the word repentance comes from the idea of turning around. If a person was facing one direction away from a target, they need to turn around in order to hit the correct target. In the same way, John was calling people to turn away from living their life one way and turning it toward another. John's baptism was an act of repentance. It was an act of turning from one way and turning toward another.

A person is not saved by repenting. But repenting prepares the heart to encounter the true and living God. It's an act of humility. A person says that they are not living life or doing things according to the way God desires. By repenting a person acknowledges this fact and is asking God for help. John was calling the people to do three things. First, not to presume that they are ok with God because of their Jewish heritage. We too must not presume we are ok with God because we go to church or because our parents are Christians, or because we have been in church for a long time. Christians are called to practice repentance regularly. Second, he calls the people to live lives that are consistent with a heart of repentance. Followers are to share the things they have. They are not to extort money. It's easy to say we're sorry. We need God's help for us to actually change. Third, John calls the people to prepare their hearts. John thought that the Messiah will come to judge immediately. He didn't realize that Jesus came to save before he came to judge. As difficult as John's message was to hear, Luke describes John's message as, "Good News".

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. How has your spiritual life been? Are you prepared and excited to know God this year?
2. Is there something in your life you feel as if God is calling you to turn away from? What are you called to turn to?
3. Spend some time in prayer and ask God to prepare your heart to know Him more.

**Day 6: An Example***Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17*

Do you believe that God has the power to transform a terrorist? Could God change someone who is so captured by evil that his purpose in life is to hurt and destroy people? As Christians we believe the Gospel has the power to transform. It has the power to transform the proud to become humble. It has the power to transform those who hate to those who love. It has the power to transform rebels into children of God.

Paul was one of those people who were transformed by Christ. If you read the book of Acts, Paul's story is mentioned three separate times. Paul's experience with Jesus led him to passionately pursue Christ's purpose for his life. Initially, Paul was a person who was raised and trained as a Pharisee. He was someone who zealously studied the Torah and tried to apply its rules into his life. He traced his lineage to the tribe of Benjamin and trained vigorously under one of the leading rabbis of the time, a man named Gamaliel. When Christians were on trial he voted to allow them to be stoned to death. He was present when the first Christian martyr Stephen was killed. He even went to foreign cities to try and find believers of Christ to arrest them and bring them back to Jerusalem to be put on trial for blasphemy.

But God met Paul on the way to one of these cities. Jesus revealed himself to Paul in a blinding vision and spoke to him. Paul was knocked off his horse and was unable to see for a time until a Christian named Ananias healed Paul in Jesus' name. After some time, Paul not only believed in Jesus, but focused his zeal and energy in proclaiming that Jesus is the Messiah. The very person who persecuted Christ was now risking his life to proclaim Christ.

For the rest of his life, Paul would preach the Gospel, teach the church, and help people to understand the significance of what Jesus had done. He would acknowledge that God had used him, but would always recognize that God was the one who had mercy on him. Why did God do this? Why did God choose Paul and show him such mercy?

Perhaps God knew the good that Paul would do? Or perhaps it was because Paul had the intelligence, the education or the language ability? No- it was nothing within Paul himself that God needed. God could create anyone with these skills. Paul himself would not boast in his skills. Paul himself said in verse 15, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost". In other words, Paul

that we were just sinners this would devastate us. We would have no hope. But the Gospel gives us good news.

During my conversation with the college student, I smiled because I knew she got it. She understood that calling people sinners was offensive, but I said to her, “Hang on a minute, it gets good. You need to hear the bad news before you hear the good news.” The bad news is that we are sinners- we are rebels before God. This is not an encouraging or flattering thing to say. It also cuts our self-esteem down. But this is not the end of the story. The gospel tells us that there is hope. God’s love is so great that he would love sinners like us.

God loved us so much that while we were enemies with God, Christ died for our sins. This means we are now reconciled to God. We have hope now. We do not need to fear God’s wrath because it was taken by Jesus. God is not against us now, but for us. The Gospel makes sure that we know that we have no hope in to save ourselves. There is no boasting. But what we cannot do- God does for us.

### Questions for Meditation

1. How does it make you feel knowing about your failure to obey God?
2. If Jesus had not died for your sin, how would you deal with your sin?
3. How does Jesus’ love for you in spite of your sin make you feel? How does knowing that because of what Jesus did, you have a relationship with God make you feel?

## Day 2: How We Should Repent?

### Read Psalm 51

There are many erroneous views of repentance. One wrong view is that repentance and forgiveness is transactional. It’s a business deal. I messed up and I paid a fine. Another wrong view of repentance is something we do to help us psychologically. Some confess just to relieve some emotional stress. Some do so in the hopes of getting out of the consequences of our sin. Still others repent because it’s just the Christian thing to do. But the kind of repentance that the Bible describes is one that spends time really understanding ourselves, understanding our motives and acknowledging the wrong we have done.

The background to Psalm 51 is described in 2 Samuel 11-12. David took the wife of one of his warriors and she became pregnant. To cover up his deed, David had the man killed and made it look like the man’s death was just a misfortune of war. God used a prophet named Nathan to expose the King’s actions.

Psalm 51 is known as a psalm of repentance. Here we glimpse into the heart of a man whose sin was fully exposed. He had nowhere to run. He had no excuses. Here are some things to consider:

1. *David’s Attitude:* David knew in his soul that God owed Him nothing. God had done nothing but good to David. And despite God’s love and care, David had despised God’s grace. He knew he deserved to be cut off from God. He could only depend on God’s mercy and God’s steadfast love.
2. *David Spent Time Reflecting:* David knew his sin. “I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me (v.3)”. David knew the sin toward other people. But he also knew that his sin was against a holy God.
3. *David Sought After God and Not Just God’s Forgiveness:* David’s joy was in the Lord. To be cut off from God was pain and sorrow. He asked the Creator God to renew a right Spirit with himself and for a new heart.
4. *David was mindful of the effects on other people and sought to make it right.* He wanted to use his experience to warn others and teach others that there was a way toward forgiveness by a gracious God. Repentance is a long and agonizing process. Below are some questions to consider in this season of returning to the Lord.

### Application:

1. Ask someone you trust and who knows you well what are some areas in your life where you need to grow? Spend some time reflecting the responses your trusted person gave you.
2. Consider some of your actions. Ask yourself the following:
  - a. What are some habits that I have that are not pleasing to the Lord?
  - b. Why do I do those things?
  - c. What should I do to make things right? Do I need to apologize for something? Do I need to ask someone to hold me accountable?

## Day 3: What Should We Repent About?

Read Galatians 5:16-26

Repentance is more than just thinking about the wrong things we have done and obedience is a lot more than just doing the right thing. Thinking and doing the right things are important, but true repentance is more than those things alone.

In the letter of Galatians, Paul had just been establishing that believers in Christ are not made right before God by their fulfillment of God's law. Instead, their acceptance is through believing in Jesus' work of righteousness on their behalf. But if this is the case, why should we avoid sin? Paul writes to the Galatians and essentially tells them that it's absolutely true that they are free from the requirement to fulfill the law to be saved. But they are to use that freedom not to live in sin again, but to live "by the Spirit".

What does it mean to live "by the Spirit"? This teaching of Scripture makes a tremendous difference for the Christian. It's what makes Christianity different from a dead religion. The amazing thing about being a Christian is that God dwells within us. The third part of the Trinity, the Spirit takes up residence in our hearts and shapes our will. His presence in our lives guides us to love God and seek His purposes over our own. He makes us want to do the right thing and to know God more. It's an important element in being a Christian. We are not called to live the Christian life alone.

Many would admit to live like Jesus is hard. The reality is that it's not only hard, it's impossible. But Christ living in us makes all the difference. In this life, we will continue to battle our sinful earthly desires. This is what Paul calls, "the flesh". In verses 19-21, Paul makes a very clear list about what is sinful and contrary to what the Spirit desires. This list does not just describe external actions, but attitudes of the heart as well. Paul is very clear about the result of these things. Those who do those things, "will not inherit the kingdom of God."

But what about God's forgiveness? God's forgiveness is ready and available to all who seek it. This forgiveness cost the Son of God his life on the cross. But Christ died so that we would no longer live for ourselves, but live for Him. So Paul describes what walking in the Spirit looks like in verses 22-23. Those who follow Christ ought to live this way. We are not to be conceited, provoking one another or envying each other.

## Day 5: Justified by His Blood

Romans 5:6-11

There are things about the Gospel message that can be uncomfortable with people. One time I was explaining the Gospel with a college student who was very open to Jesus. While I was explaining the Gospel, we discussed sin in the world. I explained that while sin was something that others have done to us, but it is also something that we ourselves have done to others. As I was talking, she interrupted me and asked me with a slightly offended look, "Wait, are you telling me I'm a sinner? That I'm a bad person?" Sometimes, non-church people get the shock factor better than church people sometimes.

One of the concerns I have for the Christian church is that the Gospel message is obscured sometimes. Sometimes out of good intentions, Christians can assume things instead of trusting in God to do the work. For example, in order to try to make the Gospel easier to accept, we make things easier for people to accept. We can talk about God's love. We can talk about how God helps us in our difficulties or restores our marriages or heals us. These things are true. The truth of these things is not the problem. But the problem is what is left out. There are things that the Gospel confronts in our lives that make us uncomfortable. But until we acknowledge these things, the Gospel will not be heard the way it was meant to be heard. When the message of God's love is heard by people who still want to rule over themselves and not be ruled by God, God becomes a tool. We are appealing to sinful hearts and giving sinful people what they want instead of what they need.

The way today's passage describes our hearts and our lives is not flattering. It describes us as sinners. The word sin has so many ideas behind it. It refers to someone who has broken laws. It also has the idea that we are people who are living the wrong way; we are rebels against God. In fact, we were enemies with God.

Christ came to die for *sinners*. He didn't come to die for people who need a break from the pressures of the world, or people who weren't loved, or people who just need some encouragement. God certainly has compassion on broken people. But Christ came and died for *sinners*. He didn't come to give people more moral rules to follow. He came to reconcile rebels to God. He came to save us from God's judgment for sinners. Another word for this punishment is wrath.

But the Gospel message does not end there. If the Gospel told us

jealousies of individual people. Paul was not saying that being jealous or competitive was ok, but that Paul wasn't personally hurt or jealous by those people. It didn't matter to him *so long as the Gospel was being preached*. But with the Galatians, these teachers were teaching something against the Gospel. They added a requirement- you had to work in order to be saved.

As one person put it, it was the difference between Christianity becoming a religion of works or a religion of grace. Paul put it bluntly, the message that you are saved by your works is a distortion of the true Gospel.

Why would anyone distort the Gospel? Throughout the history of the church, there are movements to distort the Gospel. On one hand, people want a more rigorous faith. This is right and good. But where it can go too far is to say a person must work for their salvation. On the other hand, there are those who go to the other side and say there is no need for obedience. God's grace covers all. Some great sins have been justified in this way. The Apostles understood good work to be a fruit of faith and a fruit of salvation, not the cause of salvation. Work flows from a heart that has been transformed by the Holy Spirit. A person who is saved and knows the love of God will desire to reflect God. But this is a supernatural work. We must come face to face with a basic problem. We don't want to do it. In our sinful natural selves, we don't want to serve God. The first step is to admit our inability and need for God to transform our hearts. There we find the truth of the Gospel.

### Questions for Meditation

1. Do you feel more confident and safer in your faith when you obey the rules? Do you look down on others when they don't know how to behave or when they break the rules?
2. Do you sometimes feel better than those who aren't as gracious as you are? Do you look down on people who are so focused on the rules?
3. How are both of these attitudes incompatible with the Gospel?

### Application:

1. Look over the list of works of the flesh in verses 19-21. What have you allowed to give yourself into recently?
2. Consider your relationships with others or a specific recent incident where there was a disagreement between you and another person. Is there evidence that some things that you did were motivated by these sinful desires in verses 19-21?
3. Look over the list of fruit of the Spirit in verses 22-23. Although it is a list, these are all part of the one fruit of the Spirit. Take time to ask God to renew your spirit to desire God's presence in your life.
4. Take some to thank God and ask God to continue to crucify your sinful life.

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## Day 4: Saying No to the World

### Read 1 John 2:15-17

Repentance deals with all aspects of sin. Sin is what we do and don't do. Sin is also why we do something. It's possible to do the right thing for the wrong reasons. But sin is also what we love. The reason we sin is because we want to. That's why it has so much power over us. We want to sin.

In 1 John 2:15, John warns his hearers not just to stop doing something, he is engaging the heart. He is exposing what we love. Here, he tells believers to not love the world. He also says unequivocally, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (v. 15). What does he mean here by world? He is not of course talking about sunsets, pizza, or the air we breathe. In the next verse John clarifies what he means:

*[16] For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. [17] And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (ESV)*

So what is John referring to? There are three things. First, the desires of the flesh. Here John refers to the flesh not as the physical body, but the desires of the sinful nature. The desires of the sinful nature are similar to what we read yesterday. These are desires that are out of control. These can be sexually immoral desires, desiring an inordinate amount of food, appetites that are left uncontrolled and unchecked. Second are the desires of the eyes. One English version of the Bible calls it "lust of the eyes". This is not limited to sexually explicit images, but would include them.

This could be coveting something or an uncontrolled desire for material possessions. The third one is “pride of life”. This is a boasting of what one has and does. Boasting in one’s accomplishment, or boasting in what a person possesses, or what a person knows.

John reminds hearers that these things are passing away. Whether you are a Christian or not, you may already sense the truth of this. Things might be pleasurable for a time. But eventually the excitement and the happiness it gives fades. Toys break or become boring. The vacation you are on wasn’t as satisfying as you thought it would be. These things are passing away. But there is a promise: the one who does the will of God abides forever.

Christ came and lived the life we should have lived. He spent his entire life living for God’s will. He obeyed out of love for God. He died in obedience to the Father’s will. But he rose again in victory so we could live for God. His resurrection gives us power to live for God and not for ourselves. We have a new master. Let us live for Him.

#### **Application:**

1. Meditate on each of the three categories: desires of the flesh, desires of the eyes, and pride of life. How have you desired things in each category recently?
2. How does remembering the eternal greatness of God’s promise help you fight the desires for the things of the world?
3. Who is someone you can talk to about these challenges? Confess it to them and ask them to pray with you.

royalty, speaks like royalty, acts like royalty doesn’t mean that they are royalty. But if you are adopted into a royal family, while it may take time for the person to learn how to act like royalty, it doesn’t change the fact that the person is royalty. The Gospel means that because of what Jesus has done, we have been made royalty not because of anything we did. But simply because of grace.

I like to put it this way sometimes: we don’t do good works to get into heaven, but it’s because we’re going to heaven that we do good works.

#### **Questions for Meditation:**

1. Have you ever felt insecure about your salvation? How does the passage give you comfort in spite of your many sins?
2. How does being saved by grace differ from being saved by works?
3. How does God’s kindness encourage you today?

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## **Day 4: Intolerance**

### *Read Philippians 1:15-18, Galatians 1:6-9*

In today’s passages, we are considering two different situations that the Apostle Paul faced. In Philippians, Paul is in prison. But in spite of his situation, he rejoices. Why? In Paul’s ministry, he met other preachers who were often jealous of Paul. Paul was popular and was an Apostle. Paul had influence and authority while others did not. In spite of this, Paul didn’t view these preachers as being rivals. In fact, he was so gracious that he rejoiced in spite of people’s motivation. He was happy simply in the fact that the Gospel was being preached.

However, in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, he writes to the church with great concern. He is so concerned that the Galatians have abandoned the Gospel. Teachers had been coming in to the church and teaching that if a person wanted to be a follower of Jesus, they had to first obey the laws of Moses. They taught that in order for a person to be made right with God, they had to contribute to their faith by good works. Paul was very blunt about this kind of teaching. He said it didn’t matter who taught this kind of teaching. Even if it was an angel from heaven, may anyone who taught a different Gospel be cursed.

Why was Paul so gracious in the first situation, and so inhospitable in the second? With the Philippians, the problem was just the personal

**Day 3: Grace vs. Merit***Ephesians 2:8-10*

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is contrary to what a lot of us would expect about religion. It's why it's so different from other religions and why it has sometimes been forgotten even among church leaders. That's why we need to constantly be reminded. In the Scripture the earliest Apostles wrote down the meaning of the Gospel. But the Gospel is far from what we'd expect. What most people expect is that God would love and care about those who behave themselves and do what He wants. We would expect God to love and care for those who do right and punish and hate those who don't. But the Gospel tells us something different.

The Gospel tells us first that we are all sinners. (Romans 3:23- "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."). None of us live up to the standards that we should live. None of us are worthy of acceptance or to be able to stand before God in His holiness. Throughout the Old Testament and the New Testament, it is affirmed over and over again that no one can come before God. That means we all deserve to be cut off from God and punished for our sin.

But the crazy part of the Gospel is that we are told that God sent his son into the world to die for the ungodly (Romans 5:8). Jesus didn't just die for people to give them some more moral teaching. Jesus came to die for those who rejected God. He went to the cross to receive our punishment and to give us new life.

In today's passage, we are told that people are saved "by grace". Grace means a free gift from God. It's not something earned. It's not a result of "works" or human effort or human determination. It's not because of all the hard work a person does for the church, how well you've lived your life, or how much offering you gave. We need to be rescued.

This however has been debated throughout church history. Many feel uncomfortable with this idea. Some say, if you say salvation is free, then people will live their lives whatever way they want and sin as much as they want. This was a concern in the early church as well as by several teachers throughout church history. But Paul says something very different.

In verse 10, we are told that the good works we do are the result of a renewed and recreated life in Christ Jesus. One illustration may help explain what the passage means. Just because a person dresses up like

**Day 5: What God Wants***Read Luke 18:9-14*

When it comes down to it, we must ask ourselves not what we want or not how we feel, but how does God feel? How does God like how we sing? What does God think of our worship and our prayers? In the same way, we must ask what does God think of our repentance?

Jesus tells a parable about what God seeks for in our repentance. In today's passage, we are told that Jesus was addressing a problem. He was addressing a problem about people's way of thinking. He was addressing people, "who trusted in themselves that they were righteous." His parable was about two men who went to the temple to pray.

The first man was a Pharisee. He was someone who knew the commands of the Torah. We're also told that he stood by himself. This means that he considered himself elite. He had a strong sense of his worthiness before God. His prayer is a list of things he is not. He states that he is not, "like other men, extortioners, unjust adulterers, or even like this tax collector." He lists off things that he does. "I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get."

At first this man seems so arrogant and dislikable. He is the stereotypical Pharisee who is boastful and proud. But before we move on, let's look deeper. First, let's consider his prayer. Let's keep in mind that the Pharisee is thanking God. That's a good thing isn't it? He's acknowledging that God is the one that put him in this position. He is acknowledging God's grace. Second, Scripture commends those who do righteous deeds. These are not bad things. Third, he does righteous deeds like fasting and tithing.

The Pharisee is dealing with two problems: First, is he is not able to recognize his own sin. Although he acknowledges that God is the one who put him in this position, the Pharisee is someone who trusted in himself that he was righteous. The prayer is telling. While he acknowledges that his righteousness is from God, he is looking at his performance as the way to justify himself before God. Jesus is telling us that we not only need to confess our wrong sins, we also need to confess our righteous deeds that we do to make ourselves look good. Second, the Pharisee is also comparing himself before others. He is not able to see his own sin because he is comparing himself to others. When we compare our sin with other people we can often think that we look better than others. We tend to be lenient on ourselves and harsh with others.

The tax collector has a much different approach before God. The tax collector stood far off. He wouldn't even lift his eyes to heaven and beat his breast (a physical expression of grief). His prayer was simply that God would have mercy on him a sinner. The Greek here would probably be better translated as "be merciful to me, *the* sinner".

We see here the tax collector had no illusions that he was right before God. He needed mercy. In contrast to the Pharisee, the tax collector's statement that he was "the sinner" indicated that he was also not looking at others but toward God for mercy. Jesus is not excusing the tax collector's sin or saying that it is no big deal. Far from it. Jesus is pointing out all of our need for mercy. We can miss our need for mercy if we don't humble ourselves.

The parable ends by Jesus declaring that the tax collector went home justified and not the Pharisee. Jesus summarizes his point by saying, "everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

#### **Here are some questions for consideration:**

1. Do I sometimes feel as if God should answer my prayer because of how well I am doing spiritually?
2. Do you ever compare yourself morally to other people? Does that make you feel better about yourself?
3. How do you respond when you are being corrected by someone? Do you defend yourself? Do you make excuses? Do you blame other people? How do you feel if you were to take ownership of the mistakes?
4. Is there someone you can admit and confess your weaknesses to?

First, Paul reminded them that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scripture. Jesus came to this world for a purpose. He came not just to be an example for us, but also to be our Savior. He died for our sins. His purpose was to atone, or make us one with God again. In order to do this, Jesus had to get rid of the thing that was keeping us from God. Our sin.

Second, this was in line with the promises of the Old Testament. Christ's death and resurrection was what the whole Old Testament was leading toward. The Old Testament has a great deal of heroes and examples of faith. But everyone failed. Jesus is the second Adam who succeeded where Adam sinned. Jesus fulfilled the role the nation of Israel was supposed to by representing God on earth. Jesus was the descendant of David who fulfilled God's promise that someday one of David's descendants would sit on the throne forever.

Third, Jesus' life and death and resurrection were not made up stories. Paul and the other Apostles were witnesses to Jesus. They were witnesses. At the time of Paul's letter, there were still many living eye witnesses.

Fourth, the gospel is for those needing grace. Of those who did not deserve salvation and adoption into the family of God, it was Paul. He persecuted and even tried to stamp out Christianity. But God showed Paul grace.

The Gospel is a combination of truth along with deep heartfelt conviction. It needs both. It is something that we need to remember.

#### **Questions for Meditation**

1. What are some ways you forget or lose interest in the Gospel? How does that show in your life?
2. What are some dangers if we lean toward having our spirituality just be truthful information without conviction or conviction without true information?
3. How does knowing that if God could save a person like Paul bring you comfort?

tells us that as bad as we are and undeserving of kindness, God gives us what we don't deserve. It must be received. It must be believed.

**v. 2 We must continue to stand upon it and hold fast to it.** There is no graduating from the Gospel message. It is the only thing that we have that can support us through life and through death. It is not just a message for outsiders or non-Christians. Those who know the Gospel and treasure the Gospel must continue to hold onto it. We are tempted more than we like to admit to depend on our own ability, smarts or goodness. Or on the other hand, we fall into despair thinking that no one can love us. Instead, we are to depend on the grace of God alone. It breaks into the darkest depths of our sin but brings comfort in that we know Christ has come and died for our sin.

### Questions for Meditation

1. When was the first time you heard and understood the Gospel? Who shared it with you?
2. Why is the Gospel something worth living and dying for?
3. Can you explain the Gospel clearly? Is it something that makes you excited still?
4. What are some ways you may have depended on yourself or your own merit to be right before God and others?

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## Day 2: Spiritual Amnesia

### Read 1 Corinthians 15:3-11

An old mentor of mine used a phrase that I have found over the years to be very helpful. "Spiritual Amnesia". It means to forget spiritual truths and lessons that have been learned or acknowledged before in the past. We all forget sometimes. Often the longer we live, the farther we get from the experiences and lessons we have learned before in the past. For some of us we may be able to remember a retreat where we encountered God or a difficult season in our life where God showed himself.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to remember the basic message of Christ. Often we can get caught up in the business of ministry, life and trying to look spiritually mature, we forget the basic simple message of the Gospel.

## Day 6: It's Not Just About Me

### Read Joel 2:12-17

Over the past few days we have been talking about repentance. We have discussed what repentance looks like, what we should repent about. In the last reflection of this week, we are going to shift to repentance as a church. Often when it comes to repentance, many often think of confession as being an individual act. Perhaps we would confess our sins or mistakes during our devotion time, or perhaps before we go to bed. Perhaps we would confess our sins during church. But for many it's a very personal act. My sins are the things that I have done. But when it comes to Scripture, repentance is not only an individual act, it's also for the church. We are called to repent over the things we have done.

In today's passage, the prophet Joel is calling for the people of Judah to come together and repent. The book of Joel talks about the aftermath of some sort of disaster. The book describes an invasion of locusts who come in and ate up all the food that was to be harvested. It is a disaster. This could be referring to a real natural disaster or it could be a metaphor describing an invading army. Regardless, the people are devastated.

In response, Joel is calling people to come together to pray and ask the Lord for mercy. In these verses, there is a repeated word: return. God calls the people to turn back to God and seek him once again. In verse 12, God is calling the people to do external actions, but also internal attitudes. Internally, they are to return with their hearts. Their internal being. They are called to shift their desires and will back toward God. Their external actions are meant to echo their hearts. They are told to come with fasting, weeping and mourning. These are external actions that express an internal reality. In verse 13, they are told to tear their hearts and not their garments. Tearing one's clothes was an expression of sorrow and grief. God didn't just want a show of sorrow, he wanted real repentance.

Verses 13-14 talk about God's character. God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and he relents over disaster. The word "relent" is connected with the idea of bringing comfort. While God's character is not in doubt, Joel recognizes that God alone has the right to make the decision on how he will respond. It is not as if God is a vending machine who owes restoration of what was lost. And yet, Joel is confident and calls the people to come together to ask God for restoration.

There is a word picture that describes this repentance. A trumpet is blown. Trumpets are blown in cases of emergency or to gather people together. People from all different ages, and stages of life are called together. Elders, children, nursing infants, brides and bridegrooms, priests and ministers are all called to Solomon's Temple to pray and ask God to spare his people.

### Application:

What about us? Are there things that we do as a church that we are called to repent? Here are some questions to think through:

#### *Church Practices:*

- Is God calling us to repent of cultural practices we do at the church that are ungodly or unbiblical?
- Are there things that we have done out of neglect of God and His Word that have caused us sorrow and grief?
- Is the advice we give truly from God's Word or are we advising people based off of our experiences?
- Are we mindful of the other ministries in our church or do we claim our own territory?
- Do we seek to serve people when I come to church or are we seeking to be served? Are we mindful of those in need and willing and ready to pray for them?

#### *Individually:*

- Do I still have a heart to know God through His Word? Has my heart to pursue God lessened?
- Am I in relationship with anyone in the church where I can be honest enough to confess my sins and be corrected?
- When in worship, do I worship our feelings or worship the true and living God?
- Have I surrendered our desire for comfort in the things of this world?
- Are I mindful of the resources I have and how I am using them for God's kingdom?
- Have I responded with grace toward those who have made mistakes toward us personally? Have I cut anyone off relationally? Is there someone I need to forgive in the church?

## Day 1: What does it mean to be Gospel-Centered?

### *Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-2*

In our church, we hope to be Gospel Centered. But what is the Gospel? Many people talk about the gospel, and it means a lot of things. We tell people we need to spread the gospel, to preach the gospel, to understand the gospel. But what is it? It seems nowadays to be a junk drawer of good things. Is it a message about God's love? Is it a promise for a life of happiness and success?

Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 reminds his hearers of the basic simple message. He starts off the passage by telling the Corinthians that it is something that was preached, they received and in which they are being saved. Let's examine the various phrases in these verses to try to understand what the Gospel is.

**v. 1 Reminder:** First the Gospel is something that we need to be reminded. It's something that needs to be repeated. Although Paul is already writing to a church full of followers of Christ, he adds a reminder into the letter. Why does someone remind us of something? They do it in order to help us. It's something we can forget or tend to forget. It's something important. Even long-term believers can forget and replace the gospel with work. We sometimes measure our faith depending on how well we have obeyed God. Other times we ignore the teaching of the gospel that teaches that we are set free from sin and are no longer supposed to live in our sin. We need to be reminded.

**v. 1 The Gospel was preached.** The Gospel is not something natural for us. In our natural selves we don't accept the Gospel. It's in many ways unnatural because it depends on grace. On one hand we act as if God's treatment toward us is owed to us or we earn it. Others know they don't deserve it and don't believe that God would have such mercy on us. But the Gospel has to be said and taught. God could use angels and visions and miracles. But throughout the book of Acts, God chooses to use people to tell other people about Jesus. The Gospel is not something we come up with from within ourselves. Preaching reminds us that this news is outside of us, it is from another place, it is true whether we feel like it or not.

**v.1 It was received.** It is not enough for the Gospel to be heard. It is not enough that the Gospel is known by the mind. There are many people who can say and explain the Gospel. It must also be received. It must be accepted. The Gospel tells us who we are. We are sinners. It tells us we need salvation. It tells us that we don't deserve it. It also