

ON MISSION

Devotions for Your Short-Term Trip

PATRIC J. KNAAK

“Patric Knaak’s *On Mission* is a wonderful resource not only in helping short-term missionaries prepare, reflect, and debrief their short-term missions experience but to draw closer to our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Lloyd Kim, Coordinator, Mission to the World

“Patric Knaak’s devotions are wonderful for the spiritual preparation, encouragement, and reflection that should accompany (and follow) mission trips. His thoughtful, vulnerable, and dear explanations of the impact of the gospel on his heart during the ‘stretching’ experiences of mission work provide intriguing reading and inspiring thoughts for those who want Christ’s identity to transform their own hearts, as well as save the souls of others.”

Bryan Chapell, Author of *Christ-Centered Preaching*; pastor, Grace Presbyterian Church, Peoria, IL

“Patric Knaak has been on a lifelong journey to further God’s mission. With humor, transparency, and wisdom *On Mission* deals with the issues he has faced and lessons that can be learned on the missionary journey. Patric’s book will help the reader deal with practical challenges that require God’s grace while on God’s mission. I commend *On Mission* to all who would follow Christ in leaving the comfortable certainties of the home culture to spend time and effort in what will seem a strange and challenging yet enriching mission experience.”

Paul McKaughan, The Ambassador at Large, Mission Exchange

“Short-term mission trips are often surprisingly powerful, life-transforming experiences for those who go. Why? Because God takes pleasure in bringing honor to his Son by displaying his presence and power to those who align their purposes with his for the nations. When followers of Christ leave their comfort zones, even for a brief period on a short-term mission trip, they are often forced to face their fears, arrogance, and foolishness. However, most have not been adequately prepared to embrace their weaknesses in a way that leads them to deeper levels of dependence on Christ and intimacy with him. That’s why I’m grateful for Knaak’s *On Mission*. It’s a comprehensive, gospel-centered resource designed to help you encounter Jesus in unique ways before, during, and after your mission trip. I highly recommend it.”

Dr. Steve Childers, Professor of Practical Theology, RTS-Orlando; President and CEO, Pathway Learning

“I highly recommend this new book that provides devotions for short-term missionaries while on their mission. Each Bible study helps them focus on Jesus to strengthen their relations with fellow missionaries and the people they serve. It also includes methods of debriefing after returning home, with studies to assist them to continue in mission while at home.”

John E. Kyle, Wycliffe Bible Translators, Philippines and USA;
Founding Director, Mission to the World; Missions Director
and VP of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship USA; Senior VP of
the Evangelical Fellowship of Mission Agencies

“It is generally easier to get people logistically prepared for a mission trip than to help them prepare spiritually. This small book is quite remarkable because it helps prepare you for your short-term trip spiritually and also relationally. And it does this in a very reflective way by providing thoughtful devotional resources for your trip as well as a debrief. Short-term trips provide a great opportunity for service and the spiritual formation of those who go. This book helps make that formation intentional and gospel-driven.”

James C. Wilhoit, Scripture Press Professor of Christian Education,
Wheaton College

“This is the devotional I wish I’d had for so many short-term trips in the past, and it’s the one I hope future short-term teams will carry with them when they come. It’s a daily, poignant, and personal reminder that God’s mission isn’t first ‘out there’; it is first to me, ‘in my own heart.’”

Cartee Bales, MTW International Director, Asia/Pacific

“Accessible and helpfully formatted, *On Mission* realistically identifies the challenges of mission teams, especially cross-cultural ones. Through looking at a number of stories and incidents from the life of Jesus, it focuses on applying the transforming good news about Jesus to the heart rather than simply offering skills or techniques. It also provides important encouragement for debriefing, including helpful material on how to tell your story. The final sections ensure that readers are encouraged to think about how to develop as world Christians rather than just seeing the trip as a self-contained event. I hope this short book is widely circulated, and I can see its first users/readers becoming the best publicists.”

Cassells Morrell, International Fellowship of Evangelical Students
Associate Regional Secretary for Europe

ON MISSION

Devotions for Your Short-Term Trip

Patric J. Knaak



New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27404
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Cover Design: Faceout Books, faceoutstudio.com
Typesetting: Lisa Parnell, lparnell.com

ISBN: 978-1-942572-12-1 (Print)
ISBN: 978-1-942572-13-8 (eBook)

Printed in the United States of America

22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 1 2 3 4 5

DEDICATION

*For Jennifer and Parker, the loves of my life,
who steadfastly keep the lights on
and welcome me home after every trip.
I truly could not do what I do without you.*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Content creation at Serge is always a bit of a team effort and I've been blessed to serve on a team with others who have challenged, inspired, helped, and encouraged me deeply. Lindsay Kimball has freely shared her time, brainstormed topics, offered suggestions, organized my rambling thoughts on occasion, and never failed to provide me with great ideas about how to make things better. Josiah Bancroft and Jeff McMullen have listened to me think through ideas and offered great insight into the exegetical parts of *On Mission*. Karen Herold has steadfastly read every word, organizing, and reformatting the early drafts. Sue Lutz, my editor, has given invaluable help in sharpening and clarifying the content. Barbara Juliani and her team at New Growth Press have been wonderful dialogue partners and have done an exceptional job of guiding me through this project. Without Barbara's encouragement and vision for the project, it never would have happened.

BEFORE YOU GO

INTRODUCTION: LEARNING TO SHOUT

I've always been drawn to scenes from the life of Jesus, where seemingly random people wake up in the morning expecting nothing but their normal lives but end up coming face-to-face with the second person of the Trinity. One of my favorites is Jesus's encounter with Bartimaeus, a blind man forced to beg for his living. You can read it for yourself in Mark 10:46–52.

The assumption of the day was that Bartimaeus (or someone very close to him) had sinned gravely and thus God had punished him with blindness. Begging, especially by someone who is just “getting what he deserves,” would have been difficult and demeaning work, offering little more than subsistence living. But in this case it has also done something else: it has prepared Bartimaeus's heart in a unique way to encounter Jesus. That's the intent of this book too—to prepare our hearts to encounter Jesus in unique ways as we embark on the intensity and challenges of a short-term mission trip.

I have to say, though, that in my most tender moments with God, I am rarely as “abandoned” as Bartimaeus is when he encounters Jesus. I'm too embarrassed by my needs and inadequacies to start screaming out my deepest desires to Jesus. Far too often my unbelief muzzles my desperation and I fail to cry out in faith to the One who has poured out his lifeblood for me. Instead, I tend to ask for things politely, from a distance, outlining items that I think I *should* want as a spiritually mature person instead of pouring out my heart when Jesus asks, “Patric, what do you want me to do for you?”

Not so with Bartimaeus. He runs in faith to Jesus with his deepest desires—that by faith he can be made right, reconciled to his God and Father, healed of his blindness and, as a result, released from his life as a beggar. He literally shouts louder than the rest of the crowd as Jesus, God's Forever King who will sit on David's throne, passes by. There is no pretense or artificiality in him. As a man whose blindness has forced him to ask for everything instead

of trying to earn it for himself, Bartimaeus is free from the illusion of his own adequacy and control. Instead, he *asks*—boldly and loudly.

Mission trips give us a unique opportunity to see and experience God differently than we do at home. Away from the demands of “normal” life, things come into focus differently. Our need for God’s provision is more evident. Jesus’s words echo a little more clearly. God’s passion to see others redeemed is on display. Short-term mission trips have shaped my walk with Jesus in deep and profound ways. In fact, they are a large part of why I work for a mission agency today.

It’s my prayer that your trip will be a truly life-changing event and that you, like Bartimaeus, will experience the freedom that comes from shouting out your deepest needs to the One who is able to meet them.

HOW TO GET THE MOST OUT OF *ON MISSION*

On Mission is designed to be a comprehensive spiritual resource for your short-term mission trip. At the heart of *On Mission* are ten daily devotionals specifically written for individuals and teams participating in short-term mission work. But *On Mission* also contains material to help you prepare for and debrief after your trip, travel features to give you a place to record the details and memories of your adventure, additional ideas for devotionals and journaling, and lots of extra pages to let you capture your experiences and conversations with God.

BEFORE YOU GO

INTRODUCTION

A basic introduction to *On Mission* and an overview of its features.

PRE-TRIP EXERCISE: READY OR NOT?

Designed to help you identify some of your needs and hopes going into the trip. *Ready or Not?* will also give you the chance to journal about things you'd like to see God do on your trip and to craft a prayer update to send out before you leave.

TRAVELOGUE FEATURES: MY TEAMMATES; HOLDING THE ROPES

My Teammates and *Holding the Ropes* provide easy ways to record the names and contact information for your teammates and your supporters.

ON THE TRIP

DAILY DEVOTIONS

On Mission's daily devotionals are designed to help you connect with Christ in deep and refreshing ways as you experience the highs and lows of your

journey. Every day begins with a passage from the Gospels that focuses on Jesus. A brief article provides the content for each day and is followed by thought-provoking questions and prayer and journaling exercises. Each devotional also includes a reflection section where you can record how you saw God work during the course of the day. Because they can be completed in thirty minutes, the devotionals are easy to schedule consistently throughout your trip.

ADDITIONAL DEVOTIONAL RESOURCE: INTRODUCING *LECTIO DIVINA*

For trips lasting longer than ten days, the *Additional Devotional Resource* section will help you use an ancient method of devotional reading that combines Scripture and prayer into an intimate listening experience with God.

TRAVELOGUE FEATURES: OUR JOURNEY; NEW FRIENDS; MISSION MEMORIES; BY THE NUMBERS

Our Journey, *New Friends*, *Mission Memories*, and *By the Numbers* all provide handy ways to record the unique memories, people, and experiences you'll encounter along the way.

AFTER THE TRIP

God's work in your life doesn't end when you return home. In many ways, it's just beginning. To help you make the lessons of your trip last a lifetime, the debrief exercises will help you record and organize your thoughts, listen more intently to God, and discern his plans for you as you think about the future. They will also help you continue to live *on mission*—with the same outward focus of helping others meet Jesus that you developed during your trip.

DEBRIEF ONE: MAKING SENSE OF WHAT YOU'VE SEEN

Completed on your journey home or in the first week after you're back, the first debrief will help you to record the spiritual lessons of your trip while

they are fresh and to reflect on all the ways that God was at work during your trip. It will also help you prepare to tell your story to your church, friends, and supporters.

DEBRIEF TWO: THE GOSPEL IN AND THROUGH YOU

Completed four to six weeks after you're back and the dust has settled, the second debrief is geared toward helping you connect the experiences and lessons of your trip with your daily life. It features a planning section designed to help you come up with some concrete ways to live more missionally—to pray, serve, give, and go in ways that will help others see Jesus more clearly—as part of your normal lifestyle.

DEBRIEF THREE: THE ONGOING JOURNEY

Completed six months after your trip, the final debrief will help you review your plans and consider additional ways to be missionally engaged, involved in helping God's kingdom grow and new people find Christ.

PRE-TRIP EXERCISE

Ready or Not?

To be done one week pre-trip

As you prepare to leave for your mission trip in the next week, it's likely that you are feeling a wide range of emotions. Often, getting ready to do ministry in a different cultural context can bring out strange paradoxes in our hearts. We can, at the exact same moment, feel excited about what God will do in and through us, and yet slightly panicked at the hundreds of unknowns that lie ahead. If you're feeling this spectrum of emotion this week, you're in good company!

PART 1: INVENTORY OF NEEDS AND HOPES

Take a few minutes in the busyness of packing and checking off your pre-trip "To Do's" to take an inventory of your needs and hopes for your trip. Then answer the questions below.

Afraid

- Of the unknown
- Of entering an unknown culture or situation
- Of being away from family and home
- Of having to do things that will be hard
- Of being asked to eat “disgusting” food
- Of not knowing what I’m doing
- Of feeling unprepared or incapable
- Of making mistakes, making others angry
- Of getting hurt or sick
- Of my prayers not being answered
- Of my family getting hurt or sick while I’m gone
- Of not having enough privacy or down time

Under Pressure

- To not let others see my sin and fears
- To be perfect (or cover it up if I’m not)
- To see lives changed/people get saved
- To not let my teammates/family down
- To produce big results to report after the trip, especially since many are supporting me
- To be a great leader who knows just what to do and how to do it
- To be a great teammate who doesn’t complain or cause any trouble

Excited

- New place, new people
- New experiences and culture
- This will be my first _____
- Seeing God work in special ways in my life
- Seeing God change people/bring them to faith
- Going with a group and making new friends
- Going with my family and bonding together

Hopeful

- This will be “the experience of lifetime”
- I’ll be changed; things will never be the same
- God will do amazing things
- I won’t be as sinful as I normally am
- Our team can make a real difference
- God will be glorified through me

Expecting

- To really help others and be used by God
- To see my spiritual life deepen
- To experience renewed intimacy with God
- To see God work in ways I often overlook
- To be part of God’s kingdom in a different way

ON MISSION

1. As you prepare to leave, what are your biggest fears?

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2. Is there anything about the trip that makes you uneasy in “the pit of your stomach” when you think about it?

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3. In what ways are you feeling needy?

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4. What are your hopes and expectations for this trip?

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5. What are you excited about seeing God do in you and through you?

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PART 2: TALKING WITH GOD

Using the inventory and answers to the questions above, write a letter/prayer to God. Tell him about your needs and fears, your hopes and expectations as you head into this trip. As you write, consider:

- What do you want to see God do in you on this trip?
- Where are you feeling like you will have a hard time trusting God?
- What would you like to see God do through you on this trip?

PART 3: EMAILING YOUR SUPPORT TEAM

Nothing is more critical than to have a group of friends, family, and supporters who will pray for you daily while you are away. Using some of the concerns you've identified and some of the things you'd like to see God do on the trip, write them one short, final email, letting them know how they can pray.

GUIDELINES

1. **Be Honest:** People will pray for you if they sense you are needy. So let them know what your needs really are, not just the surface issues. Use the work you did in Parts 1 and 2 to guide you about what to include.
2. **Be Short:** You want people to be able to read your email quickly and pray specifically. A few sentences followed by a list of four to seven things is great.
3. **Be Thankful:** Every single person on your list is someone special to you, someone who cares about you and who is going pray for you. Let these people know how thankful you are for them.



TRAVELOGUE FEATURES

God has brought together just the right people at just the right time to accomplish the very things he wants to see done on your trip! Take a few minutes before you go, or early on, to record everyone who is on your team. Be sure to include any key on-site leaders where you will be serving (i.e. nationals, missionaries, people who run the long-term ministry on site, etc.).

Over the course of the trip, look for qualities or experiences that make you grateful for each person. During your time together, if you have the patience to look, you'll find out you're serving alongside of some pretty amazing people!

Don't forget to get contact information so that you can easily stay in contact once you return.

MY TEAMMATES

| Name | Why I'm Grateful for This Person | Contact Info |
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| Name | Why I'm Grateful for This Person | Contact Info |
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| Name | Why I'm Grateful for This Person | Contact Info |
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HOLDING THE ROPES

Before British missionary William Carey set out for India to share the gospel in the late 1700s, he famously said, “I will go down if you will hold the rope.” Who are those back home who are “holding the rope” for you during your trip? Who are those on your team of prayer and financial supporters? As you list their names here, you’ll be amazed both now and in the future at how God faithfully provided a multitude of supporters to come alongside you and send you out. Use this list to follow up with your home team after your trip.

| Name | Contact Info |
|------|--------------|
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| Name | Contact Info |
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1

DEVOTIONAL

JESUS IS THE ONE WHO SUSTAINS YOU

I distinctly remember preparing for the first mission trip I ever took. I was in high school. A friend and I had signed up to spend an entire summer overseas doing outreach. As a new Christian, I was absolutely certain that this trip would be the secret ingredient that lit my spiritual life on fire. I assumed that my devotional life would blossom and I'd overcome all of those pesky "signature sins" that seemed to characterize my everyday life. No more doubts, no more struggles, no more setbacks. Just the "new and improved Patric," going to tell the rest of the world that they needed Jesus—big time. Imagine my surprise when I discovered that all of the same sins, doubts, and struggles had followed me to the field. In many ways, they seemed worse than ever!

That summer *was* one of the most spiritually formative events in my life, but in none of the ways I thought it would be. The lessons I began to learn that summer have taken many years to mature and bear fruit. But the enduring memory of that summer is that this was when I started to understand that my sin was a lot more deeply ingrained than I had ever imagined and, at the very same time, I was more loved by God than I ever dared to hope, all because of Jesus.

For the next ten days we're going to spend some time looking at scenes from Jesus's life. Each one will present us with the unique ways that Jesus meets and connects with us, particularly as we step out to walk with him on mission.

Date:

Location:

How I'll Be Serving Today:.....

.....

.....

BIG IDEA

Most of the time, we think of connecting with Jesus as carving out a few minutes for devotions or prayer. But Jesus sees our connection with him in terms of a living, breathing, growing, moment-by-moment relationship, apart from which we can do nothing.

MEETING WITH GOD *(15 Minutes)*

I AM THE VINE (JOHN 15:1-11)

¹ “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes [trims clean] so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

1. Throughout the devotionals, I have used the NIV translation for the Scripture passages. However, in some places I have included text in brackets that I believe better captures the intent of the original language.

⁹“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

YOU CAN DO NOTHING (AT ALL)

In today’s passage, Jesus is talking to his disciples on the evening before his arrest. He will be crucified the following day. He knows that the disciples are getting ready to start doing ministry “on their own,” without him physically present to lead, instruct, and guide them, so he wants to be sure that the lessons he has been living out with them for the previous three years are crystal clear. After all, the disciples didn’t have a stellar record up to this point.

In speaking about his connection with the disciples, Jesus uses a metaphor that would have been readily understood by all: that of a vine, its branches, and the fruit it produces. Everyone present that night would have been familiar with the thick, gnarly, stout vines that looked a lot like the picture below. When Jesus says that he is the vine, he’s referring to the woody, stout trunk that remains alive over generations. The word translated “branches”

refers to the disciples themselves. It usually referred to the small, green tendrils that grew from year to year out of the long-lasting vine. Each year these tendrils had to be handled with care. Dead tendrils had to be removed. The ones that didn’t produce fruit had to be pruned back so that fruitful ones could grow. Jesus isn’t being subtle here—it would be ludicrous to think that a tendril could survive on its own for even a day without being connected to the main vine as its source of nourishment and strength. At the same time, the very reason the vine exists



is to produce fruit, and the fruit only comes from the tendril branches. The vine and the branches are organically interconnected in a way that is essential if fruit is to be produced.

Jesus's point is that our most fundamental need as disciples is to stay constantly connected to him, to "remain in me." We never outgrow our need for Jesus because we never get to a place where we no longer need the forgiveness and righteousness that only he can provide. That sounds like a pretty basic fact, but it often gets lost in discipleship models. Yet it's a point made repeatedly throughout the New Testament: "So then, *just as you received* Christ Jesus as Lord, *continue to live* your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Colossians 2:6–7; emphasis mine).

Two enormous implications follow from Jesus's teaching that we need to have him—and the message of the gospel—central in our lives. The first is that fruit isn't something we produce on our own. Fruit is something Christ produces in us as we remain connected to and dependent on him. In John 15, the fruit Jesus has in mind is the sum total of what the gospel produces in us and through us. It includes prayer (v. 7), obedience (v. 10), joy (v. 11), our love for one another (v. 10–17), and our witness as we point others to Jesus (v. 26). This fruit comes as we receive, depend on, and live out of the love God has for us *as* we reach out to love others. It all depends on staying rooted in Christ in the same way that branches stay connected to the vine. I've often felt that it's up to me to produce fruit in my life and ministry. Jesus says it's just the opposite: my job as the branch is to stay connected to him, and his job as the vine is to produce the fruit through me.

The second major implication is that when we are disconnected from Jesus, we can accomplish nothing whatsoever. Again, Jesus uses the strongest possible language to communicate this. Unlike English, in Greek it is perfectly acceptable to have a double negative, but it is only used for the most emphatic way of saying "no." If I were to translate verse 5 literally, it would say, ". . . apart from me you cannot do nothing" or ". . . apart from me you can do *nothing* at all." Nothing. Zero. Zip. Zilch. Nada. No-thing.

At a heart level, I don't often read the verse that way. Too often I live as if Jesus is saying something more like, "Apart from me, you can do quite a bit,

but when you get stuck, come back and get reconnected and I'll help you out." Jesus, however, means what he says. Apart from him we can do nothing to produce the spiritual fruit we are created to produce to glorify God.

Over the years, I've come to realize why my expectations for that first mission trip were so misplaced. I had expected the trip itself to change me, to somehow make me more spiritual. In reality, the trip showed me just how big my need is to stay constantly connected to Jesus. It's the staying-constantly-connected-to-Jesus-through-the-gospel that changes us, not the experience of a mission trip.

My hope is that you'll start to see the same thing over the next week or two. It's easy to forget how much we need Jesus. The truth is that I need him the same way I need air. In the hectic pace of normal life, it's easy to miss this. But when I go swimming and dive underwater, my need for air becomes immediately apparent—and urgent. In many ways a mission trip is like living underwater for a few weeks. It takes us out of our normal environment and shows us just how much we need to breathe in Jesus every minute. It shows us how much we need the good news of the gospel ourselves, even as we try to help others meet Jesus.

RESPONDING TO GOD *(15 Minutes)*

1. Look through the passage again and circle the word "remain" every time it appears. What do you think Jesus is trying to communicate about the importance of staying spiritually connected to him?

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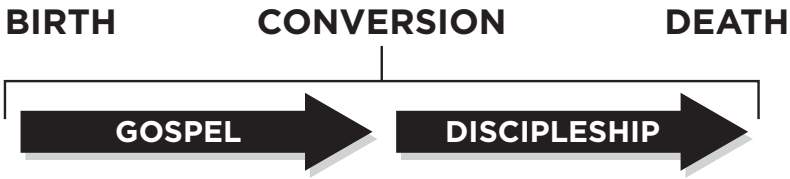
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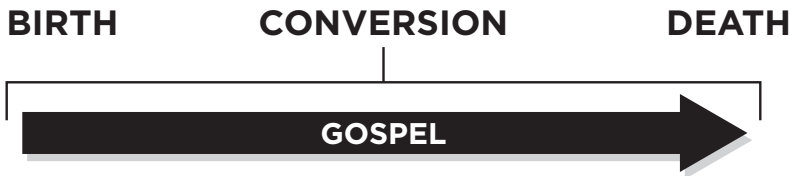
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- It's obvious that before we come to faith, the message we most need to hear is the gospel—the good news about all that Jesus is and all that Jesus has done. However, after we come to faith, it sometimes seems like we need to “move on” to something beyond the gospel: discipleship, spiritual disciplines, becoming more holy, etc. That understanding of the gospel looks something like this:



The truth, though, is that we never outgrow our need for Jesus, because we never get to the point where we can run our lives without him. In fact, a large part of spiritual maturity is growing in our ability to see how much we need Jesus every minute of every day, turning to him and depending on him, rather than ourselves, more and more.

And because we never outgrow our need for Jesus, we never outgrow our need for the grace of the gospel. Believing the gospel isn't just the way we begin the Christian life, it's also the way we continue to grow all through our Christian life. This understanding of the gospel looks something like this:



What are some implications of thinking about the Christian life this way?

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3. Where are you most tempted to rely on something other than Jesus to produce “fruit” in your life or ministry? What has happened when you’ve tried to do this?

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Spend a few minutes asking Jesus to show you, over the course of the trip, when you are putting your faith in something other than him and his good news.

WHAT I SAW GOD DO TODAY . . .

This evening (or tomorrow morning), take a few minutes to record unique ways that you saw God at work. Our sin-hardened hearts easily forget, so writing down a few of the things you’ve seen God do is a great way to offer thanks and praise to him.

Today I saw God . . .

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