

the
GOSPEL-CENTERED
life
FOR TEENS

LEADER'S GUIDE | SERGE

ROBERT H. THUNE + WILL WALKER

“*The Gospel-Centered Life for Teens* is a remarkable, easy-to-use curriculum for helping young adults go deeper into the glories of all that God has done for us in Christ. Important theological concepts—including God’s holiness, our sinfulness, and the relationship between the law and the gospel—are explained in simple, clear, and compelling language. This is a resource that can simultaneously introduce teens to Christ and help committed Christians grow in their faith. I’m excited to recommend it.”

Alex Chediak, Professor at California Baptist University; author of *Thriving at College: Make Great Friends, Keep Your Faith, and Get Ready for the Real World!*

“Fantastic study! Creative, innovative, refreshing, and biblically focused!”

Joe White, President of Kanakuk Kamps

“I know so many teens who need these lessons. They’re living in an image-gripped world where acceptance seems based on this or that label. *The Gospel-Centered Life for Teens* turns that on its head, steadily and sweetly pointing students to ‘the only label that really matters: “in Christ.”’

What great lessons! They take on the tough issues teens deal with every day, like gossip and greed, and they show how believing the gospel changes everything. I wish every teen I know could do this study.”

Jack Klumpenhower, Author of *Show Them Jesus: Teaching the Gospel to Kids*

“Thune and Walker have given us a gift by reminding us that we never move past our need for the gospel. It is always shaping, always informing, and always transforming us more and more into the image of Christ. If you want a clear, easy-to-understand guide for teens on the theology and application of the gospel in your life, this guide is for you!”

Brian Cosby, Author of *Giving Up Gimmicks: Reclaiming Youth Ministry from an Entertainment Culture*

“The gospel is a crucial topic for this next generation and one we must invest in as we raise up future leaders of the Church. *The Gospel-Centered Life for Teens* is therefore a great and timely resource for helping to form spiritually mature teens with a life cemented in the gospel, which unleashes them to make a profound difference for the Kingdom.”

Dave Ramseyer, Vice President, National Ministries, Youth for Christ (yfc.org)

“All human beings are religious. Everyone worships someone or something. There is always a center to our lives. In a world offering teens a constant barrage of ‘centers’ that lie and can never fulfill, *The Gospel-Centered Life for Teens* takes them on a much-needed journey into the place where they can hear God’s voice, understand God’s grand story for their lives, and assume the place for which they’ve been made.”

Dr. Walt Mueller, Author of *Youth Culture 101*; founder/president of Center for Parent/Youth Understanding

“There is nothing more important in discipling students than helping them grasp the power of the gospel for their own lives. *The Gospel-Centered Life for Teens* is a powerful tool and welcome resource! Many thanks to Will Walker and Bob Thune for developing this excellent tool.”

Chuck Klein, Executive Director, The Campus Alliance

“This distillation of gospel truth for teens is a great tool for churches and ministries that are seeking to raise up the next generation of church and culture leaders. I heartily recommend it.”

Rev. Jason Dorsey, Lead Pastor Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Indianapolis

“*The Gospel-Centered Life for Teens* is a thoughtful, age-appropriate adaptation of *The Gospel-Centered Life*. I like using *GCL* for one reason: it helpfully illuminates just how big the gospel really is for people like you and me living out our lives right here and now. It helps people like us see that following Jesus affects more of our lives than we might ever have imagined. It’s relentlessly relational and hopeful.”

Aaron Baker, Pastor, Covenant Presbyterian Church of Chicago

“After seeing such great fruit in my years as a youth pastor and small group leader, I’m so thankful that this great curriculum has been rewritten with teens in mind. In twenty-four years of youth ministry and the shepherding of my own four teenage children, I have found no other study so important and foundational in the way they are to think and live as *The Gospel-Centered Life for Teens*. I wholeheartedly recommend it.”

Rev. Mark Kuiper, Senior Pastor Kirk of the Hills Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, MO

THE GOSPEL- CENTERED LIFE FOR TEENS

Robert H. Thune and Will Walker

LEADER'S GUIDE



www.newgrowthpress.com

The Gospel-Centered Life for Teens: Leader's Guide

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INTRODUCTION

ABOUT SERGE

Serge never set out to write and publish curriculum. We are a missions agency that has always believed the power and motive for mission is the gospel of grace at work in the life of a believer. However, along the way, we've also discovered that it's a lot harder to do cross-cultural, team-oriented ministry than we thought. Eventually, we started writing material to keep the gospel front and center in our own lives and relationships. Before long we had pastors and ministry leaders requesting gospel-centered materials for use in their churches and ministries.

Over the years, it's been our privilege to partner with friends who share our passion for the way the gospel transforms both believers and unbelievers alike. This study is the result of one such partnership. Bob Thune and Will Walker adapted their study *The Gospel-Centered Life* to make it accessible to teens and help them grow in the gospel. We're partnering with them to publish it because we think it is a helpful and much-needed resource.

Some of the original content was adapted from earlier Serge materials. If you are familiar with *Sonship*, *Gospel Identity*, *Gospel Growth*, and *Gospel Love*, you may recognize a few key themes and concepts. If you haven't heard them presented before, Bob and Will have done a great job of articulating the gospel in simple, deep, and transformative ways here.

As a cross-denominational, reformed, sending agency with over 200 missionaries on over 25 teams in 5 continents, Serge is always looking for people who are ready to take the next step in a missional lifestyle. If you'd like to learn more about our teaching, healing, and equipping ministries around the world and what might be next for you, please visit

us at www.serge.org/mission. If you'd like to learn more about our gospel mentoring programs and the discipleship training that we offer here in the United States, you can find those details at www.serge.org/mentoring.

FROM THE AUTHORS

God gave us the privilege of planting a wonderfully messy church, where mature Christians, newer Christians, and lots of non-Christians and skeptics are all mixed up together. Our church is structured around these groups called missional communities, which are kind of like traditional church small groups, only completely different.

The ideal missional community consists of a small band of Christians living on mission together, and inviting their non-Christian friends to join in conversation and interaction about the gospel of Jesus. This seemed like a really great idea...until we started doing it. We quickly discovered two significant problems:

- 1. Most traditional "church small group" material was written for a Christian audience, and therefore non-Christians relate to it about as well as a cattle rancher relates to vegetarians.*
- 2. Many Christians have a weak and anemic understanding of the gospel, so asking them to talk about how the gospel is transforming them is like asking a teenage boy band to talk about the finer elements of Mozart's work.*

So we wrote The Gospel-Centered Life in order to shape "gospel DNA" in our church in a way that was accessible to both Christians and non-Christians. We adapted this material for teens because, just like the adults in our community, they needed help understanding the gospel.

The Gospel-Centered Life for Teens is intended to help young adults understand how the gospel shapes every aspect of life and conduct. Colossians 1:6 says that the gospel is "continually bearing fruit and increasing" in and among us, even after we first believe it. How does that happen? Why is a continual rediscovery and application of the gospel so important? How will our personal growth and missional life be stunted if we don't grasp the gospel deeply? These are the questions that GCL for Teens seeks to answer.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

The biggest advantage to *The Gospel-Centered Life for Teens* is its flexibility. It's appropriate for Sunday schools, youth groups, parachurch ministries, and campus ministries. It creates good dialogue among teenagers who are mature Christians as well as among new Christians and non-Christians. It can be led by an experienced small-group leader or by a high school student. And because the concepts are basic and biblical, it adapts easily to different cultural settings.

THE GOSPEL-CENTERED LIFE FOR TEENS IS IDEAL FOR:

- Youth pastors and youth leaders who are looking for content that “works” with diverse groups of people
- Students and campus ministers who are looking to live out the gospel on campus
- Christian teens who want to be more deeply formed around the gospel
- Missionaries who are looking for simple material to disciple teenagers

HOW THIS STUDY IS ORGANIZED

The Gospel-Centered Life for Teens contains nine lessons that are grouped around three themes. This *Leader's Guide* contains all the information needed to facilitate the group, as well as copies of the materials in the *Participant's Guide*.

What is the gospel?

LESSON 1: THE GOSPEL GRID

Everyone's life revolves around something, and we often label people accordingly. The point of this lesson is that God is meant to be our “center.” Everything else will eventually fail us. Only a life that's centered on God will be meaningful, fulfilling, and satisfying. We will look at a simple diagram (the Cross Chart) that gives us a grid for seeing how to

put the gospel at the center of our lives, and discover the only label that matters: “in Christ.”

LESSON 2: PRETENDING

Each of us tends to “shrink the cross,” which is to say that something is lacking in our understanding, appreciation, or application of Jesus’s sacrifice for our sin. One way we do this is by pretending. Pretending minimizes sin by making ourselves out to be something we are not.

LESSON 3: PERFORMING

Performing is another way of “shrinking the cross” that minimizes God’s holiness by reducing his standard to something we can meet, thereby meriting his favor. Both pretending and performing are rooted in an inadequate view of God’s holiness and our identity.

What does the gospel do in us?

LESSON 4: LAW & GOSPEL

Continue to think about how the gospel interacts with our lives, but now we turn to consider the gospel’s relationship to the law. What is the law? Does God expect me to obey it? What is the purpose of the law? How does the law help me to believe the gospel? How does the gospel help me to obey the law?

LESSON 5: REPENTANCE

This lesson deals with repentance. In our culture, this usually sounds like a bad thing, but repentance is the norm for gospel-centered living. Becoming more aware of God’s holiness and our sinfulness leads us to repent and believe the gospel of Jesus. Biblical repentance frees us from our own devices and makes a way for the power of the gospel to bear fruit in our lives.

LESSON 6: HEART IDOLATRY

The Christian walk consists of two repeated steps: repentance and faith. Turning our attention to the topic of faith, we focus on how we grow through believing the gospel. This week’s goal is to take “believing the gospel” out of the abstract and make it concrete.

How does the gospel work through us?

LESSON 7: MISSION

The gospel is simultaneously at work in us and through us. Inwardly, our desires and motives are being changed as we repent and believe the gospel. As we experience Christ's love in this way, we are compelled to engage those around us with the same kind of redemptive love. God's grace brings renewal everywhere, in us and through us.

LESSON 8: FORGIVENESS

The gospel that works in us always works through us. It shows its power in our relationships and actions. One key way this happens is when we forgive others biblically.

LESSON 9: CONFLICT

Conflict is something we all experience (regularly), but often handle in very fleshly ways. The gospel gives us a pattern and a means to healthy conflict resolution.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

The Gospel-Centered Life for Teens is designed for small group study, although it is possible to work through the study independently or in a larger group. The tone of the material assumes a small-group format, because this is the setting we've found to be the most effective.

Each lesson is designed to take around 1 hour to complete. If your group has more time available, you can simply spend a little longer in the Discussion and Exercise sections. Our experience has shown that this content often creates deep and substantive conversation that can easily last longer than an hour. So plan accordingly, and be sure to honor the time commitment that your group has made.

Because *The Gospel-Centered Life for Teens* is designed as an introduction to the dynamics of gospel renewal, there is no outside work required by the participants. Each person should simply receive a copy of the Participant's Guide for the lesson at hand. The content will often stimulate

further reflection over the following days, but no preparation is needed for subsequent lessons.

Likewise, it is not assumed that the group leader will be an expert theologian or long-standing Christian. Ample direction and content is provided in the Leader's Guide to help the leader facilitate the group's time together. The material also provides the content for the study, so there is no need for the group leader to try and "teach" the group. Just relax and guide a good conversation.

Each of these lessons follows a similar format including these elements...

BIBLE CONVERSATION

We want to start by talking about the Bible together. As the name suggests, this section is designed to stimulate your thinking and prepare you and your group for the ideas that will be presented in each lesson.

ARTICLE

The written articles are the primary source of the teaching content for each lesson. They are short, clear teachings of the concepts being presented in the lesson. Each week, your group will take a few minutes and read the article out loud together.

DISCUSSION

This section is where we communally process the concepts being taught in the article. Often the discussion will work in conjunction with the next section (exercise) to help flesh out the teaching and apply it to our lives in concrete ways.

EXERCISE

Each of the exercises in this study is designed to help you make practical applications of the concepts being taught, or help you understand the content at a deeper heart level. Be sure to allow enough time for your group to adequately work through and discuss the exercises as directed.

WRAP-UP

The wrap-up gives the leader the chance to answer any last minute questions, reinforce ideas, and most importantly spend a few minutes praying as a group.

WHAT TO EXPECT

EXPECT TO BE CHALLENGED...

most of us have reduced the gospel to something much less than it is. As you work through each lesson, expect your thinking about the gospel to be challenged and expanded.

EXPECT THE HOLY SPIRIT...

to be the one ultimately responsible for the growth of your group, and for the change in each person's life—including your own. Relax and trust him.

EXPECT YOUR GROUP'S AGENDA TO INCLUDE...

an open, give-and-take discussion of the article, the questions, and the exercises. Also expect times of prayer at each meeting.

EXPECT STRUGGLE...

and don't be surprised to find that your group is a mixture of enthusiasm, hope, and honesty, along with indifference, anxiety, skepticism, guilt, and covering up. We are all people who really need Jesus every day. So expect your group to be made up of people who wrestle with sin and have problems—people just like yourself!

EXPECT A GROUP LEADER...

who desires to serve you, but who also needs Jesus as much as you do. No leader should be put on a pedestal, so expect that your group leader will have the freedom to share openly about his or her own weaknesses, struggles, and sins.

GOSPEL OVERVIEW

The study you are about to begin aims to help you live a “gospel-centered” life. The obvious question is, What exactly is “the gospel”? That’s a question we should clear up before going any further. Though many people are familiar with the word *gospel*, they’re often fuzzy about its content.

Many popular “gospel presentations” distill the gospel message down to three or four core principles. These simple summaries can be very helpful. But a richer way to understand the gospel is as a *story*—the true Story that speaks to our purest aspirations and deepest longings. This Great Story has four chapters.

CREATION: THE WORLD WE WERE MADE FOR

The Story begins, not with us, but with God. Deep down, we have a sense that this is true. We sense that we are important—that there is something dignified, majestic, and eternal about humanity. But we also know that we are not ultimate. Something (or Someone) greater than us exists.

The Bible tells us that this Someone is the one infinite, eternal, and unchanging God who created all things out of nothing (Genesis 1:1–31). This one God exists in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Because God is Triune in his being, he wasn’t motivated to create the world because he *needed* something—be it relationship, worship, or glory. Rather, he created out of the overflow of his perfection—his own love, goodness, and glory. God made human beings in his image (Genesis 1:27), which is what gives us our dignity and value. He also made us *human*, which means we are created beings, dependent

on our Creator. We were made to worship, enjoy, love, and serve him, not ourselves.

In God's original creation, everything was good. The world existed in perfect peace, stability, harmony, and wholeness.

FALL: THE CORRUPTION OF EVERYTHING

God created us to worship, enjoy, love, and serve him. But rather than live under God's authority, humanity turned away from God in sinful rebellion (Genesis 3:1–7; Isaiah 53:6). Our defection plunged the whole world into the darkness and chaos of sin. Though vestiges of good remain, the wholeness and harmony of God's original creation is shattered.

As a result, all human beings are sinners by nature and by choice (Ephesians 2:1–3). We often excuse our sin by claiming that we're "not that bad"—after all, we can always find someone worse than we are! But this evasion only reveals our shallow and superficial view of sin. Sin is not primarily an *action*; it's a *disposition*. It's our soul's aversion to God. Sin is manifested in our pride, our selfishness, our independence, and our lack of love for God and others. Sometimes sin is very obvious and external; other times it's hidden and internal. But "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Sin brings two drastic consequences into our lives. First, *sin enslaves us* (Romans 6:17–18). When we turn *from* God, we turn *to* other things to find our life, our identity, our meaning, and our happiness. These things become substitute gods—what the Bible calls idols—and they soon enslave us, demanding our time, our energy, our loyalty, our money—everything we are and have. They begin to rule over our lives and hearts. This is why the Bible describes sin as something that "masters" us (Romans 6:14 NIV). Sin causes us to "serve created things rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25 NIV).

Second, *sin brings condemnation*. We're not just enslaved by our sin; we're *guilty* because of it. We stand condemned before the Judge of heaven and earth. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). We are under a death sentence for our cosmic treason against the holiness

and justice of God. His righteous anger toward sin stands over us (Nahum 1:2; John 3:36).

REDEMPTION: JESUS COMES TO SAVE US

Every good story has a hero. And the hero of the Gospel Story is Jesus. Humanity needs a Savior, a Redeemer, a Deliverer to free us from the bondage and condemnation of sin and to restore the world to its original good. This Rescuer must be *truly human* in order to pay the debt we owe to God. But he can't be *merely human* because he must conquer sin. We need a Substitute—one who can live the life of obedience we've failed to live, and who can stand in our place to bear the punishment we deserve for our disobedience and sin.

This is why God sent Jesus into the world to be our substitute (1 John 4:14). The Bible teaches that Jesus was fully God—the second person of the Trinity—and also fully human. He was born to a human mother, lived a real flesh-and-blood existence, and died a brutal death on a Roman cross outside Jerusalem. Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God (Hebrews 4:15), making him the only person in history who did not deserve judgment. But on the cross, he took our place, dying for our sin. He received the condemnation and death we deserve so that, when we put our trust in him, we can receive the blessing and life he deserves (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Not only did Jesus die in our place, he rose from death, displaying his victory over sin, death, and hell. His resurrection is a decisive event in history; the Bible calls it the “first fruits”—the initial evidence—of the cosmic renewal God is bringing (1 Corinthians 15:20–28). One of the greatest promises in the Bible is Revelation 21:5: “Behold, I am making all things new.” All that was lost, broken, and corrupted in the fall will ultimately be put right. Redemption doesn't simply mean the salvation of individual souls; it means the restoring of the whole creation back to its original good.

A NEW PEOPLE: THE STORY CONTINUES

So how do we become a part of the story? How do we experience God's salvation personally and become agents of his redemption in the world?

By faith or trust (Ephesians 2:8–9). What does that mean? We trust a taxi driver when we count on him to get us to our destination. We trust a doctor when we agree with her diagnosis and entrust ourselves to her care. And we trust in Jesus Christ when we admit our sin, receive his gracious forgiveness, and rest entirely in Jesus for our acceptance before God. Faith is like getting in the taxi. It's like going under the surgeon's knife. It's a restful, whole-hearted commitment of the self to Jesus (Psalm 31:14–15). This is what it means to believe the gospel.

When we trust in Jesus, we are released from sin's condemnation *and* from its bondage. We are free to say “no” to sin and “yes” to God. We are free to die to ourselves and live for Christ and his purposes. We are free to work for justice in the world. We are free to stop living for our own glory and start living for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). We are free to love God and others in the way we live, which is the particular focus of this study.

God has promised that Jesus will return to finally judge sin and make all things new. Until then, he is gathering to himself a people “from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Revelation 7:9 NIV). As part of that called-and-sent people, we have the privilege of joining him in his mission (Matthew 28:18–20) as individuals and as part of his spiritual family. By grace, we can enjoy God, live life for his glory, serve humanity, and make his gospel known to others through our words and actions.

This is the good news—the True Story—of the gospel.

THE GOSPEL GRID

BIG IDEA

Everyone’s life revolves around something, and we often label people accordingly. The point of this lesson is that God is meant to be our “center.” Everything else will eventually fail us. Only a life that’s centered on God will be meaningful, fulfilling, and satisfying. We will look at a simple diagram (the Cross Chart) that gives us a grid for seeing how to put the gospel at the center of our lives, and discover the only label that matters: “in Christ.”

LESSON OVERVIEW

- I. BIBLE CONVERSATION Read and talk about the passage(s) [10 min]
- II. ARTICLE Read *The Gospel Grid* together [10 min]
- III. DISCUSSION Process concepts together [15 min]
- IV. EXERCISE Apply the concepts using a specific exercise [15 min]
- V. WRAP-UP Final thoughts and prayer [5 min]

BIBLE CONVERSATION *10 minutes*

We are focusing on two major concepts in this lesson: who God is and who we are. The passages highlight the holiness of God and the depth of our sinfulness. The goal here is not to say everything there is to say about these ideas. The goal is simply to get the conversation going in a way

that establishes a biblical foundation for the concepts, which will unfold throughout the discussion.

SETUP We are going to talk about two concepts: how we view God and how we view ourselves. These concepts lay the foundation for understanding ourselves and understanding why the gospel is so important. When it comes to the way we view God, there tends to be a range of opinions. Some people have a very high view of God, to the point that he is totally “other” and uninvolved in daily life. Others have a very personal view of God, to the point that he is so much like a best friend that his holiness is neglected. The same is true for the way we view ourselves: the spectrum ranges from the idea that people are basically good to basically bad. Let’s see where we land on each of these questions.

ASK Which end of the spectrum do you lean toward when it comes to God: is he majestic and distant, or so personal that you don’t think much about his holiness?

ASK Which thought best represents your view of people: basically good or basically bad?

Let’s look at two Bible passages that highlight these two concepts. The main two questions to ask as we read these verses are (1) What does this say about God? and (2) What does this say about me?

READ The first passage is Isaiah 55:6–9. (*Have someone read Isaiah 55:6–9 out loud.*)

ASK What is your initial reaction to this passage? What stands out to you? What does this say about God—and us?

READ The next passage is Jeremiah 17:9–10. (*Have someone read Jeremiah 17:9–10 out loud.*)

ASK What is your initial reaction to this passage? What stands out to you?

What does this say about God—and us?

TRANSITION TO ARTICLE These passages introduce us to the biblical view of God's holiness and our sinfulness. To get a more focused understanding of these ideas, let's read this article together. We are going to read it aloud, taking turns at the paragraph breaks. Then I have some discussion questions that will help us process it together.

ARTICLE *10 minutes*

This lesson assumes a basic familiarity with the gospel. If that's a generous assumption for your group, consider reading through the "Gospel Overview" in the Front Matter together before you progress through the reading for this lesson. It will add about ten minutes to your study, but it will be well worth it.

The point of reading an article together is twofold: (1) To explain key concepts so everyone in your group has a common understanding and language, and (2) to provide a focus for conversation. Remember, we are trying to help your group learn how to talk about the gospel in relation to their actual lives. In many cases, people do not talk about the gospel or their lives because they simply don't have much to say. The article gives them content to talk about.

Ask your group to turn to the article The Gospel Grid in their Participant's Guide and read it aloud together, taking turns at the paragraph breaks.

TRANSITION TO DISCUSSION There is some good stuff here. So let's read this article together and see what it says about these issues. As we do, I want to focus on understanding the concepts and relating them to our lives. If there is something you don't get, ask questions so we can talk it through together. I have some questions that will help us dig a little deeper as we go.

DISCUSSION *15 minutes*

These questions are aimed at helping the group talk through the Cross Chart. Those who do not understand it will be able to work it out in community, and those who "get it" will benefit from learning how to articulate it. You may want to ask follow-up questions as you go.

1. Let's recap the main ideas from the article.

ASK What are some problems with being centered on something other than the gospel?

ASK What two things are to be growing as we mature in faith? What does that mean? How do we do that?

ASK What “label” do we get when we believe the gospel?

2. Let's personalize these concepts a bit.

ASK What are some of the labels people use at your school?

ASK What would people who know you say your life revolves around?

ASK What sounds attractive to you about centering your life on God? How would you even do that?

ASK What makes you feel unsure about centering your life on God?

TRANSITION TO EXERCISE This is really good. We are talking about some significant things that we will continue to explore in the next two sessions. I want to end with an exercise that will help us apply what we have been talking about to a specific area we all deal with.

EXERCISE *15 minutes*

*The point of this exercise is to apply the Cross Chart to a specific issue that will help everyone see (1) how their sin is rooted in a small view of the gospel and (2) how a big view of the gospel helps us overcome sin. **Note:** Not everyone needs to answer every question aloud, but try to draw out as many people as you can throughout the exercise.*

SETUP Let's take the issue of judging others. Judging others means labeling them, looking down on them, or thinking you are better than them in some way. We all do this in various ways. So let's start by quickly brainstorming a list of ways we judge others. Even if it's just the little

everyday judgments we make, what are some specific ways we judge others?

(Write down a list of ways we judge others based on the group's answers.)
So that's how we judge others. Let's talk about why we do this.

ASK What are the reasons we judge others? Let's brainstorm another list together.

ASK How do these reasons reflect a small view of God's holiness?

ASK How do these reasons reflect a small view of our own sin?

Okay, let's get personal. Think of a specific person in your life that you are often judgmental toward.

ASK How would a bigger view of God's holiness affect that relationship?

ASK How would a bigger view of your sin affect that relationship?

TRANSITION TO WRAP-UP This has been really good. Thanks for sharing. We will be talking about the Cross Chart the next two weeks as well, and doing exercises like this one to help us make it practical. Before we wrap up, does anyone have any lingering questions or comments? Okay, let's spend a few minutes praying together. If some of you want to pray, I will close in a few minutes.

WRAP-UP *5 minutes*

Questions, comments, prayer.

1

ARTICLE

THE GOSPEL GRID

What does your life revolve around? What people, interests, or pursuits consume your time and attention?

Everyone's life has a center. Think of the solar system: the sun is the center, and everything else revolves around it. Your life is kind of like that. There's something at the center that everything else tends to revolve around.

For some of us, the center is our grades. For others, it's sports. For others, it's music. For others, it's boyfriends or girlfriends or relationships. Whatever it is, that "center" also tends to give us a sense of identity. If you're the pretty girl who gets noticed by boys, you probably enjoy that sense of acceptance. If you're the athletic kid who's good at sports, you probably enjoy the attention and affirmation. If you're the smart kid who does well in school, it feels good to get noticed for your intelligence.

Sometimes other people try to define a "center" for us by labeling us with a certain identity. Maybe you've been called "the nerd" or "the slut" or "the misfit" or "the religious kid." Maybe you've labeled other people in these sorts of ways too. There are some labels we like because they give us a sense of being acceptable: "I'm smart (or kind or funny), and therefore I belong." And there are other labels we don't want, because we think we are better than that: "Some people are arrogant or annoying or losers, but I am not like that." We're busy either embracing the labels people give us, or working hard to reject them and forge a *different* identity.

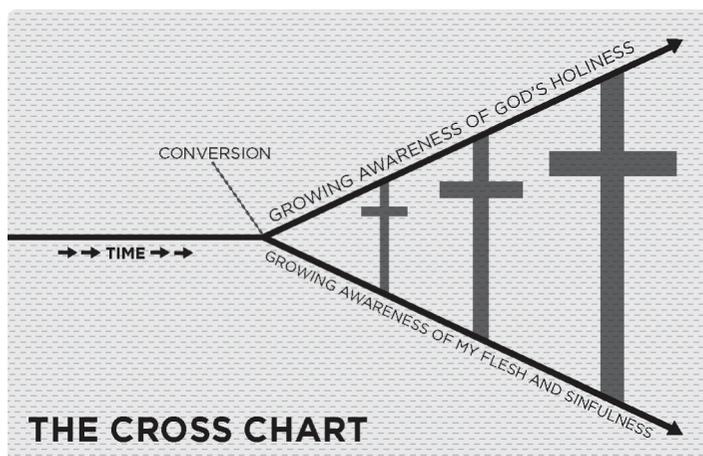
What's at the center of your life? What's defining your identity?

The point of this lesson, and of this whole study, is that God is meant to be your center. He's the only thing in the universe with the "gravitational pull" to keep your life in balance. Anything else that you put at the center

of your life will eventually fail you. Only a life that's centered on God will be meaningful, fulfilling, and satisfying.

We're going to be talking about this idea of a God-centered life for the next few weeks. But as a starting point, we need to understand some basic truths about God, about ourselves, and about the gospel. Understanding the gospel will help you see why it's so hard to live a God-centered life on your own and how much you need a Savior—not only to get to heaven (an important goal!), but also to live life to the fullest right now.

The word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the good news that God saves sinners through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The following diagram is a helpful illustration of what it means to center our life on this good news:



In order to become a Christian, I must become aware of the gap that exists between who God is and who I am. God is holy, which means “set apart.” God is completely good, loving, and wise—perfect in all of his ways (Deuteronomy 32:3–4). We, on the other hand, are not. The real reason we don’t center our lives on God is that we don’t want to. We want to go our own way, not God’s way. That’s what the Bible calls “sin.” So it’s not just that we’re a little bit different from God; we’re in a different category altogether. We have never been perfect in all of our ways for even one day. We are sinful. We are naturally bent to think

and act in ways that are not like God. That means there is a huge gap between God and us.

But here's the good news: Jesus Christ came to bridge the gap between God and us. He came to live and die in our place, as our substitute. As Tim Keller puts it, "He lived the life we should have lived, and died the death we deserved to die because of our sin, so that God could accept us."

Being a Christian means turning from going our own way (our sin) and trusting in Jesus as our substitute. It means that we follow the ABC's of faith:

- A) Admit our sin before a holy God—that we are guilty and in need of salvation,
- B) Believe in Jesus—not just intellectually, but with our heart and life, and
- C) Confess Jesus as Lord—turn our lives over to him and become his disciples, his followers.

As the Cross Chart shows, when we put our trust in Jesus, he becomes the center of our lives. He now defines our identity. The Bible calls this new identity being "in Christ." The most important thing about us—the thing that defines us—is not grades or sports or boys or girls or music or coolness, but Jesus! He is the gravitational pull that keeps our life on the right course.

The more we grow in our awareness of who God is and who we really are, the more we experience our new life in Christ. As we read the Bible, as we experience the work of God's Spirit in us, and as we live in community with God's people, the extent of God's holiness and the extent of our sinfulness become increasingly clear. It is not that God is becoming more holy or that we are becoming more sinful. It's just that our awareness of both is growing. We are increasingly seeing God as he actually is (Isaiah 55:6–9) and ourselves as we actually are (Jeremiah 17:9–10). And we are becoming more "centered" in our new identity in Jesus. That's why it's important to see the gospel as both the entry point into the Christian life and the pathway of the Christian life.

As our understanding of God's holiness and our sinfulness grows, something else also grows: our appreciation and love for Jesus. The Holy Spirit makes Jesus's life, death, and resurrection increasingly real and powerful to us. We realize more and more that the labels we want don't come anywhere close to the holiness of God. And we realize that we are not better than other people—no matter what label we may have given them. Like us, they are also sinners who need to be saved by Jesus.

A gospel-centered life means a life that's centered on the only category that really matters: "in Christ."

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EXERCISE

JUDGING OTHERS

One way to see the value of the Cross Chart is to apply it to a specific area where people commonly struggle. Judging others is something we all do in big and small ways. We judge others when we label them, look down on them, or think we are better than them in some way.

As a group, brainstorm about some of the specific ways we judge people, or feel judged. The questions below will help you see the connection between judging others and your view of the gospel.

1. Have you ever felt judged? How and why?
2. What are the specific ways you have judged/labeled others?
3. Why do we judge others? What reasons do we give for doing this?
4. How do these reasons reflect a small view of God's holiness?
5. How do these reasons reflect a small view of our own sin?
6. Think of a specific person or group of people in your life that you often feel judged by.
 - a. How would a bigger view of God's holiness affect that relationship?
 - b. How would a bigger view of our sinfulness affect that relationship?