

Finding the Missing Piece



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INTRODUCTION

As I read through the gospels, many things thrill me, spark my imagination, draw me to wonder and worship, and make me wish I was there. However, there is one thing that happens repeatedly that I have a hard time relating to because it is so distant from anything within my experience. In fact, it happens multiple times in the gospels, which only serves to make it more curious. What is it?

In the gospels, some people have a direct personal encounter with Jesus and after this life altering experience they are left overwhelmed and thrilled. You get the impression that they will verbally explode all over the first person they encounter about what has happened to them. But then Jesus puts a finger up to His lips and says, "SSSHHH, don't tell anyone." What??

It seems like my experience with Christ-followers is the completely opposite. Often when I interact with Christians one of the reoccurring themes is encouraging them to speak up. Just to say something, anything about Jesus. Many leaders are working hard to inject courage in their people to share Jesus with those around them. We think of methods, laws, steps, illustrations, roads, leading questions, and everything else we can think of to try to provide some easy, memorable way to talk about Christ, and yet most remain silent. Those that do speak of Him, often do so more out of duty or guilt than passion.

Why is there such a vast gulf between these two experiences? Why did Jesus have to continually tell people to be quiet and

even then sometimes it didn't work? Why do I continually have to tell people to speak up and even then it rarely works?

I propose there are two reasons. First, we don't see that inestimable value of the gospel and therefore Jesus. The people that encountered Jesus in the gospels had to tell everyone they knew because of the treasure they had discovered. They found the only thing that mattered and their joy was not going to be contained. They had gone from dead to alive, from blind to seeing, from condemned to saved. Silence equaled selfishness. They felt compelled to speak to anyone and everyone who would listen.

For us however, the gospel has gone from being "Good News" just to being news. It's in the mix with everything else we know. It doesn't thrill our hearts or consume our thoughts. Other 'needs' seem more immediate and necessary than peace with our Creator. We put the gospel on the level with helpful tips for living but not life-imparting, essential news, so why get so excited?

Secondly, if we are honest, we just don't love the lost. Frankly, they are difficult to love. We wish they didn't swear, act the way they do, go the places they go, or whatever.

Besides, we escaped that life and are not interested in going back. We pulled ourselves out of that, why can't they? We've got it together and their lives are messy. I'm sure they already know about Jesus, and they probably don't care. Right?

Sometimes we live like the mission of the Christian life is to get a good job, make decent money, buy a house, raise our kids, go to church and do all this without getting too soiled by the world in the process. The lost just don't figure into that plan and we're fine with that.

However, if we were to compare ourselves to biblical characters we would look more like Jonah than Jesus. *Why would I go over there when they just might get saved and that would*

disturb my plans? Besides, hell is not that bad or last that long. Right?

As I considered the week of prayer and fasting, my heart was drawn to address these issues. I want to be a person whose only boast is the gospel of Christ. I want you to know more about Jesus and His gospel when you are with me than you know about my hobbies, kids, or plans. I want to cultivate a group of people at Hope Church who are so enthralled with the gospel that I have to tell them to calm down and be quiet.

Our approach in doing this will be to spend some time each day of this week reading, meditating, and praying through the truth of the gospel. My hope is that as you see the beautiful jewel of redemption that it would enflame your heart . And a fresh passion for it would arise in you.

Second, I want you to think, pray, and fast for those around you that don't know Christ. I'm praying we would not be able to go into a restaurant, school, supermarket, workplace, or anywhere with people and not see souls that without the gospel will spend eternity separated from God, and our hearts would break. And this would draw us to pray and speak.

Will you join us as we plead with God to save people in our city for His glory?

MONDAY

RIGHT-SIZING GOD AND ME

It's not hard to make me feel small. I don't mean emotionally, I mean literally.

Consider your place in the world. I know your mom worked hard to inflate your ego by telling you there was no one like you. That just makes me feel smaller. I'm one unique 'special' individual in 5 billion other humans. I mean 6 billion. No wait, 6.7 billion. Um... that's a lot and I'm how many? Just one. Now that's small.

Maybe if I go stand in my yard I will feel a bit bigger. At least there I'm king. Looking down at the ants, I puff up my chest and feel god-like. Pulling out my magnifying glass, I decide to indulge my adolescent thoughts by imposing a little solar vengeance on them, but in that moment I only feel smaller. Interrupting their lives only for my pleasure gives me a shrinking feeling. Also, the blazing sun above me that I have conscripted for such an effort only serves to give me a relatively miniscule perspective. I'm small. Then without warning, there is a preemptive strike - one, then another, then another and another. Before I can move my foot, it is the front-line of a war. Me vs. the ants and they're winning. I can't even beat the ants. I am small.

Maybe if I open the scripture, God will do a better job than my mom or the ants did at making me feel big.

Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.

Isa 40:15

Now, I feel better. Oh, wait. The nations are what? A drop and a speck of dust. I mean, I get that with Moldova or say Belize, but the United States? Maybe we're just a slightly bigger drop or speck. That doesn't help. So if the US is a drop or a speck and I'm 1 out of a population of 300 million or so, what am I? A molecule? An atom? A proton? A quark? No, smaller. Great! I'm shrinking.

I think what I am getting is called "perspective." I'm small.

Read Isa 40:12-31

The Gospel Connection

Like the Bible, the gospel begins with God. We must begin with an understanding of who He is and what He is like if we are to rightly understand the gospel. If we don't we run the danger of shrinking Him into a manageable deity of our design. Worship God for who He is. See Him as God-sized and you as creation-sized.

Love the Lost

"I'm scared. If I say something, I don't know what will happen."

We would like to think we left peer-pressure behind with backpacks, locker combinations, and stale PB&J's. The truth is that often times we don't speak of Christ because of a fear of others. When that happens people are really BIG and God is really small. Scripture calls that a "fear of man."

Getting God in the right perspective should help us overcome this unbiblical phobia. It doesn't mean that everyone

will be nice, listen, or even be interested, but it does mean that God is larger. Our greatest concern should be Him, not others. Pray for God to give you an expanded view of Him. Pray for perspective. Pray that God would grow a fear of Him that will overwhelm your fear of others.

Take a Step

Begin to pray for the people in your life that don't know Christ. My challenge to you is to make a list of at least 5 people. Commit to pray for them every day this week and possibly beyond. Pray that God would open their heart to the gospel. Pray that God might use you as the instrument for Him.

TUESDAY

HOLDING IT TOGETHER

Cosmic glue? Really! I confess my degrees are not scientific. Most of the time when I ask friends what they “do” in this highly technical town, I smile and nod with absolutely no degree of understanding whatsoever. But cosmic glue? That’s the best we can do?

Don’t know what that is? No, it’s not available for a limited time for \$9.99. It’s what physicists say holds the world together. *No, but wait, there’s more.* Even though the particles of us and everything else should fly apart, something holds them together. Cosmic glue! *Call now and we will throw in . . .* That’s some good stuff. Maybe, it can fix that butter dish I . . . oh, never mind!

God must have gotten the jumbo pack.

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Col 1:16-17

Wait. If this is true then He designed the glue, and He is far bigger, stronger, and stickier than it is. In fact, we are in a completely dependent position. Without His hand squeezing things together we don’t laugh, work, grow, breathe, or even

exist. So we owe Him allegiance, awe, obedience, thankfulness, and worship.

Read Jer 18:1-11

The Gospel Connection

God created, designed, owns, and maintains this world. It is God-dominated. It operates by His rules. Yet, we easily invert the position of creature and Creator. We see ourselves as independent - ignoring our size and position. Like an ant trying to be president we think we are bigger, faster, and smarter than God.

Inverting our natural inclinations for dominance and independence is essential to the gospel because without this we look at ourselves as god. The Biblical word for this is "pride." Pride blinds us to the foolishness of our situation. We think we can and should hold things together. We make up our own rules.

However, the reality is we owe our very existence to God. Without His creation and sustaining of that creation we are nothing, literally. Our very existence is by His grace.

Love the Lost

It's a clash of the Titans. Well, not really. It's more like a clash of the Potter vs. the clay. We need to recognize that sharing the gospel is a battle of worldviews and religions. The gospel is on a collision course with everything else.

There are bound to be sparks. Knocking over gods is not popular because they shatter easily. Most are made of glass.

As we communicate the gospel there are two things to remember. First, be humble. God is big enough to fight for Himself. Don't come in with your guns blazing. Speak confidently and gently .

Second, when you catch a shard from a shattering god, you are being like Jesus. You are blessed. You are being like Christ in a real and painful way. Rejoice because being like Jesus is our goal.

Need help seeing this? Read and pray through 1 Peter 3:14-15.

Take a Step

Pray that God would humble you through a greater understanding of your position before Him. Pray that God would humble your five friends. Pray that the shallowness of the gods would be exposed both in our hearts and our friends hearts.

WEDNESDAY

NO NEWS LIKE BAD NEWS

It isn't good. The ticker tape continues to roll across the bottom of the screen. The pictures relate what is happening around the world. As soon as one crisis ends, another one springs up. The more I know the more I don't like the world, but it's inescapable – sort of. I am a news junkie. It's fed to me on screens and in waves of various shapes and sizes. It's bad out there and seems to be getting worse! I could turn it off, but the darkness can be oddly entertaining.

The haunting question that never seems to get answered is: have they gotten to the bottom of it? What's the root cause? Some dictator? Some failed gene? Nature or nurture?

As I watch the terror across oceans and in other states, I can't help but feel uneasy. Even behind the neighborhood watch, my multiple locks, and my alarm systems the darkness seems close. Familiarly close. Internally close. Scripture only confirms my desperate diagnosis.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Jer 17:9

You see, sin is easy to see and difficult to own. Even beyond the vague generalities of wrongness, I'm pierced by the commands and calls of God I have specifically and willfully dis-

obeyed. As long as I maintain some level of distance I remain hidden and blameless, but the shadow extends beyond my TV, past my closed door, and drapes my heart. I can't escape. And the darkness is internal.

The headline flashes across the screen. They break in. They've discovered the cause. Now for the picture and video.

It's me.

The God that created me, the one that holds me together, has been wronged. However, it wasn't by those people, whoever they might be. It was by me. My thanklessness was willful. My ignorance was conscious. My declaration of war has been signed.

"You may have pieced me together, but I'll take over from here. You aren't needed any longer. Don't bother to write."

The darkness is apparent. The cause is real. The rebellion is full. I'm to blame.

Read Rom 3:10-18

I'm worse than I ever thought, and it's darker in here than out there.

The Gospel Connection

Sin is our greatest problem. It's everyone's greatest problem. Nothing else comes even close. Our inner personal struggles and our interpersonal struggles are connected to sin. Internally and externally sin is the issue. We sin against each other, but most of all, our sin is against our Creator. He is the one most sinned against. He is the most offended.

It is not a bad thing to help people. In fact, we should be gracious giving people as ones that have received divine giving. But if we leave people fed, housed, and helped without the

gospel we have only eased their path toward an eternity in hell. We must love by meeting their lesser needs in the physical and introducing them to Jesus, the only one that provides for their greatest need, salvation. Don't soft sell. Sin is the problem.

Love the Lost

The "ins" and the "outs". The haves and the have-nots. Those who get it and those who don't. One of our very human skills is to divide and subdivide the human race. As Christians we can easily spiritualize this tendency. Those that are righteous and those that aren't. In the interest of holiness and with the line clearly painted we stand on one side of the line. We might yell over the line, but we hesitate to crossover. Someone might be looking. If we are really brave we form strike teams. Get in. Get out. Leave no man behind!

The reality of sin means that there is one circle painted around all of the human race. I stand at the center. There is one category: Unrighteous & Condemned. My sin is grievous and so is my neighbor's.

As you look at others, you don't look down but across. We come to others not because we are good, better, or best. We come as equal criminals. Pray that God would remove from our thinking any line we have drawn.

Take a Step

No, literally take a step. Living around you are people that need the gospel. In your neighborhood, in your cube farm, and across the hall are souls. Do you know them? Do you pray for them? Take a walk around. As you walk, look and pray. Pray for their salvation. Pray for their greatest need, salvation. Go with your small group around your neighborhood. Pray for God to move.

Need more help or ideas of how to prayer walk? Check out

Appendix 3.

THURSDAY

BUT GOD . . .

Helplessness is the predecessor of hopelessness. But willful helplessness is worse. To know the situation, the reality of desperation, and to revel in it is insanity and deserves only to be pitied. *I like where I am and I'm happy to stay here. My quick sand is comfortable destruction.*

That is our fate. That is our attitude. Hopelessly bound up in sin. Reveling in Rebellion. Unable and unwilling to change our disposition. Dead to God. Enemies to our Creator. Deserving destruction and Divine judgment.

Then two words break through. They stand in bold relief against the dark clouds of our reality.

But God . . .

Not our action but His. Not our movement but His. Not our peace but His. Not our plan but His.

God declares, "Amnesty"

Not some Divine mental lapse or some lessening of His standard, but justice is accomplished and forgiveness offered. Wrath is satisfied. A great substitution is made.

God becomes man. The Creator enters His creation. The art-

ist comes into the picture. Jesus.

He comes to redeem through death. After living a perfect life, He offers Himself. Taking the punishment that I deserved, He willingly dies my death; the righteous for the unrighteous.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person-- though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die-- but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

Rom 5:6-9

God's grace is greater than you ever dreamed. Breathtaking Divine intervention.

Read Eph 2:1-10

The Gospel Connection

What is your god? What's on your t-shirt? What do you want everyone to know about you? What do you boast about?

Getting people to talk about themselves is relatively easy. Begin by asking about their kids, hobbies, house, whatever. It will come out. They are proud of something. They will put it on display. Just listen and pay attention. Their answers show us their gods and its salvation.

But is your only boast in the cross? Often times then we begin to compare notes on our gods. Mine is better or newer or faster. But is it supreme?

Jesus is. He stands above all other gods. His cross may seem ridiculous, lowly, and humiliating, but it is the very power of God. Truly understanding and explaining it shows our im-

potence and God's magnificence. It makes us nothing and Him everything.

Love the Lost

Do you love the lost? Answer honestly. It's okay.

If the answer is 'no', check your heart. God is an enemy lover. If He wasn't, you wouldn't know salvation. You didn't deserve rescue. You didn't earn it. God was overly gracious to you if you came to faith at 5 or 50.

To not love the lost is contrary to the very gospel you say you believe. It is to go against the very principle that saved you, the enemy.

Pray for repentance. Pray for supernatural, God-like enemy love.

Take a Step

Add an enemy to your list of people that you're praying for salvation. Think of someone that has hurt you or hates you. Add him/her not to pray God's judgment on them, but God's favor. Pray for their heart to be transformed by His grace. Pray that God might use you as His instrument.

FRIDAY

SAVED

Redeemed. Reconciled. Adopted. Justified. Made righteous. Freed. Saved. Forgiven. Baptized. Indwelt. Peace. Propitiated for. Kept. Loved. Grace. Atoned for.

Are you overwhelmed? Do you feel the weight of these words? Do you know how these words relate to you?

These are the things that God has done in your salvation. Like a diamond turned in the sunlight, your salvation sparks like a rainbow of theological color. As you turn it you see a greater depth and beauty. In the beginning, you may have simply understood your sin and God's forgiveness, but God's work was greater and fuller than you could have conceived.

We can't be dispassionate about this. We can't be passé. It's incredible. It's amazing. Our response should be mystery and wonder. *Why me?*

Did you ever have some amazing news? Maybe you just got engaged. Maybe you were going to have a child. Maybe the scholarship game through. Maybe the promotion finally happened. Whatever it was, do you remember the feeling?

You were about to burst. You might have had to keep the secret for a while, but it was ticking inside you. You couldn't hold it for long and finally you got it out there. Your excite-

ment could no longer be contained.

The greatest news is ours. It should not be a guilt trip or a duty to tell “our secret.” That is if we believe the news.

Rehearsing the gospel should loosen our lips. It should motivate us to communicate. It should fill us with excitement. It should give us butterflies, hoping someone will ask us what is going on so that we can explode all over them with our good news.

Read Rom 11:33-36

Gospel Connection

Keeping the gospel close is not just something for people excited for evangelism. It is my conviction that the gospel is not the A-B-C's of the Christian life but the A-Z's. As we rehearse and meditate on the gospel it should continue to enlarge our love for God. As we talk about it we should see more and more implications for our continued growth. Take some time to slowly read and meditate on the gospel. In the Appendix 1 you will find a good description of the gospel. I encourage you to make this a daily discipline.

Love the Lost

What would you give up so that others might know the gospel? What did someone give up so that you would know the gospel? I want to challenge you to fast for a friend. This is not a way to trick God into saving someone or trying to make a bargain with Him. It is giving up something for a spiritual purpose. It's setting some time aside that you would use to eat or surf the web or watch TV and instead pray. This simple practice is a way to discipline yourself and draw your heart closer to the heart of God. Want some more info on fasting? Check out the Appendix 2.

Action Step

Often in scripture you will find a rehearsal of the gospel followed by the writer breaking out in a spontaneous praise. When they contemplate the reality of their salvation their immediate response was worship. Take some time in prayer today to praise God for his salvation. Review the gospel. Re-wind how you personally came to Christ. Praise Him for His work in you.

SATURDAY

BEAUTIFUL?

I get stinky, dirty, calloused, and flat, but not beautiful. I know that some of you are very meticulous about them. Pedicures every so often and all. Some of you ladies enjoy your open toed shoes. But, beautiful?

That's the adjective, "beautiful". Beautiful feet. Not only that, but preachers with beautiful feet no less! That doesn't seem to fit the 'man code'. Isaiah writes it and Paul confirms it, beautiful feet.

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!"

Rom 10:14-15

God's adjectives aren't always mine. We paint with different brushes at times.

The beauty of these feet is not in toenail color, attention to cuticles (whatever those are), or an absence of hammer toes, but in a message. They're beautiful because they carry beautiful words. Redemptive words. Saving words.

This complement is not just for the professionals. You know,

people that get paid to have pretty feet. It's for all the messengers. The messenger on the soccer field. Or the messenger at the office. Or the messenger in your cul-de-sac. Or the messenger in your school. Yeah, that's you!

Welcome to God's foot spa. So do you want beautiful feet? No problem. Step one: Open your mouth!

Read Acts 1:1-11

Gospel Connection

God never calls you to save anyone. You can't. You can't twist arms or hearts. On the other side you can't 'notch your belt' when another one falls. You didn't die for their sins. You didn't open their hearts or convict them of sin. Don't can't credit.

We are called to be mouthpieces. I played trombone in high school. My mouthpiece was important. Not because it made music, but because it was a conduit for the breath that was shoved through it. Without it there was silence. (I think my parents and the neighbors would have preferred that at times.)

You can't make the music of the gospel. When the Holy Spirit blows through someone's life his heart will warm to the truth. They will break under his offense before God. He will see the glory of the gospel. The cross will go from foolishness to wisdom. Just be a mouthpiece and leave the music to God.

Love the Lost

I'm a visual person. Pictures are worth a lot to me. One visual that I cannot escape came during my high school years. A godly man that was encouraging my faith took a few of us on a hike in the hills above Los Angeles about dusk. As the sun set the glow from the sky was replaced with the glow from the city below. The stars were dimmed and were replaced by

the street lights and signs.

As we gazed onto these man-made constellations, he simply asked, "Have you considered these lights?" He went on to remind us that each of these lights represent people. Just imagine each street light as a soul. As we looked across the horizon they extended as far as we could see. In that moment I was overwhelmed with the reality that people need to hear the gospel.

My challenge to you is to go to a vista in our city. Drive up Monte Sano. Go up to some look out point and see the lights of the city. Think about the souls. Read Matthew 23:37-39. Cry over our city.

Take a Step

You have prayed for them privately now pray for them publicly. Not as a show, but as an expression of concern. Take one person on your list and ask them, "How can I pray for you?" It's a simple question. They may share nothing or they may share something profound. Then pray for them, right there. It doesn't have to be long or involved, but lift up their request. This simple act of love could open the doors for the gospel.

Appendix 1

A Gospel Narrative

The Glory of God

My God is immense beyond imagination. He measured the entire universe with merely the span of His hand (Isa 40:12).

He is unimaginably awesome in all of His perfections, absolutely righteous, holy, and just in all of His ways (Deu 32).

He has also been unbelievably good and merciful to me as the Creator and Sustainer of my life.

Every breath, every heartbeat, every function of every organ in my body is a gift from Him.

Every legitimate pleasure I experience is a gift from His loving hand to me (1 Tim 6:17).

All that I am and all that I have I owe to Him and to His goodness (Jam 1:17).

My life in every way is, and will continue to be, utterly dependent upon Him in whom I live and move and have my being (Acts 17:28).

This wonderful God is the most supremely worthy Object of admiration (Psa 96), honor (Rev 4:11), and delight (Psa 16:11) in all of the universe;

He has created me with the intention that I might glorify Him (Rom 11:36) by finding my soul's delight in Him and by living in joyful obedience to Him in all of my ways (Psa 37:4).

My Sin Against God

Yet I could not have failed this great God more miserably than I have (Rom 1).

Instead of giving thanks to Him and humbly submitting to His rule over my life, I have rebelled against Him and have actually sought to exalt myself above Him.

Going my own way and living according to my own wisdom, I have broken countless times either the letter or the spirit of every one of God's Ten Commandments (Exo 20; Col 3:5; Mat 5; 1 Joh 3:15).

Thinking myself to be wise, I have shown myself to be a fool; Because of my arrogance, God has every right to damn me to the everlasting experience of His terrifying wrath in the Lake of Fire (Rom 6:23; Rev 21:8; Eph 2:3).

So as for myself, apart from Christ I am bound by the guilt of my sins (Rom 3:19; Jam 2:10) and also bound by the power of sin, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures (Tit 3:3; Eph 2:3).

Apart from Christ, I am also utterly deserving of and destined for eternal punishment in the Lake of Fire, completely unable to save myself or even to make one iota of a contribution to my own salvation (Rom 5:6).

God's Work on My Behalf

However, what I could not do, God did (Rom 5:6), and in doing it, He did it all, sending His own Son into the world to die on the cross for my sins (Rom 8:3; 1 Pet 3:18), thereby showing me unfathomable love (Rom 5).

God loved me so much that He was willing to suffer the loss of His Son (Joh 3:16; Rom 8:32), and even more amazingly, He was willing to allow His Son to suffer the loss of Him at the cross (Mar 15:34).

Jesus loved me so much that He was willing to lay down His life for me. No one could ever love me more or better than Jesus (Joh 15).

On the third day after Jesus' death, God raised Him from the dead (1 Cor 15:4) thereby announcing that His death was completely sufficient to atone for every sin that I have or will commit throughout my lifetime (Act 13).

God then exalted Christ to His own right hand, where Christ now reigns from on high, granting salvation and forgiveness (Act 5:31) to all who call on Him by faith (Rom 10; Act 16:31).

My Salvation

Now when my time came and I placed my faith in Jesus, God instantly granted me a great salvation.

He forgave me of all of my sins, past, present, and future (Col 2:13; Psa 103:12).

He made me His child, adopting me into His family (Eph 1:5; Joh 1:12).

He gave me the gift of the Holy Spirit, who gives me God's power (Act 1:8; Eph 3:16), who pours out God's love within my heart (Eph 1; Rom 5:5), and who tenderly communicates to my spirit that I am a child of God and an heir of eternal glory in heaven (Rom 8).

In saving me, God also freed me from slavery to any and all sins (Rom 6).

I no longer have to sin again, for sin's mastery over me has been broken!

In saving me, God also justified me (Rom 5:1), and being justified through Christ, I have a peace with God that will endure forever.

In justifying me, God declared me innocent of my sins and pronounced me righteous with the very righteousness of Jesus (Rom 5:18).

God also allowed His future and present wrath against me to be completely propitiated by Jesus, who bore it upon Himself while on the cross (1 Joh 2:2).

Consequently, God now has only love, compassion, and deepest affection for me, and this love is without any admixture of wrath whatsoever.

God always looks upon me and treats me with gracious favor, always working all things together for my ultimate and eternal good (Rom 8:28).

God's grace abounds to me even through trials.

Because I am a justified one, He subjugates every trial and forces it to do good unto me (Rom 5).

When I sin, God's grace abounds to me all the more as He graciously maintains my justified status as described above (Rom 5).

When I sin, God feels no wrath in His heart against me

(1 The 5; 1 Joh 2:2).

His heart is filled with nothing but love for me, and He longs for me to repent and confess my sins to Him, so that He might show me the gracious and forgiving love that has been in His heart all along (1 Joh 1:9).

God does not require my confession before He desires to forgive me.

In His heart He already has forgiven me; and when I come to Him to confess my sins to Him, He runs to me (as it were) and is repeatedly embracing and kissing me even before I get the words of my confession out of my mouth! (Luk 15).

God does see my sins, and He is grieved by my sins (Eph 4:30). His grief comes partly from the fact that in my moments of sin, I am not receiving the fullness of His love for me.

He even sends chastisement into my life (Heb 12); but He does so because He is for me (Rom 8:31), and He loves me (Heb 12:6); and He disciplines me for my ultimate good (Heb 12:10).

I don't deserve any of this, even on my best day; but this is my salvation, and herein I stand (1 Pet 5:12; 1 Cor 16:13; Col 1:23). Thank You, Jesus.

Taken from A Gospel Primer for Christians: Learning to See the Glories of God's Love by Milton Vincent

Appendix 2

What is fasting? Why do it?

Biblical fasting is simply self denial for a spiritual purpose. In most cases that denial is a denial of food. We are physical beings and much of our life is controlled by our physical-ness. We have to eat, drink, sleep, and exercise. However often those physical things of life crowd out the spiritual realities. Fasting is an attempt to bring that back into balance. We choose to set something, like food, aside to pursue spiritual means. Most times we choose not to eat so that we can consciously pursue Christ in study and prayer.

This week I want to challenge you to do just that. Spend the time you would take for a meal reading and meditating on God's Word and in prayer. The schedule and duration is up to you.

I want to also encourage you to go on a media fast. We are bombarded with info, exposés, articles, blogs, opinions, news, and on and on it goes. That noise is so loud and overwhelming that we don't hear the still small voice of God. I am challenging myself and you to turn it off this week. Go as media free as possible and use that time for pursuit of Christ both alone and together with others.

May God use this time to draw us closer to Him.

Appendix 3

What is a prayer walk?

Prayer-walking is simply praying “on-site with insight.” In other words its praying for people in the places that you see and interact with them such as your workplace or neighborhood. This type of prayer gives you a visual reminder of who it is you’re praying for.

Prayer-walking is low-profile. And it can be done individually or in groups. You can do it silently or quietly. You are looking to be on the scene and not make a scene.

Here are a few practical hints:

For Groups

- Meet at an assigned time and start with a group prayer
- Walk in groups of 2-3.
- Pray in a conversational voice or silently if you feel uncomfortable.
- If anyone asks what your are doing, be prepared to respond; “We’re praying for God’s blessing on this neighborhood. Is there any special way we can pray for you?”
- Plan to walk for about half an hour.
- Afterwards gather to share your prayers, observations and experiences

What to pray

- Pray for Salvation: God is the heart transformer. Pray for Him to open up people to the gospel
- Pray for Opportunity: Ask for opportunities to be His instrument for the message
- Pray for Needs: Be observant. There may be an obvious need you can lift up or meet

