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CHAPTER ONE

THE BEST NEWS EVER AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU



We never “get beyond the gospel” to something more advanced.

*The gospel is not the first step in a stairway of truths;
rather, it is more like the hub in a wheel of truth.*

The gospel is not just the ABCs but the A to Z of Christianity.

TIMOTHY KELLER, *THE CENTRALITY OF THE GOSPEL*

The one thing the gospel never does is nothing.

RAY ORTLUND JR., *THE GOSPEL*

Lola was a slave.

She grew up in a poor family in a rural part of the Philippines. She was penniless, unschooled, and gullible. Her parents wanted her to marry a pig farmer twice her age, but she was unhappy at the prospect. When a lieutenant approached her with an offer,

she couldn't resist: she could have food and shelter if she would commit to taking care of his young daughter.

Lola agreed. She had no idea she had signed up to become a slave for life.

Lola lived with that daughter, and eventually her children and grandchildren, for fifty-six years, both in the Philippines and America. She raised children. She cooked and cleaned from dawn to dark. She was tongue-lashed and beaten, wore used clothing, and ate scraps and leftovers by herself in the kitchen. She slept anywhere she could find a spot: on couches, in storage areas, in corners, or on piles of laundry.

As Alex, the son of the family that enslaved Lola, grew up he began to understand that Lola was a slave. As a young adult, he gave her an ATM card linked to his account and taught her how to use it. He tried to teach her how to drive.

Later he invited Lola to live with him and his family. He gave her a bedroom and permission to do whatever she wanted: sleep in, watch TV, or do nothing all day. "She could relax—and be free—for the first time in her life. I should have known it wouldn't be that simple," he writes in a recent article for *The Atlantic*. He sat her down. "This is your house now . . . you're not here to serve us. You can relax, okay?"

"Okay," she said. And went back to cleaning. She didn't know how *not* to be a slave.

One day he came home and found Lola sitting on the couch with her feet up, doing a word puzzle and watching TV, with a cup of tea beside her. She looked up sheepishly. "Progress," he thought.¹

Lola had been a slave for so long that she struggled to embrace freedom when it was offered her. She spent the last years of her life with only a fleeting understanding that she was free and loved.

In a similar way, many of us find it difficult to accept our freedom in Christ. The Bible says that we—all of us—have lived as

slaves to sin (John 8:34; Rom. 6:20). We're so used to it that we struggle to understand that, in Jesus, we're no longer slaves. We'll spend the rest of our lives trying to live in light of two truths we find hard to grasp: in Jesus we're free and we're loved.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

A Christian leader once argued that we should take the next ten years off so that we could define the gospel.

He was right and he was wrong. We do need to define the gospel. There's nothing more important than understanding, at the deepest levels of our souls, the truth of what God has done for us in Jesus. The gospel is both simple and complex. A small child can understand it—sometimes better than we can—but the most advanced theologian will never be able to sound its deepest depths.

Yet we can't wait ten years to define the gospel. We need the gospel *now*. We can no sooner take ten years to define the gospel than we could take a ten-year break from breathing. The gospel is the desperate need of the world and of every human heart. It's of first importance. Our churches need it. We need it if we have any hope of becoming who we were meant to be, because the gospel is the key to spiritual growth.

*The gospel
is the key to
spiritual growth.*

So what is the gospel? The gospel is set within a larger story of a good world that's gone bad because of human sin. Unless we understand the larger story, it's impossible to understand the gospel itself. The Bible tells one unified story that explains our world, and the centerpiece of that story is the gospel.

God created all things good, including us, but we rebelled against Him. We see evidence of the brokenness of the world all around us: wars, violence, injustice, inequity, relational breakdown, natural disasters, sickness, death, and more. The world is broken

beyond our ability to fix it. Not only is the world broken, but so are we. But God didn't create the world like this. We've contaminated the world through our treason against a good and holy God.

We made such a mess of this world that God would have been justified in writing us off. He would be right to judge us and be done with us. But instead, God chose to rescue us. God—one God who is three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—conspired together to save us. The Father sent His Son, Jesus, to become one of us. Instead of destroying the world, He entered it. When Jesus was born, He became the first person in history to live without rebelling against God. His obedience was perfect. Jesus also gave us a taste of life the way it should be. He healed the sick, served outcasts, and confronted injustice. The miracles He performed foreshadowed the day when God will restore the world to the way it should be.

But that's not even the best part. Although Jesus was the first truly innocent person to ever live, He took our place and died as payment for sins we committed. He repeatedly emphasized that this is why He came. He not only entered the world filled with people who deserved to be judged, but He took that judgment on Himself so we don't have to. And by doing this, He restored us to relationship with our heavenly Father.

To everyone's surprise, Jesus' followers found His grave empty three days after He'd been killed. Over five hundred people saw Him alive before He ascended to heaven. His resurrection proved that what He said was true. It vindicated Him. It also shows us that we can trust Him, and it gives a preview of what will happen to those who follow Him.

One day Jesus will return and judge all of us, and then He'll completely renew our world. Those who have trusted Jesus will enjoy the world as it was meant to be, in perfect relationship with God and others.

But now, God calls for our response. God invites us to come to Him in surrender, admitting our need. God calls us to admit the truth about ourselves, to turn away from our sins, and follow Him in faith and trust. There's only one way out of the mess we find ourselves in, and that's through Jesus. We've been found guilty, but Jesus has already paid the penalty for those who put their trust in Him. If we cling to our own efforts to pay that penalty, we'll miss out on what Jesus has done and face the penalty ourselves—a penalty that's more than we can ever pay. We *must* take advantage of the gospel. It's our only hope.

Until Jesus comes back, the church's role is to show and tell the story of the gospel. The gospel motivates us, guides us, and empowers us. It calls for a response. Once we respond with genuine repentance and faith, the gospel changes everything.

Whew. That's a lot, yet it's barely scratching the surface of what the gospel means. To simplify it a bit more, the gospel can be summarized by understanding three truths:

- **God is holy.**
- **Humanity is sinful.**
- **God is rescuing His people and creation through the perfect work of Jesus Christ.**

These truths set everything right. They not only show us the way to be right with God, but they also show us the way to live. The best news of all is that God's rescue is completely based on grace. We don't earn any of it. We don't deserve it. But it's ours, given to us freely by God.

That's the best news ever. Paul, a former enemy of Jesus who became one of His most passionate followers, wrote that we stand in this gospel, and that we're being saved by it. "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried,

that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4). It’s the very power of God, and the greatest truth known by humanity, yet we often treat it like it doesn’t matter. The apostle Paul observed this tendency even in the first century, writing to the Galatian believers: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one” (Gal. 1:6–7). This has been our story ever since.

It’s time to rediscover the good news that has the power to change our lives forever.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

Because the work of Jesus is the climactic event of history and the transformative truth in our lives, we can look to it in every aspect of our lives. In fact, most of the New Testament is spent unpacking how it applies to every part of life. Simply open to any New Testament passage to discover an aspect of the gospel being applied to real life.

While there’s no way I can tease out all the implications of this amazing news, I’d like to highlight a few things that are true in your life if you have trusted Jesus.

1. You’re Free from Guilt and Shame

Most of us are familiar with *shame*: the internal sense that we don’t measure up and that we’re not okay. It’s an emotional weapon Satan uses to corrupt our relationships with God and each other, and to disintegrate our vocational vision and creativity.² Brené Brown’s TED talk on the subject has been viewed over 34 million times,³ and her books on vulnerability and imperfection are bestsellers.

We also experience *guilt*: the objective sense that we haven’t

met an external standard. Although widespread acceptance of religion seems to be declining, we still seem to struggle with guilt. According to professor Wilfred M. McClay, “Guilt has not merely lingered. It has grown, even metastasized, into an ever more powerful and pervasive element in the life of the contemporary West.”⁴ Yet we still don’t know what to do with it.

The gospel provides the remedy we need. For those who trust Jesus, every wrong done and every good left undone—past, present, and future—has been dealt with at the cross. Jesus has made full payment, so that when God looks at us He sees the perfect righteousness of Jesus. The Bible offers this shocking declaration: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1). We are free from sin, guilt, and shame.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is found in Zechariah 3. Zechariah has a vision of Joshua, the high priest, standing in God’s presence. It was the Day of Atonement, which means that Joshua would have spent days preparing himself so that he could be pure before God. In Zechariah’s vision, though, Joshua stood before God with dirty clothes. The language that Zechariah uses is explicit: he was covered in excrement. To make it worse, Satan was also present and accusing Joshua of his failings.

That’s a pretty good picture of how the best of us measure up before God. My friend Brian Bakke regularly sweeps the streets where he lives to remind himself of how we measure up before God. He writes:

I clean the block each morning. And as I gather up the drug bags, dog crap, food garbage, butts, and bottles, I think this is how I look before a pure and holy God on my best day. I am covered in my own filth as I stand before the Almighty. And as I put my hands in filth I am reminded [that] God left Heaven and came

to live in our filth. And He redeemed it. In this way He calls me to be an act of redemption on my street and redeem the places where people dump trash. Where they seek to kill themselves or others. And to get in the way. The entire time I am asking God to forgive our fathers for the sins that created this neighborhood and city, and then ask God to bless the saints who live here, that we can be salt and light. And take back from Satan the land he stole from Jesus.⁵

We need the gospel. We're hopeless before God without it. In Zechariah's vision, God told Satan to shut up. He took away Joshua's filthy clothes and reclothed him like royalty. This demonstrates what God does for each one of us when we come to Him.

When we feel guilt, shame, or regret, we can remember that God has silenced our accuser, removed our guilt, and reclothed us with His righteousness. He has decisively dealt with our sins—not just some of them, but all of them. Martin Luther, a priest who struggled with guilt more than five hundred years ago, discovered the gospel's power in dealing with sin and offers advice that still holds true today:

When the devil throws our sins up to us and declares that we deserve death and hell, we ought to speak thus: "I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? Does this mean that I shall be sentenced to eternal damnation? By no means. For I know One who suffered and made satisfaction in my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Where he is, there I shall be also."⁶

The gospel removes all condemnation from your life. We'll still encounter guilt and shame as long as we live, but we can keep turning to the gospel to remind ourselves that in Jesus we're

forgiven and reclothed in honor. Whenever we feel that we don't measure up, we can remind ourselves that God removes our shame. Because Jesus measures up, all who trust Jesus measure up too.

2. You're Loved and Accepted

Shea Glover, an eighteen-year-old high school student from Chicago, recently conducted a social experiment at her school. She recorded video of classmates, capturing their reactions before and after she explained her purpose: "I'm taking pictures of things I find beautiful." After being called beautiful, almost every face lit up with joy.⁷ We can't help but light up when we're appreciated.

We tend to think that God tolerates us but can't possibly be very happy with us. The gospel corrects us by announcing that, although we did nothing to deserve it, we are intimately loved and accepted by God. The prophet Zephaniah, at the end of an Old Testament book that includes some stern warnings for the people of God, wrote this startling truth:

"The LORD your God is in your midst,
 a mighty one who will save;
 he will rejoice over you with gladness;
 he will quiet you by his love;
 he will exult over you with loud singing."
 (Zeph. 3:17)

Isn't that staggering? God doesn't just tolerate us; He rejoices over us. He exults over us with loud singing. To *exult* means to express great joy, and can even include actions like leaping, shrieking ecstatically, and shouting with joy. God isn't reserved in His affections for His people. He overflows in love for us. We can now approach God like a young son approaches his loving father (Rom. 8:15). And hard things somehow seem easier when we know we're loved.

Jesus Himself said, “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus’ work is both the foundation of and the greatest evidence of God’s love for us. On the basis of this good news, nothing can separate us from God’s love (Rom. 8:35). We can’t mess it up. God doesn’t just tolerate us. He lavishes us with love. We apply the gospel when we remind ourselves of His love, and enter into the relationship Jesus has made possible for us. Because of the gospel, we enjoy intimacy with God Himself.

Remind yourself regularly: God loves those who trust Him. You are loved. Keep yourself close to this love (Jude 1:21).

3. You’ve Been Given the Power to Change

I once tried to ride a bike forty miles uphill. That may seem like nothing, but it was more than I could handle. I had to call my wife Charlene to come pick me up and drive me and the bike the rest of the way.

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In the same way, we lack the power to change ourselves. The story of the Bible is the story of human inability to obey God—at least until Jesus came. Jesus’ birth changed everything. When we believe, God gives us new hearts so

that we want to obey Him (Ezek. 36:26). He rewires us so that we don’t just *act* differently, but we *desire* differently. We begin to love the things that He loves. He gives us new desires (Ps. 37:4).

And God gives us the Holy Spirit to empower our obedience. When we follow Jesus, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead begins to work in us (Eph. 1:19–20). He begins to develop new characteristics within us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23). God guarantees that He will finish the work in us that He’s started (Phil. 1:6). He always finishes what He starts.

Of course we play a role. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul encouraged his readers to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. But even this is a product of God’s work within us. In the very next verse, Paul says it’s *God* who works in us so that we desire and act in new ways (Phil. 2:12–13). In fact, our role involves discipline and hard work (1 Cor. 9:27). But even our role is powered by God. Our hard work is necessary, but it’s only possible because God is empowering us to do this work.

An older friend told me that he biked through Holland. I was impressed by his athleticism until he told me that he used an e-bike. I don’t mean to insult e-bike riders, but I’m not sure you can say *you* cycled through Holland if your bike has an electric motor.

Once we follow Jesus, we’re all spiritual e-bikers. Nobody operates on their own power. God starts to work on us and gives us a power that we never had before. He’s renovating us from the inside out. When we struggle to change, we can remind ourselves that God has given us new hearts, and that He’s also given us the Holy Spirit to change and empower us. He gives us the power to change, and He always finishes what He’s started.

4. You’re Part of a New Family

Churches often don’t look like much. I’m not talking about the buildings; I’m talking about the people. It seems that they’re full of people like us: people who are imperfect, inconvenient, sometimes disappointing, and always a lot of work. But they’re also beautiful. Churches display the glory and wisdom of God. At their best they are foretastes of heaven. They’re where we grow, where we love and are loved, and where we learn what it means to be part of God’s family.

One of the greatest gifts God gives us through the gospel is membership in His family so that we don't have to live alone.

When I was a child, my father lived in Margate, a small resort town in southeast England. I lived in Canada and didn't see him regularly. My mother put my sister and me on a plane to visit him when I was twelve, which was one of the hardest things she'd ever done. She wanted us to know our dad, but she also knew that because of the complexity of international custody laws, she might never see us again.

I remember feeling lonely when we landed since I knew only one person on the continent, and I wasn't sure I could rely on him. But Dad picked us up promptly, which was a little reassuring. I still felt unsure of what would happen, though.

On our first Sunday we found our way to the Baptist church off the town square. I didn't know anyone there. I remember taking the bread and juice during Communion at the end of the service, and

somehow felt like I was no longer alone. I can't explain it. I just felt like I was with family. I somehow knew that I could count on these people if needed because the gospel had made me family with them. I knew, even at that age, that God's people are everywhere on earth.

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I felt this way again in Madison, Wisconsin, last year. Charlene and I ate at a restaurant in the town square. I knew only one person in the area and felt far from home. When food arrived at a nearby table, I watched as strangers bowed to thank God.

I didn't know them, but I experienced the same feeling of belonging. I knew we belonged together. Those of us who are in Christ have a big family. We're never alone.

What's true globally is also true locally. Because we started a church from scratch, I didn't have many people in my church family a few years ago. I'm glad I do now. As the church grew, so did my family. My local church family has faces and names. We laugh together, pray together, and learn from one another. It's not perfect; we annoy each other too, but that's okay. I love knowing that I'm not alone, and that I have people who are watching out for me, just as I'm watching out for them. We have nothing in common except for Jesus, and that's enough. Family isn't merely a metaphor: we are brothers and sisters because of the gospel.

This means that it's important to take our spiritual family seriously. When we understand that the local church is a family of brothers and sisters, we'll make it a priority in our lives. We won't settle for only attending worship services when it's convenient, nor will we approach church with a consumer mindset. We'll dig into the messiness of local church life, opening up our lives to our new spiritual family. Families are messy and costly, but worth it. When we live our lives like we really are spiritual brothers and sisters, it changes everything.

Family is one of the greatest blessings of the gospel. We're never alone. We have family everywhere. We can love and be loved and display God's glory in ways that we never could alone.

5. You Can Have Hope When You Suffer

I've learned to avoid giving easy answers when other people are suffering. It's usually much better to offer friendship, silent companionship, and practical help rather than words.

As I've walked through hard times myself and alongside others, I've discovered three truths that have been of great comfort.

First, it's okay to grieve. I'm grateful the Bible gives us permission to do this. In fact, the book of Psalms contains more songs of lament than any other kind of psalm. There's a time to weep, both for ourselves and with others who are going through difficult times (Rom. 12:15).

Second, we're invited to pray. My prayers in the middle of suffering aren't articulate, but that's okay. As Paul explained in his letter to the Romans, "For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26). God knows what we're saying even when we lack words. And more importantly, He cares.

Finally, I've found it helpful to remember that God is at work even through our suffering. I don't say this lightly, nor do I always understand it, but it's true. This won't erase the pain, but it allows us to rest in the fact that God hasn't lost control. He promises to work everything together for good in this life (Rom. 8:28), and He will wipe every tear from our eyes, and will eliminate death, mourning, and fear (Rev. 21:4). If you, like Sam Gamgee in *The Lord of the Rings*, wonder "is everything sad going to come untrue?"⁸ you're not alone.

We don't always understand what God is doing. "How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" exclaims Paul (Rom. 11:33). The gospel doesn't give us the *answers*, but it gives us *assurance* that God hasn't abandoned us.

These truths don't eliminate our tears or short-circuit our grief, but they provide immeasurable comfort. God is so committed to us in Jesus that He has promised to use even the hard things in life for our ultimate good, even if we can't see it at the time.

6. You Can Know Your Life Has Meaning

Recent data indicates that early retirement may lead to a shorter life span.⁹ It turns out that we gain economic, social, and

other benefits from our work. We thrive when our lives are full of purpose, meaning, and identity.

The gospel is what truly gives us what our souls crave: a deep sense of our innate value and identity. Through the gospel, we

become God's own children, His precious possession, His royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). We're given important tasks that matter for eternity—to make disciples and to use our gifts to serve others (Matt. 28:18–20; 1 Peter 4:10–11).

I often feel insignificant. When I focus on the fact that I'm one of 7.6 billion people alive on a tiny planet in a vast universe, it doesn't seem to matter how hard I work or what I leave behind. I will be forgotten. A hundred years from now, nobody will even remember that I was alive.

Yet I won't be forgotten by God. I've been adopted by Him. Scripture tells us we matter and none of our work for Him will be wasted (1 Cor. 15:58). We're given an identity that can't be taken away, and our actions matter, not just now but for eternity. We have everything we need to live lives of significance.

7. You Have an Example to Follow

We often learn best by example. The problem with examples is that they can sometimes discourage us. Usain Bolt doesn't encourage me to be a better runner, for instance. He encourages me to give up because no matter how hard I try, I'll never run like him.

If we're not careful, the example of Jesus might dishearten us because we feel we can never measure up. But when we're gripped by what Jesus did for us, His example actually motivates us. I had a hard time forgiving somebody a couple of years ago. Remembering how much Jesus forgave me when I didn't deserve it motivated

We're given important tasks that matter for eternity—to make disciples and to use our gifts to serve others.

me to extend forgiveness to that individual (Luke 7:47). It didn't happen instantly or easily, but it happened. The gospel served as an example and motivation at the same time.

Jesus provides an example for us in so many areas. The Bible uses Jesus' actions as a pattern for us, and it also gives us the power to follow this pattern, which we couldn't do on our own. We may not want to be generous, until we consider how generous Jesus has been to us (2 Cor. 8:9). Men may not know how to love their wives, but they learn from and are motivated by the way Jesus treasures the church, His bride (Eph. 5:25–30). When we're mistreated, we can remember that Jesus was mistreated for us (1 Peter 2:21–25). When we see what Jesus did for us, it motivates us to follow His example.

BRINGING THE GOSPEL TO LIFE

The gospel doesn't just bring us into right relationship with God and assure us of our future with Him; it also provides rich resources for dealing with every part of life—our marriages, work

lives, relationships, habits, bodies, emotions, and more. It has the power to change every part of our lives from the inside out. There's nothing that it leaves alone.

The gospel isn't just good news that gets us to heaven. It's not even a set of resources or benefits that we get to enjoy. It's God Himself, who is

The gospel isn't just good news that gets us to heaven.

It's God Himself, who is in relationship with us, who is transforming us, and who gives us everything that we need.

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The old hymn “How Firm a Foundation, Ye Saints of the Lord” asks the question: “What more can He say than to you He hath said, / who unto the Savior for refuge have fled?” Good question. God hasn’t held back. He’s lavished believers with benefits through the gospel that we can apply to our lives. The Bible assures us that change is possible as we enjoy the intimacy with God that is ours through the gospel, and as we live off its benefits. We can be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2).

God has given us untold riches. Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers that they would have “the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:18). This should be our prayer too: that we grow in our knowledge of the riches we have in the gospel, and that we begin to live with the knowledge that all these riches are ours and more.

Fighting shame or feeling guilty? Don’t believe the lies. God silences your accuser, and He’s re clothed you with the righteousness of Jesus. The final verdict has been spoken over your life, and nothing can change that.

Criticized, justly or unjustly? Worse things could be said about us all, but God knows the worst about us and has chosen to pardon and love us, and the court’s been adjourned.

Disappointed by the actions of others, or feeling lonely? You couldn’t be more loved than you are in Christ. You have the love of your Father. He exults over you. He sings over you.

Frustrated by your lack of progress? Struggling with negative or damaging patterns of behavior? God is at work in your life. He promises His power. He’s changing you from the inside out, and He always finishes what He starts.

Tired of trying to make it on your own? He’s given you a family, and that family is everywhere. He invites you to join part of His family near you to display His glory and to love and be loved.

Going through hard times? God knows and God cares. He invites us to grieve, pray, and trust that He's at work even when it's hard. He will one day wipe the tears from our eyes and eliminate death, mourning, and fear (Rev. 21:3–5).

Looking for purpose? God gives us a new identity, meaning, and responsibility. Your life matters because of the gospel. You're now called to faithfully use everything He's given you—your time, body, and more.

Need motivation? The blessings of the gospel motivate us to live lives of worship, gratitude, and service. We've been given an example to follow.

Feeling insecure? The gospel motivates us to stop looking at ourselves and instead look to Jesus, and to begin to put others ahead of us. It gives us the freedom of self-forgetfulness.¹⁰ We'll get to what we must do soon enough. The place to begin, though, is with the good news of what Jesus has done for us.

I started this chapter with the story of Lola, a woman who grew up in slavery. In some ways, Lola's not like us. She did nothing to deserve her slavery. She was a victim. We're culpable in our slavery. We've rebelled against God.

The place to begin is with the good news of what Jesus has done for us.

We are like Lola in one way—we have a hard time accepting our freedom. Once Alex invited Lola to live with him, she continued old behaviors: She threw nothing out. She rifled through the trash to make sure others hadn't thrown out anything useful. She washed and reused paper towels. She kept grocery bags, yogurt containers, and pickle jars. She was free and had everything she needed, yet she continued to live like a poor slave. We're the same. Though we've been set free, we often live like the resources of the gospel aren't ours.

Our greatest problem isn't that we lack freedom. We've been offered freedom and unimaginable wealth through the gospel. Our problem is that we have a hard time living as if it's true.

The key to living like you believe Jesus has freed you from your old identity as a slave is having "the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might" (Eph. 1:18–19). In other words, we must *accept* what's true and then *live* like it's true.

We'll get to what we must do soon enough. The place to begin, though, is with the good news of what Jesus has *done* for us. Believe it. Celebrate it. This news gives us everything we need to grow.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- The gospel sets us free, but we tend to continue living like we're slaves.
- The gospel is the good news that God has chosen to rescue His people and the world through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- The gospel changes everything personally and relationally. It will eventually lead to the renewal of the whole world.
- The gospel gives us immediate benefits when we believe. It also gives us ongoing benefits for all of life.
- The gospel frees us from guilt and shame.
- Because of the gospel and through the gospel, God lavishes us with love. He doesn't tolerate us; He exults over us.
- God transforms us from the inside out. He gives us the

Holy Spirit to change, and promises that He will complete the process of transformation.

- God puts us into community so that we can love and be loved, and display His glory.
- God cares for us in our griefs, uses even our suffering for our good, and will one day undo and banish all that's bad.
- God fills our lives with identity, meaning, and responsibility.
- When we consider what Jesus has done for us, we're motivated to follow His example.
- God gives us even more riches than these. We can pray to know and enjoy more of the blessings He gives us through the gospel.

Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

1. How would you explain the gospel?
2. What truth about the gospel means the most to you?
3. Why do you think we often treat the gospel as old news rather than the best news ever?
4. This chapter outlines seven things that are true for those who have trusted Jesus. Which of the seven truths means the most to you right now?



What Do I Do Now?

- Pick a truth about the gospel, and spend some time thinking about it. Ask God to allow you to really understand it both intellectually and emotionally.
- Consider whether you have responded to the gospel with repentance and faith. If you haven't, I encourage you to do so today.
- Think about one way your life would change if you really believed the gospel is true. Ask God to begin to make that change happen.
- Pray that you would have “the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints” (Eph. 1:18).