

STUDY GUIDE

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the
unbelievable
gospel



SAY SOMETHING WORTH BELIEVING

How to Use this Study Guide

This study guide is designed to help small groups (3-15 people) use *The Unbelievable Gospel* in a more practical, communal, and focused way.

How can you make the most of your weekly discussions?

- Have a leader. You will need someone to help bring focus and lead the discussion (tips on how to lead using this guide are on the following page).
- Everyone should have a study guide and come prepared.
- Take notes and capture your thoughts throughout this study guide. This will help you be able to internalize and reflect later.
- Reflect on the excerpts from *The Unbelievable Gospel* that are highlighted in orange.
- Earnestly engage in gospel conversations while you are reading this book and going through this study. Don't wait until you are done. If you learn something, apply it!
- Remember: sharing the gospel is not a performance. *People are not projects; they are persons made in the image of God.*

Each element is specifically designed to be a catalyst for growth and deeper learning. This is what you can expect to find each week:

BIG PICTURE:

These are the big ideas the guide will focus on each week.

DISCUSSION:

This is a time to engage the book and the Scriptures. Transformation happens best in community. These discussion questions are meant to foster learning, clarify concepts, and create focused application. It should be a fun conversation, not an oral exam.

This section is designed for heart transformation in the evangelist; to see how the gospel is good news to those who believe and share it. Also, questions may expose areas of unbelief in your own life. Allow time for everyone to share and for follow-up questions with each person.

LATER THIS WEEK:

How are you going to apply this stuff? How are you going to continue processing and applying what you have learned? Expect to do these weekly assignments. They are not suggestions; they are part of the process.

Tips for Facilitating Discussions

HOW CAN YOU LEAD YOUR WEEKLY DISCUSSIONS?

- Be Prepared. Read all of *The Unbelievable Gospel* by Jonathan Dodson before beginning this guide and leading others through it. Read through all nine weeks of the study guide before beginning week one. This will give you an understanding of the scope and sequence of the study.
- Continually cast vision for why your group is doing this study.
- Lay the ground work for open conversation by creating an atmosphere where everyone is listened to and encouraged to share.
- Allow for an hour of discussion. You might not be able to get to all the questions, so pick a few of the best ones for your group.
- Follow-up on the **Later This Week** section each week. If everyone is faithful to do these things, it will create a truly dynamic experience for everyone.
- Pray! When the guide says pray, really pray! Allow all who are willing to pray for folks who do not believe.

WEEK 1:

Intro to Sharing a Believable Gospel

BIG PICTURE:

- The foundation for what evangelism is and isn't
- The difference between a believable and unbelievable gospel
- Our own intentions and perspectives on evangelism

DISCUSSION:

Discuss what you hope to learn or how would you like to grow during this study.

WHAT IS EVANGELISM?

1. What is evangelism? What associations do you have with the word “evangelism”? How does it make you feel?
2. What have been some of your experiences with evangelism (as the initiator or the receiver)?
3. Can you identify with evangelistic failure? Share a story of your own failure.
4. Why do Christians have to do evangelism?

Atheist Penn Jillette of illusionist duo Penn and Teller frames this dilemma in stark terms:

“If you believe that there’s a heaven and a hell, and people could be going to hell or not getting eternal life, and you think that it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward . . . how much do you have to hate somebody to not proselytize? How much do you have to hate somebody to believe ever-lasting life is possible and not tell them that?”

If Jesus did die and rise for the world, then it is incumbent on us, his followers, to tell others how and why the gospel is good.

5. How do you or people you know feel pressure with evangelism? What’s wrong with pressure evangelism?

While it is good to want to share your faith, to tell others the good news about Jesus and what he has done for them, in many cases that pressure we feel to evangelize isn’t good, especially when it drives us to manipulate others or to try to force a conversion.

6. What are some of the sources of the pressure we feel in evangelism (God’s approval, approval of others, approval of ourselves)?
7. How does our desire for approval or performance contradict the gospel?
8. What is the difference between an “unbelievable” and a “believable” gospel?

RETHINKING EVANGELISM

1. What do you think of this definition of evangelism by missiologist David Bosch?

“Evangelism is: the core, heart, or center of mission: it consists in the

proclamation of salvation in Christ to nonbelievers, in announcing forgiveness of sins, in calling people to repentance and faith in Christ, in inviting them to become living members of Christ's earthly community and to begin a life in the power of the Spirit."

2. What are the various components of this definition?
3. How does this differ from what you have previously understood evangelism to be?

New methods aren't enough. Our whole understanding of evangelism needs to change—our motivations, our methods, and even our message. Our motives, message, and methods are all intertwined, pulling us together as humans on mission.

LATER THIS WEEK:

- Reflect on these questions:
 - What emotions or objections come to mind when you think about evangelism?
 - What do you do with “evangelistic pressure”?
 - What would change if you were compelled, not by pressure, but by the love of Christ?
- Read Chapter 2: Impersonal Witness.

WEEK 2:

Impersonal Witness

BIG PICTURE:

- Rethinking and re-understanding evangelism ourselves
- The difference between relationship and evangelistic project
- The role of work and faith

DISCUSSION:

1. What keeps you from sharing the gospel? What are some issues, feelings, or stereotypes that prevent you from sharing the gospel with people you love?

One thing that prevents people from sharing the gospel is the fear of being impersonal.

THE EVANGELISTIC PROJECT

1. How do you engage in relationships in your life?
2. Have you ever had an evangelistic project? Someone you were trying to convert, either on a mission trip or in life? How did that go, what was it like?
3. What are the consequences of an impersonal witness in our current cultural climate?
4. Consider this example:

The ‘workplace evangelist’ campaigns for Jesus in the office without taking the time to really know people. Blinded by passion (and/ or performance), she doesn’t see what everyone else sees—a Christian looking to clear her evangelistic conscience. She treats people like projects and grades herself on how well she performs with them. Each project is graded on a check system:

- *Not saying anything about Jesus earns a “Check Minus”*
- *Saying Jesus’ name in conversation earns a “Check”*
- *Mentioning what Jesus did (on the cross, for your sins) earns a “Check Plus”*
- *Giving a “whole gospel presentation” earns a gold star.*

5. Have you ever encountered this person before? Have you ever been this person?

Read: Hebrews 11.

6. According to this chapter, what is faith?

7. How was faith expressed in the people described in this chapter?

8. What is the correspondence between what we have faith in and what we do?

9. How should our faith and work relate to one another?

10. Is it possible to share our faith in the workplace, in a way that is respectful and honoring to God? How?

BELIEVABLE EVANGELISM

Good evangelism takes time. When Francis Schaeffer was asked what he would do if he had an hour with a non-Christian, he replied by saying he would listen for fifty-five minutes. Then, in those last five minutes, he would have something to say.

1. Can you imagine spending 55 minutes listening to anyone? What is hard for you about having deep conversations? What is easy?

FIVE WAYS TO HAVE DEEP CONVERSATIONS:

- *Ask questions; it isn't just about giving answers.*
- *Focus on the heart, not just on the mind.*
- *Steer conversation, with love and wisdom, toward deeply held beliefs and desires.*
- *Value and affirm the insights of skeptics and seekers.*
- *Tell stories from—and to—the heart.*

2. Which of these is most challenging to you? Which could you implement today?

LATER THIS WEEK:

- Meditate on and memorize Col. 4:5.
- Pray daily for the people God has put in your life who need to hear the gospel, that you would take the time to listen and get to know them.

- Read Chapter 3: Preachy Witness | Self-Righteous Proselytizing.

WEEK 3:

Preachy Witness | Self-Righteous Proselytizing

BIG PICTURE:

- The difference between evangelism and proselytizing
- Our role in evangelism
- How our evangelism exposes the idols of our hearts

DISCUSSION:

One of the reasons people often find it difficult to share their faith is because they don't want to be perceived as preachy.

1. Have you ever been accused of being “preachy,” or are you ever aware of acting self-righteous?
2. Why do you (or other people) sometimes act like this? How does it make others feel?
3. How have you encountered preachy Christianity? Do you think God uses it? If so, what's wrong with it?

EVANGELISM IS NOT PROSELYTIZING

1. What do you think motivates proselytizing?
2. How is proselytizing like recruitment?

The problem with being a spiritual recruiter is that we often enlist people into the wrong things. We recruit to what we are really into, what we think is most important. Some focus on a political party, or a moral code, or a view of the book of Revelation. Others try to recruit to a particular form or denomination of church, or a doctrinal stance. None of these is about Jesus.

3. What stumbling blocks do you tend to put in front of the gospel (political, moral, theological, or cultural)?

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:19-21

1. What does it mean that we are entrusted with the message of reconciliation?
2. What does it mean that God is making his appeal through us?
3. What are ambassadors like today? For example, how does the US ambassador to Guatemala function?

In contrast to proselytizers, who act as spiritual recruiters for God, evangelists are announcers. We announce the good news of grace, alert people to the promise of forgiveness, and share the hope of new life. As emissaries of King Jesus, we simply spread the saving word of his kingdom. We show people where it is, and how to enter it—through Jesus. As ambassadors, we realize we have neither the power nor the responsibility to change people.

4. How is evangelism different from proselytizing?

CHANGING THE “PREACHY” PERCEPTION

1. How could the gospel free us from being perceived as

preachy and self-righteous?

The gospel reminds us that we don't have what it takes to stand before a holy God, that Christ alone has what it takes, and that he died and rose to give that to us.

2. What are some things that happen when we avoid being preachy by being silent?
3. What do you think about this quote:

People won't be able to get past preachy images of religion unless someone "preaches" a message of grace to them.

4. How can we preach the gospel without being preachy?

EVANGELISM EXPOSES OUR HEARTS

Evangelistic errors like preachy self-righteousness and proselytizing or recruitment often spring from a functional faith in something other than Jesus.

1. Do you tend to invite people to have faith in something other than the gospel (e.g. political views, good morals, community, the "right" church, doctrine, pastor, etc.)? What does this reveal about where your hope and passion lie?
2. Do any of the following thoughts or arguments characterize your approach to evangelism? What does that reveal about your heart?
 - *The proselytizer: "You can swap out your inferior beliefs and community for my superior beliefs and better community."*

- *The debater: “If I can just disprove my coworker’s belief system and expose them to a lot of people who have my beliefs, then they will be swept into Christianity.”*
- *The recruiter: “Join my social network, we are better and more fun than your friends.”*
- *The secret agent: “Just keep your head down and be quiet and try to ride out the storm of life.”*

Evangelism is not about recruitment to a cause or community... The gospel requires much more than mere belief, a switch in doctrines; it requires faith, a switch in saviors. What does your evangelism say about who your savior is?

LATER THIS WEEK:

- Meditate on 2 Corinthians 5:19-21.
- Think about the people in your life. What are they being recruited to?
- Read chapter 4: Intolerant Witness | Navigating Pluralism

WEEK 4:

Intolerant Witness | Navigating Pluralism

BIG PICTURE:

- Understanding the difference between classic and new tolerance
- Religious pluralism and how we respond to it.

DISCUSSION:

1. Share a time that you encountered someone with a different faith. How did you respond?
2. Have you ever felt the pressure to be “politically correct” and “tolerant” when talking to someone else of a different religion or who believed that all faiths lead to truth (or all paths lead to God)? Where does that pressure come from?
3. How can you be engaged in meaningful conversations with those who do not believe or believe that all religions are the same?
4. What is tolerance?

CLASSICAL TOLERANCE

Classical tolerance is *the belief that other opinions have a right to exist.*

THE NEW TOLERANCE

New tolerance is *the belief that all opinions are equally valid or true.*

1. What is the difference between old tolerance and the new tolerance? Which do you tend toward?
2. Tolerance can be either an expression of Christian love or an expression of relational (and intellectual) carelessness. How do you know if your tolerance is loving or careless?
3. How is new tolerance disrespectful to all faiths (relationally careless)?

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: IS JESUS THE ONLY WAY?

1. What do we know in the Bible about Jesus' exclusivity? (John 3:16-18 & 3:36, John 10:9, John 11:25, John 14:6, Acts 4:12, 1 Cor. 3:11, 1 Tim. 2:5, 1 John 2:22-23, 1 John 5:12)

Religious pluralism is the belief that no one can have an exclusive claim to God or religious truth. There are many ways to God.

2. How should Christians respond to the claims of pluralism?
3. Do you agree or disagree with Jonathan in this quote?

The claim of the religious pluralist is arrogant because it seeks to enforce its own belief on others. It says to those who humbly and faithfully practice other religions: "You must believe what I believe, not what you believe. Your way isn't right; in fact all of your ways are wrong and my way is right. There isn't just one way to God (insert your religion); there are many ways. You are wrong and I am right."

4. Is religious pluralism enlightened, humble, and tolerant?

HOW DO WE RESPOND TO PLURALISM?

In the book, Jonathan challenges us to pursue persuasive tolerance:

Persuasive tolerance starts with deep convictions, but without the motive of forcing or manipulating others to agree with us. We enter into dialogue with other faiths out of a genuine desire to learn and to share what we believe. We do not abandon our deeply held convictions. That would be inauthentic. Instead, persuasive tolerance extends people the dignity of their own beliefs, while also freely making a case for one's own belief. If we believe that eternal life is only found in knowing Jesus Christ, then tolerant persuasion is an act of love.

1. What would persuasive tolerance look like in your existing relationships?
2. What frees us to allow people the dignity and conviction of their own beliefs?

Jesus claimed to answer the deepest questions of life. If his teachings are true, then we have every reason to talk deeply with others about meaning, faith, and truth. Jesus gives us every reason to be classically tolerant, full of love, and persuasively engaged in the things that matter most.

3. How can you be engaged in meaningful conversations with those who do not believe or believe that all religions are the same?

LATER THIS WEEK:

- Meditate on and memorize Ephesians 1:7.
- Engage in a meaningful conversation with someone about the deepest questions of life, i.e. death, meaning, purpose, contentment.

- Read Chapter 5: The Uninformed Evangelist.

WEEK 5:

The Uninformed Evangelist

BIG PICTURE:

- What is apologetics?
- What is a thinking faith?
- Our source of security

DISCUSSION:

One of the most common objections about evangelism is: “I don’t know enough.” People say, “What if someone asks me a question I don’t have an answer to?”

Explain how you feel unprepared for skeptics’ questions.

THINKING CHRISTIANITY

1. Have you ever had an experience when your beliefs were challenged and you had no answers? How did you handle it? How did that feel?

Many today consider Christianity to be an unthinking faith, something for the mindless masses. But the Bible underscores the importance of reason, frequently calling us to think and to engage our minds. Consider these passages, what do they say about the value of the mind?

- *Mark 12:30*
- *Acts 17:17; cf. 17:2; 18:4, 19*

- *Hebrews 11:3*
- *1 Peter 3:14–15*

2. What do you think of apologetics?

An apologetic is a reasoned statement of gospel belief, often presented in response to questions about the Christian faith. It is a defense of faith with reason.

Read Paul's defense of faith with Jewish Leaders in Acts 22.

3. How does Paul explain his gospel belief? What are their questions? What does he appeal to? What stories, culture, heritage?
4. Now read Paul's defense of faith with Greek thinkers and philosophers in 17:22–31.
5. How does Paul explain his gospel belief? What are their questions? What does he appeal to? What references, stories, cultural images does he use?
6. How does Paul's apologetic change? Why do you think it is different?

A thinking faith requires a willingness to learn and to adapt to circumstances so that we can communicate the gospel fluently in ideas, idioms, and words our hearers can understand.

Thinking faith isn't a matter of rehearsing canned apologetic defenses; it's a commitment to thinking deeply about the implications of the gospel in various cultures and then working to communicate that to people in those contexts.

Read: Colossians 4:5–6

7. According to this passage, how should we defend our faith? What is our posture?
8. What element of this passage is challenging for you? Why is it difficult to be wise, gracious, seasoned, and provide answers?

GETTING BEYOND INSECURITY

Read: 1 Peter 3:14-15

1. What four commands does Peter give us?
2. How have we put our hope in possessing right answers instead of having right answers for an existing hope?
3. What areas of Christianity do you feel intellectually unsure about? What can you do to settle your own doubts or prepare to answer others' questions?
4. What thoughts undermine our confidence, diminish our trust in Christ, and redirect us away from speaking about Jesus? Which of the following most rings true?
 - *“You won’t have all the right answers.”*
 - *“Do you really think you can convince this person to trust Jesus?”*
 - *“You should bring them a book instead or have a smarter Christian talk to them.”*
 - *“They will think you are dumb or ignorant.”*

- *“You will get nervous and the gospel will sound weird.”*

While we may not have the ability to answer every question, Jesus gives us the ability to be secure in our faith. True apologetics begins with heartfelt confidence in Jesus.

5. How can you honor Christ as lord in your heart?
6. What would it look like to have confidence in Jesus?

LATER THIS WEEK:

- Reflect on and memorize 1 Peter 3:14-15.
- Think about what the next step is for you to engage in “thinking Christianity”.
- Read Chapter 6: Clarity | Gaining a Fresh Vision of the Gospel.

WEEK 6:

Clarity | Gaining a Fresh Vision of the Gospel

BIG PICTURE:

- The Historical Gospel—How the gospel changes what you believe
- The Personal Gospel—How the gospel changes who you are
- The Cosmic Gospel—How the gospel changes where you live

DISCUSSION:

To avoid running off track, we need re-evangelization—a fresh preaching of the gospel to Christians and for cultures.

We can heed evangelism critiques and gain fresh witnessing methods, and remain unmotivated to share the gospel. Why? Because there is a defeater underneath the defeaters—fear of what others think of us.

CLARITY: GAINING A FRESH VISION OF THE GOSPEL

1. What does reputation and character mean to you?
2. What do you do to manage what people think of you?
3. What motivates us to manage people's impressions of us?
Fluff our resumés? Tell white lies?
4. What do you think of this quote? Do you Agree/Disagree?

“It may very well be the case that embarrassment is the most feared form of persecution for many Christians today.”—Burk Parsons

Read: Proverbs 29:25

5. How can we be free from what others think of us?
6. What is the doctrine of adoption? What truth does it bring you when you are struggling with enslavement to the approval of others, reputation guarding, or perception management?
7. How does the gospel and doctrine of adoption free us from the fear of man?
8. How does the Holy Spirit help us fight the fear of others' disapproval/desire for others' praise?

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The gospel is the good and true story that Jesus has defeated sin, death, and evil through his own death and resurrection and is making all things new, even us.

The gospel is historical, personal, and cosmic.

- *Historical—Jesus' true story of “death and resurrection”*
- *Personal—Jesus' defeating of sin and death for “even us”*
- *Cosmic—Jesus' overthrow of evil*

Read: Ephesians 2:1-10

1. How does the gospel change what we believe? *The gospel is historical, Christ-centered, and newsworthy. The historical nature of the gospel message changes what we believe. The gospel is history-making news.*

Read: Titus 3:4 – 6

2. How does the gospel change who we are? The gospel is a humbling, transforming message of grace.

Read: Isaiah 61 and Luke 4:18

3. How does the gospel change where we live? *The gospel brings spiritual, social, and cultural renewal.*
4. What happens if we don't embrace all three dimensions of the gospel—doctrinal, personal, and social? What would happen if your focus was exclusively on the doctrinal dimension? Personal dimension? Social dimension?
5. Which of the three dimensions of the gospel are weakest in your discipleship?

LATER THIS WEEK:

- Memorize and reflect on Titus 3:4-6.
- Reflect: If we are called to redeem social ill, make great culture, and share a whole gospel, which expression do you need to work on?
- Read Chapter 7: Diversity | Handling the Gospel in its Different Forms.

WEEK 7:

Diversity | Handling the Gospel in Its Different Forms

BIG PICTURE:

- How the Bible communicates the gospel through diverse metaphors.
- Different ways to handle the gospel
- How Paul and Jesus Speak the Gospel

DISCUSSION:

Both Jesus and Paul were good conversationalists and evangelists. Let's consider Paul first.

Read: Acts 17:2, 17-31 and Acts 18:4, 19

1. What does Paul do in these passages? What words are used to describe his activity?
2. How does Paul articulate the gospel in these passages?

Now, let's consider Jesus.

Read: Luke 11:37–54, Luke Luke 13, John 3:1–8, John 4:1–34

3. How does Jesus articulate the gospel in each? What images,

methods, aspects of the gospel does Jesus share?

4. Do Paul and Jesus share every aspect of the gospel each time? What do they do? Why did Paul and Jesus share the gospel?
5. What surprises you about Jesus and Paul's approach to evangelism in comparison to modern forms of evangelism?

Paul and Jesus were well aware of the condition of their listeners' hearts. Paul describes our hearts as darkened (Romans 1:21), boxed up in a coffin (Ephesians 2:1), dead and lifeless. Without the shining light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4), darkened hearts aren't illuminated and dead bodies don't truly live.

GOSPEL METAPHORS

The Scriptures contain a variety of different ways of communicating the gospel, what we have been calling gospel metaphors.

Taken together, these gospel metaphors bring the full range of God's transformative grace to us in Jesus. But at the head of the five metaphors is our union with Christ.

- *Justification (legal metaphor). In Jesus, a righteous God relates to unrighteous people— by making us righteous*
- *Redemption (slavery and sacrificial metaphors). In Jesus, our incurable sinful status is uniquely cured— he absorbs our sin and dies our death.*
- *Adoption (familial metaphor). In Jesus, we are adopted out of the satanic family and placed into God's family.*
- *New Creation (life and death metaphors). In Jesus, the old life is*

exiled and a new life introduced— through his resurrection life.

- *Union with Christ (body-marriage metaphors). In Jesus, a life divided from God is united with him to enjoy all his graces.*

Gospel metaphors are not symbolic of a deeper reality, but represent different facets of the one and only gospel, revealing its depth, complexity, and power.

1. Which of these metaphors is most appealing to you?
2. Which is the dominant image you tend to associate with the gospel?
3. Which gospel metaphors do you need to study further to understand them more clearly?

LATER THIS WEEK:

- Begin thinking about how to apply a metaphor to a challenge you are facing.
- Read Chapter 8: Fluency | Speaking the Gospel in the Cultural Key.

WEEK 8:

Fluency | Speaking the Gospel in the Cultural Key

BIG PICTURE:

- Getting out of Christian Cultural Ghettos
- What the mission of God looks like
- Patient Evangelism

DISCUSSION:

Cultural engagement is one of the reasons the early church was so successful at evangelism. They had a habit of getting into the mind-set of pagans and Jews alike to transpose the gospel into the appropriate key.

1. What does getting into the mind-set of non-Christians look like for us today?

For many, the first step is figuring out how to escape our Christian ghettos. Living in the Christian subculture can make it difficult to know, much less engage, the non-Christians around us.

2. How can we escape our Christian ghettos?
3. What is scary/exciting about leaving our Christian subculture?

MISSION IN POST-CHRISTENDOM

In addition to loosening the American moral fabric, the collapse of Christendom leaves behind a rubble of theological understanding. As the dust settles, we can no longer assume that people know what words like Christ, sin, faith, and God mean.

1. What do your friends and neighbors think words like Christ, sin, faith, gospel, and God mean?
2. What are some ways that your friends and neighbors misunderstand Christianity? If you don't know, ask them what comes to mind when they hear these words: sin, Christ, faith, and God.

Good evangelists have to slow down long enough to understand what people hear and how they speak in order to communicate the gospel in intelligible ways. This involves listening to what people think in order to communicate meaningfully what God thinks. It involves listening to the questions people ask in order to ask them good questions, the questions God asks each of us.

3. How can we become better listeners? Why is it hard for us to listen to others?
4. How can you adjust your lifestyle to engage more non-Christians and develop genuine friendships with them?

LATER THIS WEEK:

- Think about a way to communicate these concepts that is both biblically accurate and culturally clear. Try doing it next time you talk to a friend.
- Read Chapters 9, 10, and 11 in *The Unbelievable Gospel*

WEEK 9:

Gospel Metaphors : Part 1

BIG PICTURE:

- Justification: For Those Seeking Acceptance
- New Creation: For Those Seeking Hope
- Union with Christ: For Those Seeking Intimacy

DISCUSSION:

Review the gospel metaphors:

The Scriptures contain a variety of different ways of communicating the gospel, what we have been calling gospel metaphors.

Gospel metaphors bring the full range of God's transformative grace to us in Jesus. But at the head of the five metaphors is our union with Christ.

- *Justification (legal metaphor).*
- *Redemption (slavery and sacrificial metaphors).*
- *Adoption (familial metaphor).*
- *New Creation (life and death metaphors).*
- *Union with Christ (body-marriage metaphors).*

Gospel metaphors are not symbolic of a deeper reality, but represent different facets of the one and only gospel, revealing its depth, complexity, and power.

JUSTIFICATION: FOR THOSE SEEKING ACCEPTANCE

One of the greatest needs people have today is to be accepted, to know that they are welcome and won't be rejected. Though we may try to deny or hide it, we all carry with us a sense of shame, a fear that we will be found out, rejected, and judged when people learn who we really are.

1. How do you express your need to be accepted?
2. What is so terrible about rejection? What is so good about being welcomed?

The hope of justification is that we can be perfectly and completely accepted by the one who matters most — God the Father. However, many of us attempt to justify ourselves or make ourselves acceptable.

Tim Chester helpfully breaks down several ways people attempt to justify themselves:

- *Proving yourself to yourself*
- *Proving yourself to others*
- *Proving yourself to God*

3. What are some other ways people seek acceptance? How is Jesus better than that object or person?
4. As you think about your own heart and life, how do you try to justify yourself?

5. How does the gospel make us acceptable to God?
6. How would you explain the metaphor of Justification in your own words?
7. Do you know anyone seeking acceptance? How can you offer them the hope of justification in Christ?

NEW CREATION: FOR THOSE SEEKING HOPE

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:17

1. How do we become new creation? Why is this hopeful? Why do we need to be made new?

The metaphor of new creation can be especially compelling for people who are longing for a new start in life. People whose lives have been littered with failure, scarred by abuse, humbled through suffering, or ruined by addiction need the hope of becoming a new creation. The hope of the new creation appeals to anyone who senses that they have been living in sin before a holy God and who long to escape from their old life of sin to experience the freedom of new life in Christ.

New creation promises to rectify us with God and the world, alleviating despair and injecting hope into the human heart.

2. What kind of people that might be seeking hope?
3. Can you think of other metaphors related to new creation?
4. What are some other ways to communicate hope to the hopeless?
5. Do you know anyone who needs to hear about the hope of new creation?

6. How could you communicate the hope of new creation to them in your own language?

UNION WITH CHRIST: FOR THOSE SEEKING INTIMACY

1. Where do you look for intimacy?
2. What do you expect to receive in relationships?

Our search for intimacy is revealed in relationships. In our friendships we long for a sense that we belong, for a place where we can be ourselves and know that we are accepted. We want relationships that are secure, where we feel safe to share our innermost thoughts and darkest struggles.

Our therapeutic culture reinforces the idea that we deserve to have all our longings fulfilled by others. These good, deep longings—to know others and be known without fear of rejection—can only be met by someone big enough to fulfill them.

3. How do relationships and our pursuit of intimacy in others let us down?
4. How do you know when someone is searching for intimacy? Can you spot anyone like that in your life?
5. How could you communicate the hope of union with Christ to them in your own language?

The good news tells us that there is only one relationship that can bear the weight of our inordinate desires for intimacy and love—union with Christ.

6. What is union with Christ?

Ephesians 1 shows us that all the heavenly blessings come rushing to us “in Christ Jesus” (1:3) including: election, grace, redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness, and sealing by the Spirit.

Read: Ephesians 2:4-10

7. What are each of the things, according to this passage, that we receive from our union in Christ?
8. How can you share the hope of union with Christ?

LATER THIS WEEK:

- Have one of the people on your list over for a meal or get together for drinks/coffee and simply listen to their story and their life. Be praying and listening to how they struggle and what good news would be for them.
- Pray daily for the folks God has put in your life to share the gospel with.
- Read Chapters 12, 13, and 14 in *The Unbelievable Gospel*.

WEEK 10:

Gospel Metaphors : Part 2

BIG PICTURE:

- Metaphor of Redemption: For Those Seeking Tolerance
- Metaphor of Adoption: For Those Seeking Approval
- Evangelism in Community

DISCUSSION:

1. What are gospel metaphors? Why are they helpful?

REDEMPTION: FOR THOSE SEEKING TOLERANCE

Read: Ephesians 1:7

1. Why is Christianity unique among the religions? How does redemption relate to tolerance?
2. How does Jesus offer redemptive tolerance? What does Jesus tolerate at the cross?
3. Do you know anyone who practices the new tolerance? How could you communicate the difference between classical and new tolerance to them in a winsome way?
4. What are some ways you could describe the unique contribution of redemption in Christ to people who practice new tolerance?

ADOPTION: FOR THOSE SEEKING APPROVAL

1. Why do we desire approval? How do we seek approval? Who do we seek approval from?

The gospel of adoption confers what we truly need—admiration of a holy God and enjoyment of his perfect love.

2. How does the gospel of adoption offer more than even the best of parents or mentors?
3. What happens when we replace the gospel of adoption for the approval of others?
4. Many people have issues with their Dad. Make a point of asking people about their parents and inquire to understand their view of their father.
5. What is difficult about trusting in our approval of God, the Father compared to others?
6. How could you genuinely express the comfort you have received by experiencing the love of the Father?

EVANGELISM IN COMMUNITY

The church is God's evangelistic genius, not isolated people with evangelistic drive. In fact, people rarely come to faith from a single gospel witness. Most conversions are the result of a process that occurs over time and involves a variety of different gospel testimonies and experiences.

In most cases, each person who heard a gospel metaphor from me also heard the gospel and saw its power in community. This collective witness is, more often than not, how God discloses his manifold wisdom to

the world (Ephesians 4:4–6).

COMMUNAL VERSUS PERSONAL EVANGELISM

1. What do you think of this quote? Are these statistics surprising?

“Research indicates that no more than 30 percent of all conversions are punctiliar in nature. Most conversions take place over time, often with many fits and starts as one moves toward Jesus and his way. For most people conversion is a process, not an event.” — Richard V. Peace

2. How does this statistic compare to your approach to evangelism?

3. Why is “personal evangelism” insufficient?

4. List the advantages we gain in communal evangelism.

5. What is the difference between gospel promotion and proclamation?

LATER THIS WEEK:

- Try getting into a conversation with them about the difference between classical and new tolerance.
- Consider how can you share the gospel with yourself out loud? Why should you even consider it?
- Ask someone about their religious beliefs without interrupting or correcting them. Just listen.