

So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTEOUS *man* SHALL LIVE BY FAITH." (Rom 1:15-17)

Introduction—My own story of Sonship with Bill and Jeff, Milton Vincent parallel story in A Gospel Primer. I'll be freely quoting from him but he acknowledges he's channeling Jerry Bridges especially (Discipline of Grace and Transforming Grace) and then there are others like Richard Lovelace from the early 70s and Jack Miller from the 80s and 90s that he doesn't mention, but I promise you, he's drawing from them as I am.

Paul's goal in Romans 1-11 is to show that the gospel is the great leveler. It unites Jews and Gentiles to one another and to Christ. It speaks of their common need, common Messiah and common mission and message. And this is his tool to accomplish that—the message of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that creates a new humanity, giving us a new status, a new family, and a new future.

And to do that daily work of shaping our identity and our world, he gives us his gospel—not just to convert us, but as the gift that keeps on giving us everything we need for godliness. God's gifts are all gracious, unmerited—but the wise believer will learn to position themselves where God's gifts are located.

I've learned that I get God's power for living in far more abundance as I preach the gospel to myself daily than if I read the Bible daily and a whole bunch of other devotional activities I've done over the last 47 years of walking with Jesus. I find myself sinning less, working harder, recovering my footing faster after I slip, and everything I'm supposed to do as a Christian flows more freely, naturally, and passionately when I'm inhaling and exhaling the gospel. You don't believe me? If you will receive what I'm saying this week and the next, and let me pass on to you the wise words and practices of men far godlier than I am, you will believe me and you'll never be the same.

### *Why do I need to preach the gospel to myself?*

#### 1) It's the New Testament Model

The New Testament teaches that Christians ought to hear the gospel as much as non-Christians do. In fact, in the first chapter of Romans the Apostle Paul tells the believers in the church that he was anxious "to preach the gospel to you who are at Rome." Of course he was anxious to preach the gospel to the non-Christians at Rome, yet he specifically states that he was eager to preach it to the believers. To the Corinthian Christians who had already believed and been saved by the gospel, Paul says, "I make known to you the gospel, which you have believed..." He then restates the historical facts of the gospel before showing them how those gospel facts apply to their beliefs. This is actually Paul's approach to various other issues throughout the book of 1 Corinthians. In most of Paul's letters to churches, sizeable portions of them are given over to rehearsing gospel truths. Ephesians 1-3 is all gospel, Colossians 1-2 is gospel, and Romans 1-8 is gospel. The remainder of such books shows specifically how to bring those gospel truths to bear on life. Re-preaching the gospel and then showing how it applied to life was Paul's method for ministering to believers, thereby providing a divinely inspired pattern for me to follow when ministering to myself and to other believers.

#### 2) It's My Daily Need

The gospel is so foolish (according to my natural wisdom), so insulting (according to my ego), and so incredible (according to my timid heart), that it is a daily battle to believe the full scope of it as I should. There is simply no other way to compete with the demands of my ego, the condemnation of my heart, and the lies of the world and the Devil than to overwhelm such things with daily rehearsal of the gospel.

### 3) So I Can Experience the Power of God

Outside of heaven, the power of God in its highest density is found inside the gospel. This must be so, for the Bible twice describes the gospel as “the power of God.” Nothing else in all of Scripture is ever described in this way, except for the Person of Jesus Christ. Such a description indicates that the gospel is not only powerful, but that it is the ultimate entity in which God’s power resides and does its greatest work. Indeed, God’s power is seen in natural and cosmological events, yet in Scripture such wonders are never labeled “the power of God.” How powerful, then, must the gospel be that it would merit such a title! And how great is the salvation it could accomplish in my life, if I would only embrace it by faith and give it a central place in my thoughts each day!

### 4) For My Daily Protection

As long as I am inside the gospel, I experience all the protection I need from the powers of evil that rage against me. It is for this reason that the Bible tells me to “take up” and “put on” continually the whole armor of God; and the pieces of armor it tells me to put on are all merely synonyms for the gospel. Translated literally from the Greek, they are: “. . . the salvation . . . the justification . . . truth . . . the gospel of peace . . . the faith . . . [and the] . . . word of God.” What 12 are all these expressions but various ways of describing the gospel? Therefore, if I wish to stand victorious in Jesus, I must do as the songwriter suggests and “put on the gospel armor, each piece put on with prayer.” That God would tell me to “take up” and “put on” this gospel armor alerts me to the fact that I do not automatically come into each day protected by the gospel. In fact, these commands imply that I am vulnerable to defeat and injury unless I seize upon the gospel and arm myself with it from head to toe. And what better way is there to do this than to preach the gospel to myself and to make it the obsession of my heart throughout each day?

## 5) To Secure Freedom from Sin's Power

As long as I am stricken with the guilt of my sins, I will be captive to them, and will keep re-committing the very sins about which I feel most guilty. The Devil is well aware of this fact; he knows that if he can keep me tormented by sin's guilt, he can dominate me with sin's power. The gospel, however, slays sin at this root point and thereby nullifies sin's power over me. The forgiveness of God, made known to me through the gospel, liberates me from sin's power because it liberates me first from its guilt; and preaching such forgiveness to myself is a practical way of putting the gospel into operation as a nullifier of sin's power in my life.

(Illustration, Pilgrim's Progress Slough of Despond)

## 6) To Experience and Spread My Inheritance in the Saints

The gospel is not just a message of reconciliation with God, but also of deeply connecting all believers, one to another, in Christ. Through the substitutionary death of Christ, God has brought down the racial, economic, political and social barriers that once divided us. The Scriptures speak of us being members of His household, and giving us gifts; and that speaks of our oneness as we are all in one family, all receiving grace gifts or eucharist in Greek. But it goes deeper as each believer then is a grace-gift to each other. Each one of you is a portion of my gospel-inheritance. Here is in Ephesians 1:18, so plain I've missed it all my life until this week.

"I pray that the eyes of the heart may be enlightened (opened) so that you will know what are the riches of glory of his inheritance in the saints."

I am a portion of your inheritance, and you of mine. So the more you understand the gospel and all it means, the more you value the role that I play in your life, and that you play in my life. One gift of the gospel is us, to each other, forever.

## 7) To Cultivate Humility

According to God's Word, the gospel is deliberately designed to strip me of my pride and leave me without grounds for boasting.

Ephesians 2:8-10—for you are saved by grace, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.” This is a great mercy of God, for pride is at the root of all sin. Pride produced the first sin in the Garden and precedes every moral stumble in my life—Proverbs 16 says that Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.

The gospel is pre-engineered to deliver us from pride. Preaching the gospel to ourselves each day mounts a powerful assault against my pride and puts humility in its place. Nothing suffocates pride more than daily reminders regarding the glory of God's solution, the gravity of my sin, and the crucifixion of God's Son. And all that is set against the backdrop of hell, of which I deserve, but which God can deny because in the gospel, he's both just and the justifier of the ungodly.

Humility grows lushly, like grass in the Florida winter, in the warm atmosphere of God's gospel of grace. Pride fades away in the light of his glory and grace.

## 8) So My Obedience will Flow from Love

To obey God is one thing—to obey him in perfect love is quite another. To love God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength is the greatest commandment in the law, and if I could do it, every obedience I need and God requires would naturally flow forth. So how can I love God with all my being? The Bible teaches in 1 John 4:19 that we love God because he first loved us. And nowhere is the love of God more freely revealed than in the gospel. Romans 5 says that God demonstrated his great love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. And John 15, greater love has no man than he lay down his life for his friends. And Ephesians

2, But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love for us, even when we were dead in our sins, made us alive together in Christ. Meditate on that, and obedience will flow forth from love!

9) To Grant me New Perspective During Trials

More than anything else I could ever do, the gospel enables me to embrace tribulation and trial. When the gospel becomes the frame through which I view human misery, and the house in which I live through disaster, and the air I breathe even as I draw another breath to scream out in pain, then the gospel makes genuinely good news out of every aspect of my life. Turn with me to Romans 5:1-5 to really get this last point in our souls.

So then, I can embrace both trouble and troubled people as friends and allow them to do God's good work in me as is promised in Romans 5, God's gospel-logic for growing in grace in the midst of the grit and grime of this world.

CLOSE

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Therefore, now you can see Paul's argument shaping up. It's been several years since the church in Rome was founded, and he's telling them what he's about to tell them—I'm about to orient your whole life, your mission, your goals, around the gospel, so that it isn't just a forensic declaration about your legal standing with God, but so that your life conforms to its shape, your identity conforms to its truths, your theology beats in time with God's heartbeat.



## PART 2

Many Christians live in fear. As I grew up with a harsh father, it was natural to assume that my heavenly father was harsh and fearsome. Maybe You were taught to be afraid and stay afraid is the best way to live the Christian life by someone. Maybe you bear scars and carry burdens that no one can see, and maybe, just maybe, that's impacted the way you think about God and his promises. Because as rich as they are, you can't see how you deserve them.

But when you see the Scriptures like Galatians 3-4 that show how we move from being orphans and slaves to being adopted sons of God, that sort of fear cannot persist. Surely we fear God as in deep and abiding and trembling respect, but as Luther said in his introduction to Galatians, we do not fear God as the man who is in prison and hears the footsteps of his torturer, coming down the hall to his cell. That sort of fear is banished as we understand who we are as adopted sons into the family of God.

Well why aren't we daughters of God, pastor? Get woke! What's wrong with saying that we are sons and daughters of God, or are you a patriarchal chauvinist? Well I might be a little but not in this case. The Scriptures refer to believers who are adopted into God the Father's family as adopted sons because under Roman law, that is the highest status of a new family member possible. And that's how elevated, how transformed, our identity is as we enter the family of God. And besides, men get called the Bride of Christ for eternity, so we know how you feel.

Today we are looking at how meditating on the gospel, how preaching the gospel to yourself daily transforms your walk with God such that without it, you'll be totally unprepared for the assault of culture, your own ego, and Satan plays games that bring disrepute on God's Gospel promises to you daily. But checkmate, Satan, the Gospel says he's denied, defied, and one day destroyed as he's locked away for good by Jesus Christ. And you can enjoy all that now, today, as you meditate on the Gospel-victory of Jesus Christ as Paul sets up in Romans 1:15-17, and continues then throughout the book of Romans up to chapter 12, where he begins to apply it.

Once again, I'll be drawing on Milton Vincent and his work in the little book, *A Gospel Primer*. He's channeling Jerry Bridges especially (*Discipline of Grace* and *Transforming Grace*) and Tim Keller and Sinclair Ferguson and Jack Miller, all from whom I'm also I'm serving up truth to you today.

1) My sin is exposed by the cross.

In the middle of the middle of the most beautiful gospel truths in the Bible, Romans 5-8, the apostle Paul cries out, "O wretched man that I am!" In 1 Timothy 1, Paul summarizes the gospel like this: "It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am the foremost of all."

Likewise, when I go deeper into the gospel by preaching it to myself every day, I will comprehend the depth of my sinfulness, but in a safe place where there is no condemnation. The gruesome death of the cross, like one Jesus endured for me, would only be required God's elect were exceedingly sinful and wholly unable to please God. And yet, at the same time, because of his ghastly wounds, I can gasp with wonder at God's amazing grace, amen?

It's only in the gospel that my sins can be exposed without tearing me apart. It's only in understanding more deeply why Jesus was torn apart for me that I can see my own predicament and not be torn apart emotionally.

For those of you who struggle with depression, sometimes, it's just because you get insight into the depth of your depravity and mine. That's enough to make anyone depressed. But when you add to that one look at the depths of your sin, 10 looks at God's amazing grace, then you are ready to worship and adore him who exposed your sin. Or as Jack Miller said, Cheer up! You are worse than you think! But cheer up! The gospel is much better than you ever could believe!

Connected to this, if I'm rehearsing the gospel daily and my sin gets framed by it, then I don't have to conceal that the shameful slaughter of the Son of God was required for my salvation. I can let others see the depths of my sin because exposed by the cross, I can do it. Why would any one be shocked to hear my struggles, my past, my present sin, when the gospel I confess and that oozes out of me already told them what a needy sinner I am?

The gospel forces me to disclose my sin both to myself and others and from that flows enormous freedom to live.

2) I embrace the work God has for me.

According to the Scriptures, I am to be "zealous for good works" and I "work for his good pleasure" and I am saved by grace, and not by works so that I might become "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, that (I) might walk in them." I may be lazy, but when I see what Jesus did for me, I begin to be able to say with Christ, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me to accomplish his work." That is, gospel-powered work, Jesus-powered work, is like food—it refreshes me, it blesses me, it strengthens me. It does what food does for my body. When I see the cross, I know what a great gift these good works are for me because gracious Jesus died so I might do them. And how precious you must be if Jesus died so that we might serve each other.

3) I gain a great heart for the poor.

I've traveled to other nations and seen great poverty. Nothing like what we have in America. I don't understand the figures I hear on television that one in seven children are going hungry—I admit that I don't believe those figures. They don't motivate me to gain a great heart for the poor. But like nothing else I have experienced, the gospel instills in me and you a heart for the downcast, especially when they are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10 says, "So then, when we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Through the gospel, when I look at the poor and vulnerable I can feel a kinship with them. Physically, they are what I was spiritually when my heart was closed to Christ, or as John says in Revelation, “you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.” The gospel reminds me daily of the spiritual poverty into which I was born and the staggering generosity of Christ towards me. This means I can minister to others with gospel-powered motivations, not looking down on them, not treating them as less than me. I’m bringing the gospel to them in word and deed, I’m glorifying God, and as I reenact the gospel it works to my own benefit as well as I see before me a picture of Jesus feeding me.

#### 4) I boldly come to God.

In the New Testament, the story about Jesus’ life and death and resurrection that transforms me and all creation is often called “the gospel of God.” That “of” is not simply there to show that the gospel comes from God, or accomplished through him. It’s also there to show that it ultimately leads me to God, who is the great destination of life’s journey. This is what makes the good news, GREAT news, because it brings me to God. 1 Peter 3:18, “For Christ also died for sins once for all (gospel) so he might bring us to God.” In John 14, Jesus says that in my father’s house are many mansions or dwelling places, and I will go and prepare a place for you and receive you to myself. That is, Jesus not just born, lived and died to be with us but he is ascended into heaven so that our invitation to boldly come before God is not in vain, because when we get there, he’s already been there making heaven ready for us. So as Hebrews 4 says, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

Boldness is critical and it’s only possible through the gospel. Without the boldness that comes from God’s gracious gospel welcome, we leave a lot in life undone, victories are left unwon, money is left on the table, babies are never born. But if I want my life to bloom and

flourish then I must have the sort of confidence that comes from the gospel.

Tim Keller says, "The only person who dares wake up a king at 3:00 AM for a glass of water is a child. We have that kind of access to our Father."

The gospel banishes our fear by assuring us of his love for us that's based on Jesus' finished work. Preaching the gospel to myself each day nourishes a holy brazenness to believe what God says, enjoy what he offers, and do what he commands. Do I deserve such success? No. Do I fail and flounder? Sure! But I can boldly take for myself his offered forgiveness that God says is mine and continue walking in the Spirit, repenting and believing. And by placing our confidence in God, we not only live boldly but God is glorified by our confidence as rely no on ourselves, but him.

5) I gain the cruciform life.

Cruciform is a relatively new word but it means to submit to Christ's shaping of ourselves through redemptive suffering.

The Gospel is not just the story of "Christ and him crucified" as Paul says in 1 Cor 2, but it's also the story of me being crucified. Galatians 2:20 says that I have been crucified with Christ. What does that mean?

The cross is a place where sin dies. My old self, my shame, my love affair with the world all dies at the foot of the cross. It's at the cross of Christ that I die, and so the law of Moses no longer has the power to condemn me. If I die today, all my monetary debts are gone. It's because I was crucified in Christ that I'm no longer a victim of the law's demands and thus a slave to sin (Romans 6:6).

This cruciform life, where the gospel begins to shape me in

suffering, is something I resist. I want pleasure, not pain. I want ease, rest, and the newest phone to share with others about my best life now on social media. But God has united me to the crucified Christ and that's what shapes me, not my desires for the newest toys the world can offer. And that's scary because being shaped by the cross of Jesus Christ and taking seriously my crucified life is a rough, rough thing. That's why Jesus, when he faced the cross, sweated blood and cried out "Not my will, but yours be done." So preaching his story to me every day puts me in the frame of mind to take up my cross and follow him, all the way up a long hill, where when I get there, there's gonna be death. And it's gonna be mine, as my ego dies and I am raised to live for him.

Now thankfully, death isn't the end but a beginning in the gospel. After death comes life in the gospel story of Jesus. The facts around the gospel of Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven make it obvious that he will not let his holy one see decay. The thousand times I die to self and choose to live for God have a real payoff. "Whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, he will find it." In God's economy, the way to life is the way to death. I'll summarize as Pastor Vincent does in his little book—"The death that Christ died is the death to which I also am called, and the death to which I am called is my entry point into union with Christ and life at its fullness." So as Jesus looked ahead in his life as the cross and did not despise it, but let nothing come between him and it, come what may, we must pursue the cruciform life of dying to self daily and being raised to new life in him.

6) God's fame and renown flow from my life.

In Ephesians 1, the gospel just pours out, as Paul writes that we are predestined to adoption as sons, to the praise of the glory of his grace. And this phrase is repeated three times, "to the praise of the glory of his grace" as Paul pours out the truth about God's rescue of us. And at the end of the gospel-section of Ephesians, Paul says that it's "unto him be the glory" and in 1 Timothy, talking about God saving

him, he says “to the king, be glory” (1:15).

Clearly the gospel generated in Paul a great interest in God's glory. Understanding that I'm not the ultimate end of the gospel, but God's glory is, enables me to embrace my salvation more boldly. I'm sure you've heard that God sending his son Jesus to die for us shows us how valuable we are, that he would give his son in exchange for us. That's not what I'm saying today. I'm saying that when I ask “why would God want to save me” the answer can't be “Because I'm so awesome.” That's not soul-satisfying. When my timid, fearing, doubting heart asks that question, the only satisfying question is “to the praise of the glory of his grace” because that magnifies the grace and faith he lavishes on me.

The more I embrace and delight and experience the gospel, the more I want to worship God, the more I can rejoice in him, and the more I realize that really, everything is about him, and that sets me free to trust the true king of the Universe.

As Horatius Bonar said, Terror accomplishes no real obedience. Suspense brings forth no fruit unto holiness. No gloomy uncertainty as to God's favor can subdue lust or correct the crooked will. But the free pardon of the cross uproots sin and withers its branches. Only the certainty of forgiving love can do this.

Amen.