

I Gospel Fluency: Session 2 I

All sin is a failure to believe the gospel. As Paul puts it in Romans 1:25, *“they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”* We are led into sin whenever we look at anything other than God believing that it will provide for us what only he can. We have already been offered perfect joy, rest, and satisfaction in Christ. Through the cross, Jesus has overcome all of our shortfalls and deficiencies. Our emptiness will only be satisfied in him; our fullness will only be realized in him.

We were designed for our ultimate satisfaction to be found in God. As Augustine said, *“Our hearts are restless, until they can find their rest in you.”* As believers in Christ, we are completely fulfilled because everything we need and desire is secured in Jesus. At its root, sin is turning away from that truth to some other functional savior searching for what is only found in Christ. When someone is struggling with sin, frustration, doubt, or disobedience, they are essentially waving a flag and saying, *“I don’t believe the gospel here.”* Therefore, our aim is to always point them to Christ above all else.

As a group leader, lead your group to always point one another back to Jesus, remembering that everything is fully provided in him. We don’t primarily need good advice, life coaching, or encouragement to keep trying - *we need Jesus!* Here are several methods to practice and grow in helping your group learn to point one another back to Christ.

Method 1: Deep Idols - The Sin beneath the Sin

Our fundamental issue is false worship. The Bible calls this idolatry. Idolatry can take innumerable forms, as John Calvin once said, *“The human heart is a factory of idols...Every one of us from his mother’s womb is an expert in inventing idols.”* Often, we are looking to these things not for themselves, but for what we believe they provide. It’s not just the money, the job, the relationship - it’s what we believe they will give us. We use them to meet a deeper need or an ultimate desire. It is often helpful to look for *“the sin beneath the sin,”* or the root idol behind some sinful behavior. We don’t simply want to address the sin itself (the fruit) - for example, *“you shouldn’t lie”* - but address what led us to lie in the first place (the root). What did we assign such value to that we were willing to sin to protect it? What did we believe was more important than following Jesus in that moment? The question becomes *“Why did you lie?”* Tim Keller, a pastor in New York City, names what he believes are four common deep idols:

1. Comfort
2. Control
3. Approval
4. Power

To illustrate how this works, let's talk about money. People's approach to money is often idolatrous, but none of us just loves money - we only love money for what we believe it provides. If someone has a sinful approach to money, it could be any of those four idols:

1. **Comfort**—Deep down she believes that the good life is found in rest and relaxation. Money is worshipped because it's the best avenue towards a cushy life.
2. **Control**—She knows that with enough money, she will never have to worry. Anything can come her way and money will keep her safe.
3. **Approval**—She sees that money is a great way to get friends. Giving gifts, throwing parties, and being generous are her way to gain the affection of others that she truly desires.
4. **Power**—With enough money, she can exert authority over those around her. Her children and her friends are in her debt for her generosity. She's sought out for her opinion and her involvement because of her wealth. Money is her means to power.

Jesus > Idols

The answer to our heart's idolatry is not to do better, try harder, or simply get our acts together. We must have a love for Jesus that overwhelms the love that we have for our false saviors. The theologian Thomas Chalmers says it this way: "The heart's desire for an ultimate object may be conquered, but it's desire to have SOME object is unconquerable. The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is through the expulsive power of a new one." We have to always bring our idolatry back to the gospel because ultimately it is only through an overwhelming love for Jesus that we will ever be free from our incessant love for everything else. We must apply the gospel to whatever the heart issue or root idol is.

Comfort - Our relationship with Jesus provides never-ending, security, peace, and rest.

Control - We were never in control anyway, but we serve a God who has sovereign rule over the universe. In the moment the world looked the most out of control - the death of the Son of God on a cross - God was most in control, working his plan of salvation that he had carried through the ages.

Approval - We have all the approval we will ever need in Christ. Through Jesus' work on our behalf we are eternally approved of by the God of all Creation, who pours out the love, favor, and acceptance owed to Jesus onto us.

Power - God has unqualified, limitless power. We no longer have to seek power as we are able to find all the power we'll ever need in him. We no longer have to exert our will or dominance over others.

Here are several ways you can help your group grow in seeing how Jesus is better than idols:

- While in your group ask: "How does Jesus offer you true comfort, true control, true approval, or true power?"

- During confession, ask the person “What are you forgetting or failing to believe about the gospel that led you to that sin?” “What do you believe _____ will provide for you?” “How are you expecting this action to save you or fulfill you?”
- Make it a habit to ask the group: “How do you need the gospel this week? What truths do you need to be reminded of?” Then after someone shares, have another person preach the gospel to them.

Deep Idol Chart

Deep Idol	My life only has meaning or purpose if I...	My worst nightmare is...	People around me may feel...	My problem emotion is...
Power	Have success, influence or win.	Humiliation	Used	Anger
Approval	Have affirmation, relationships or feel loved.	Rejection	Smothered	Cowardice
Comfort	Have freedom, privacy and no stress.	Stress, Demands	Neglected	Apathy
Control	Have self-discipline, certainty and standards.	Uncertainty	Unloved	Worry

Method 2: Identity in Christ

As Christians, we have been given a new identity in Christ. Our fullness and completion are derived from him. Regularly working through these four questions with group members can help them learn to find their identity in God’s character and what he has done. That understanding will inform their behavior and can help reveal wrong belief or unbelief in the gospel.

1. Who is God? (Character, attributes)

2. **What does he do?** (Jesus' life and deeds, God's character proven through the person of Christ)
3. **Who are we?** (Identity in Christ, i.e. God is Creator therefore we are created)
4. **What do we do?** (How does our action flow out of our identity?)

Method 3: Creation - Fall - Redemption - Restoration

The story of the Bible flows through a basic framework that looks like this: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Restoration. Put in simple terms - God *created* everything good, but humanity *fell* from him in rebellion, bringing sin and death into the world. Through Jesus, we can be *redeemed* and forgiven of our sin and welcomed back into a relationship with God which will be fully *restored* eternally in heaven. Everyone has a story that shares a common framework to the overall story of the Bible. When listening to people's stories, you can then insert how the gospel might change aspects of their life.

- CREATION – What is my Identity? (Sense of Purpose, Significance, Security, Acceptance, Power)
- FALL – What is my Problem? (Keeping me from being or doing what I should? What would be the worst version of your life? Functional Hell)
- REDEMPTION – What is my Solution? (Who or what will save me from my problem? Functional Savior)
- RESTORATION – What is my Hope? (What should my world look like if it was as it ought to be? Functional Heaven)

Everyone is a sinner in need of repentance and grace. However, this truth is not always the greatest hurdle to belief. Sometimes abuse, the absence of a father, or an overwhelming sense of failure can stand in the way of belief more than the need to understand personal guilt. Listening to people's stories with this framework in mind can help you begin to know how the gospel intersects with their lives. Once you know how someone's story fits into this mold, you can see their personal version of hell, salvation, and heaven. Then you know more clearly how the truth of the gospel is good news to their specific situation.