A GOSPEL CATECHISM

10 MEMORABLE, REPEATABLE, LIFE-CHANGING GOSPEL TRUTHS
A DISCIPLESHIP WORKBOOK

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NEW YORK MINISTRY NETWORK

EDITED BY DAVID HERTWECK

WHAT IS A GOSPEL CATECHISM?

A catechism is a spiritual formation tool that teaches summary doctrinal truths using a Q&A approach. A Gospel Catechism offers ten answers to the same question:
WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?



Each chapter is designed to shape your understanding of the gospel and provide you with a memorable, repeatable, life-changing gospel truth. The goal is for you to memorize and internalize each of these ten simple statements. These gospel truths can become the very thoughts you preach to yourself in times when you need strength for your soul and hope in your heart.

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A GOSPEL CATECHISM

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A GOSPEL CATECHISM
CHAPTER ONE



THE GOSPEL IS UNIQUE & CENTRAL TO CHRISTIANITY

THE TAKEOFF

If your friends say, “Let’s go get a hamburger,” they could be talking about dozens of local options. But if they say, “Let’s go get a Big Mac,” then you know they are talking about McDonald’s. If your sister says she is hungry for a “P’zone,” then you know she wants some Pizza Hut grub. If your dad is craving a Frosty, then you know you’re headed to Wendy’s.

The Whopper is unique to Burger King, the Blizzard is unique to Dairy Queen, the Chalupa is unique to Taco Bell…you get the idea. Some things belong exclusively to something else. Some things are unique.

WHAT ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF THINGS THAT ARE UNIQUE TO SOMETHING? (IN THE SPORTS WORLD, IN FASHION, IN MUSIC…)

THE TENSION

Some people think all religions are the same. They lump all religions together and claim there is nothing unique about any of them — certainly nothing that makes one better than the others.

NYT best-selling author Stephen Prothero wrote the book “God Is Not One.” The premise of this book is that the eight main world religions are not compatible with each other — they are not the same. Only three of the major world religions are monotheistic (believe in one God): Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Other religions are polytheistic (believe in many gods) or pantheistic (believe God is in everything).

Religions are each a set of truth claims. To say that all these religions are equally true is ALSO a truth claim. It is not a statement of humility or tolerance — it is a statement of pride! Why? Because that truth claim assumes a higher and better perspective than all other truth claims combined! In order to know that all paths lead to the top of the same mountain, you would have to be standing at the top already!

In his book, Prothero proposes that each of the eight major world religions are centered around a problem and a solution.

- The problem in Islam is pride, and the solution is submission.
- The problem in Judaism is exile, and the solution is to return.
- In Buddhism, suffering is overcome by awakening.



Prothero suggests that Christianity is centered on the problem of sin and the solution of salvation. Whether we agree with his definitions or not, he is right about one thing: these religions do not believe the same. The foundation for each of these world religions is so different — how could they all be worshipping the same God? There are things unique to Christianity. This chapter is about the most important thing that is unique and central to Christianity.

WHAT ARE SOME BELIEFS OR VALUES THAT YOU THINK ARE UNIQUE TO CHRISTIANITY?

WHAT ARE SOME BELIEFS OR VALUES THAT CHRISTIANS SHARE WITH OTHER RELIGIOUS PEOPLE?

THE TEXT

Romans 10:9-13

9 *If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* ***10*** *For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved.* ***11*** *As the Scriptures tell us, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be disgraced."* ***12*** *Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him.* ***13*** *For "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

WHAT PHRASE IN THIS PASSAGE IS MOST MEMORABLE AND MEANINGFUL TO YOU? WHY?

THE TEACHING

The main thought of this chapter is: the Gospel is unique and central to Christianity.

WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

The heart of the Gospel is found in the radical and shocking truth claims in verse ***9: Jesus is Lord and…God raised him from the dead.***

Notice the mix of verb tenses. The Gospel is something that HAS HAPPENED and something that HAS ON-GOING MEANING. In other words, the Gospel is grounded in a historical event, but it also has far reaching effect.

The Gospel is the good news about what Jesus did. Jesus came to earth as a human to live the life you and I could never live and to die the death you and I should have died. And then God raised him from the dead proving his victory over death and the grave.

The Bible teaches us that we are sinners. Sin isn't just doing bad things. Sin is loving anything or anyone more than Jesus. It's centering your heart on and aiming your love toward anything other than God. We all do that and when we do that we become enslaved to and mastered by that thing: money, pleasure, having a boyfriend, being successful, etc… In other words: those things become our lord and we reject the true God as Lord.

But Jesus came to be Lord. Because of what he did as your substitute, you can direct your heart toward him.

He was tempted in every way you are, but he never sinned. So, his perfect performance record (his righteousness) can be yours as you hope fully and solely in him. You can receive his work on your behalf! As you trust in the completeness of what he did on the cross, his suffering and death speaks for you as well. In the Gospel, we find something both true and beautiful. True in that Jesus accomplished for us what we could not accomplish for ourselves. We must know the Gospel in our heads. Beautiful in that when our hearts "see" Jesus giving up heaven for us, we

are moved and motivated to love Jesus — to make him Lord. We must "taste" the Gospel in our hearts (Ps. 34:8).

We can now love him most. We can worship him! And Jesus is the one master who will satisfy you if you submit to him, but will also forgive you when you fail him. No other lord can do that.

UNDERLINE THE SENTENCE IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION THAT MOST HELPS YOU UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL? HOW DOES IT HELP YOU?

WHAT OTHER "LORDS" DO PEOPLE HAVE IN THEIR LIVES?

HOW IS THE GOSPEL UNIQUE?

Verse 10 says that you are made right with God by believing in your heart. Verse 11 says that those who trust in God will never be disgraced. Verse 12 says that God gives generously to all who call on him — no matter their race, gender, or social standing.

Every other religion offers you a way to save yourself. You must behave in certain ways if you want to get in. Basically, you save yourself through your own efforts and good work.

The Gospel says you never could. You can't make yourself righteous before God because your biggest problem is not your behavior, it's your heart. You need a new heart — you need to believe in your heart so that you can be made right with God. And you can't give yourself a new heart. That requires a miracle.

So, it's an inner change first and then an outer change, and not the other way around. Christians "get in" because of Jesus' work on their behalf and because they hope in Jesus. It's not earn your way in; it's receive the invitation you've been graciously given.

HOW WOULD YOU EXPLAIN THE MAIN DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND OTHER RELIGIONS?

HOW IS THE GOSPEL CENTRAL?

This truth is central to all Christian growth. We do not believe our way in and then work our way forward (Gal. 3:1-3). All spiritual growth is connected to growing and deepening belief in the Gospel. We must keep the Gospel in the center otherwise we risk motivating ourselves to act like Christians for self-serving reasons.

We never move beyond the Gospel; we always move further into it. You will read more about that in chapter four. According to Paul, the Gospel is of primary importance (1 Cor. 15:1-4), it is the power to save (Romans 1:16) and it continues to bear fruit in the lives of God's children (Col. 1:6). The Gospel is central to Christianity. The Gospel is Unique and Central to Christianity.

WHAT ARE SOME "SELF-SERVING REASONS" THAT SOMEONE MIGHT ACT LIKE A CHRISTIAN?

THE TAKEAWAY

Your friends probably wonder why you go to church. They might even wonder what you believe. Hopefully they wonder why you have different values than them. It would be easy to chalk it up to being religious, feeling good and welcomed at church, or wanting to be a good person. But none of those reasons are unique to Christianity.

Your friends may think your life is built around church attendance, moral living and being a nice person. Maybe they think the only difference between you and them is the music you listen to, the person you vote for or the way you dress. But the center of Christianity is not you or me — it is Jesus and what he has done!

What is unique to Christianity also makes the Christian unique: our belief in the gospel. In the next nine chapters, you are going to learn more about how believing the gospel changes everything about you and everything about your world. You are going to learn that the gospel is different, better, and more beautiful than you might think. You will also see that the gospel requires more of you than you think. But because the gospel is unique and central to Christianity you need to understand it, live it, and share it with others.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU READ OR LEARNED TODAY? HOW WILL IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR LIFE?

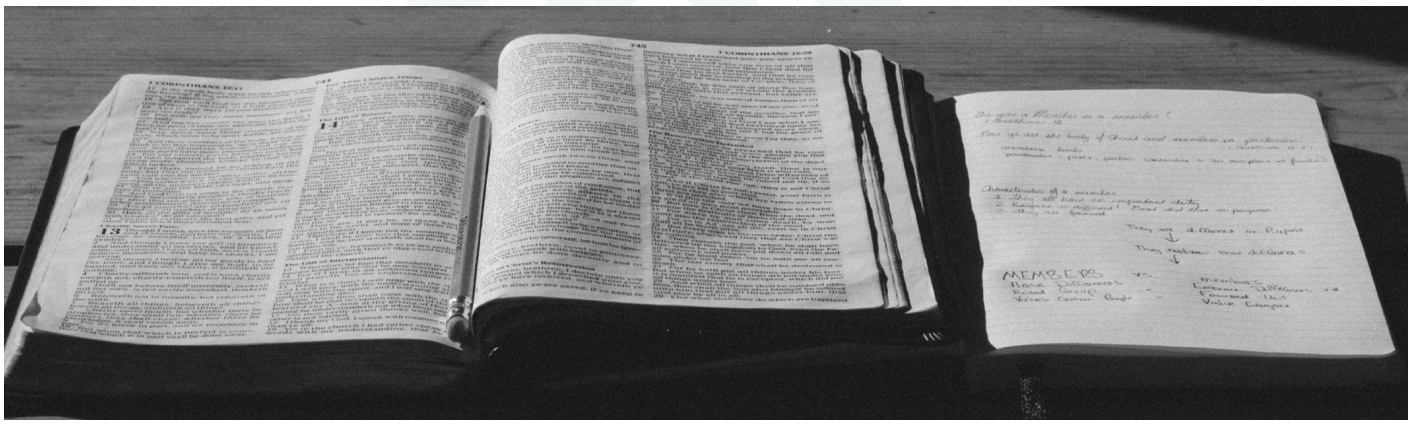
STUDENT STORY

1: THE GOSPEL IS UNIQUE AND CENTRAL TO CHRISTIANITY
Gianna's Story

As a high school senior, Gianna's after school activities included shadowing a doctor at her local hospital and leading the Christian club at her school. This got the attention of her local television station and they decided to highlight her as one of their local "kids who care." During her interview, Gianna spoke about her desire to create a venue and support system for any students in her high school — a place to gather and talk about how God moves in their lives and what it means to be accepted by Christ. She wanted every student to know that they don't have to be religious to attend. The report on the news made mention of her involvement at the local hospital, her desire to attend a Christian college, and her plans to serve as a missionary one day.

Some people view Christianity as being exclusive. They are convinced that it is not open for just anyone to join. As a result, your friends may think Christians are judgmental. While the gospel message does say that Christ alone — no other gods or human effort—can save us, that message does not keep people out. It invites them in! It is unique, but it isn't exclusive. Unlike some religions where we need to start by being the right kind of person to earn our way in, the gospel — the central message of Christianity — is available to everyone.

Through the impact of the gospel in her life and her extracurricular activity, God provided Gianna an opportunity to share that while the message that God's love is unique, it is not exclusive. She was recognized as a student who cares about her community.





THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS, NOT GOOD ADVICE

THE TAKEOFF

I can still remember the day my braces were removed! I was in tenth grade. It was a nice fall day. It was a Tuesday. Why can I remember that day? Was it my new smile? Was it because I wouldn't have to worry about chunks of pizza sticking in my braces anymore? Was it because my sister couldn't call me "metal mouth" or "transformer teeth" anymore?

No. It was because of the OTHER news I heard that day.

That morning was September 11th, 2001. Because of the tragic news of that day, I can remember exactly where I was and what I was doing. Most people have specific moments in their lives that they will always remember because of the news they received on that given day. Getting really bad news — or really good news — can make any day unforgettable.

WHEN IS THE LAST TIME YOU RECEIVED REALLY GOOD OR REALLY BAD NEWS? WHERE WERE YOU AND WHAT WERE YOU DOING?

WHEN WAS A TIME YOU RECEIVED SOME REALLY GOOD NEWS THAT CHANGED YOUR LIFE?

THE TENSION

What is the difference between good advice and good news?

Good advice is about what you must do.
Good *news* is about what has been done for you.

Good advice shapes your mind.
Good *news* shapes your heart.

Good advice requires you to achieve something.
Good *news* invites you to receive something.

CAN YOU THINK OF ANY OTHER DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GOOD ADVICE AND GOOD NEWS?



One of the dangers of seeing the message of Christianity as good advice is that it leads to moralism.

1. WHAT IS MORALISM?

Often we think of morals as a list of good things that we should do — like the 10 Commandments. It makes sense that if God gave us rules then we should probably uphold and follow them. It might also make sense that if we follow these rules then God will be happy with us. Moralism is the belief that keeping the right rules will give us peace and joy and make us right with God. In other words: we perform for his approval and acceptance.

2. THE DANGER OF MORALISM.

When we excel at being moral, any resulting success and access is being achieved and accomplished by us. We have ourselves to thank for being so good. And since we've been good, God should give us good things — he OWES us! We believe the lie that God's goodness toward us is a result from all the good we have done and not because He is good in and of himself. We also start comparing ourselves to others. Comparison games always lead to feelings of pride or inadequacy.

3. THE PROBLEM OF MORALISM.

The Bible and the gospel now become nothing more than simply good advice. Advice is a suggestion or a recommendation that you should follow. Jesus' life seems like nothing more than an example that you should try and follow. But Jesus didn't come to earth primarily to be our example. He came primarily to be our substitute. Big difference!

With moralism, you feel as if you should get the glory or praise for being a good person. And when you mess up you doubt God's love for you and want to hide your mistakes — from God and others.

CAN YOU GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF A MORAL/RULE YOU SHOULD FOLLOW?

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH FOLLOWING THE RULES BECAUSE YOU FEEL FORCED VERSUS OBEYING GOD AS AN ACT OF LOVE AND WORSHIP?

THE TEXT
Ephesians 2:8-10

8 *God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.* ***9*** *Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.* ***10*** *For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

WHAT PHRASE IN THIS PASSAGE IS MOST MEMORABLE AND MEANINGFUL TO YOU? WHY?

THE TEACHING

The main thought of this chapter is: the Gospel is good news, not good advice.

1. THE MEANING OF GOOD NEWS

You have probably heard the word “gospel” in church. Where did that word come from and what does it mean? The word gospel comes from the Greek word “euangelizo” which means good news.

What is very important to understand about the word “euangelizo” is the historical and cultural context in which it was used.

The verb euangelizo meant to announce or bring good news. This good news often came after a king and his army won a major battle. This good news would go ahead of the returning army and would be shared throughout the towns and villages. The hearts of the people would be filled with peace and joy as they heard news of the king’s victory. The good news — the “gospel” — wasn’t a call to do something; it was a call to celebrate what had already been done!

2. THE PARALLEL

We see in verse 8 that when we believe in God we receive the gift of grace. What we are believing in is the person and work of Jesus. We believe that God sent Jesus to be our King and that this King brought us victory.

Jesus is our Good News. What Jesus has done for us through His life, death, and resurrection is the euangelizo, good news, or gift of grace that we all need to escape the penalty of sin. The gospel is not primarily a call to do something; it is an announcement of what has been done for us! It’s important to realize that the joy and peace we receive from God came at the expense of Jesus and not because of something we have done (verse 9).

ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL, WHAT HAS JESUS DONE FOR YOU?

HOW DOES THE GOSPEL BRING JOY TO YOUR LIFE? HOW DOES IT BRING YOU PEACE?

3. THE CONCLUSION

Good advice is needed; it can be helpful in life but it has no power to change your heart. The Good News of Jesus has the power to change your life and your heart — you have someone worth worshipping! When your heart understands the Good News and what it cost Jesus, the "I should" approach to living right supernaturally changes to the "I want" approach. Following God and His ways is no longer a burden or an obligation. It is a joy — a response of worship!

WHAT DID IT COST JESUS TO BRING YOU THE GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL? HOW DOES SEEING WHAT JESUS DID, CHANGE YOUR HEART?

THE TAKEAWAY

Verse 10 says, **"We can do the good things He planned for us long ago."** We can still do good things out of the Good News of Jesus. In other words, because of God's goodness through Jesus, we want to be or do good. Out of His goodness we want to love and serve others. The grace of God doesn't make us lazy – far from it! Grace motivates and mobilizes us to serve God and others.

When we love people and serve the least among us (inside the church or outside the church), we don't do it in hope that God will be pleased with us. We do it because the Good News of Jesus has compelled us to serve. We have a powerful sense of his pleasure with us because of what Jesus did for us and this motivates us in remarkable ways to live right. We are not living for God's approval, we are living from his approval—the approval found in Jesus alone!

Think about the different ways you serve God and the different ways you try to live right. Ask yourself, "Is this an act of joyful worship or does it feel like an obligation?" If it's not worship, then you need to remind your heart of the good news of the Gospel.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU READ OR LEARNED TODAY? HOW WILL IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR LIFE?

STUDENT STORY

2: THE GOSPEL IS GOOD NEWS, NOT GOOD ADVICE
Gabby's Story



Gabby, a junior in high school, was encouraged by her youth pastor to take a next step in her efforts to share the gospel with her friends at school. So, she participated in an area training with other like-minded students.

At the training event, she learned that the gospel is like a language we can learn. The speaker mentioned that he studied French in high school yet he had never tried to use it in real life. Gabby knew the gospel, but she had never shared it in her school. She realized that she must understand it, know it, repeat it, and apply it in her own life or she would never become fluent in it — like a person who speaks a language every day.

She thought about her friends who were not Christians. She did have a conversation with one friend in which she was able to help her by offering some good advice about how to deal with stress in life. But she determined to grow in gospel fluency so she could share more than just good advice; she wanted to share good news. She wanted to offer the good news about Jesus, what he did on the cross and who her friend could be in Christ.

Gabby's first step was gathering a group of friends within her school to pray and support each other. She began looking for opportunities to have gospel conversations — not just good advice talks — with her friends.



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