

How Does the Gospel Lead Us?

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A Way of Life

The life of the gospel community does not consist of a few scattered events throughout a week or month, but rather an ongoing flow of movement within the everyday rhythms of a culture. The Gospel effects all of life – everything we do – because God is at work redeeming all things to Himself. Our new Gospel Identity leads us to enter in to the everyday Gospel rhythms of life.

To be a healthy Family requires that we live life together, not just attend events where we see each other once in a while.

So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. 1 Thessalonians 2:8

Effective Missionaries don't just move into a new culture and stay distant or disconnected from the culture. The most effective ones are those who join in the flow of life with everyone else, engaging in the activities of the culture they are sent into with gospel integrity, not falling to the left of syncretism or to the right of separatism.

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your souls. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

1 Peter 2:11–12

Gospel Servants are actively involved in regularly meeting the needs of the people they live life with and the communities they live within. And Ongoing Learners don't get developed and equipped through a class or sermon alone but through life on life – *iron sharpening iron*.

When Jesus came he immersed himself into the rhythms of the community he lived in, but in a radically different way (John 1:14). If we are going to effectively engage in life together and life on mission we must identify everyday rhythms of life and the unique ways in which to both live within them and preach the gospel through them.

Although, there are many unique rhythms that could be identified within every culture, Soma has discovered some that seem to exist in every culture since before the Fall and were commanded by God to be done in a particular manner by his chosen people. Certainly, they take on many different forms, but the underlying rhythms seem to be the same. As we look at these rhythms, they can provide for us a framework through which we can engage more effectively in the active work of gospel mission.

Everyday Rhythms

Story-Formed...We understand, experience and intersect with God's Story and Other's.

God has been unfolding his Story since before time began. We believe we are participants in the Story and need to understand it and see how our lives intersect with it. Therefore, we regularly reacquaint ourselves with the Story by interacting with God's Word. We look for ways and times to tell the Story often. We also take time to listen to others stories and help them find their lives within God's Story. (Genesis 1:1–2; John 1:1; Psalm 1; 2 Timothy 3:16–17)

Everyone is living within the context of some story. The story they believe shapes the kind of lives they live. Although we live in a time when many would prefer denying that they live within the context of a meta-narrative, because the meta-narratives of the western world have seemingly shown themselves to be fairy tales not rendering the happy ending they promised. It is still true that everyone finds their meaning within a context larger than their own life – it is what gives any sense of context to our lives

The Biblical/Gospel story reminds us that we all move toward seeking meaning outside of God's Story (We see this in our first parents – Adam and Eve), yet Jesus Christ who is the Author and Hero of the Story moves to Redeem and Restore His Creation from our rebellion. As we become familiar with His Story we realize that we are part of God's rescue plan as well. If we are to be an effective Family of Missionary Servants in our culture we will have to engage the Story-formed rhythm in a variety of ways:

THE STORY...

We are a story-formed people who are living our lives based upon and within a story. We must know God's Story because all of our beliefs, identity and actions are all connected to the dominant story. This is why we are to talk about it when we sit, stand, walk along the way, eat, lie down, etc.... (Deuteronomy 6:6–9)

OUR STORY...

We all need to continue to grow in the gospel of grace and truth. Therefore we need to be self-aware and let the Spirit show us where our lives, past and present, are not in line with the gospel (Galatians 2:14; 1 Timothy 4:16)

EACH OTHER'S STORY...

Not only should we regularly reacquaint ourselves with the Gospel Story, but we must also know each other's stories if we are going to be a Family who is equipping each other effectively. We need to hear one another's stories and bring the gospel story to bear on each other (Consider Paul to Peter in Galatians 2:11–14).

THE CULTURE OR COMMUNITY'S STORY...

In order to be effective missionaries, we need to know the story of our culture – what has shaped it, what is the dominant story line, what are the idols, where are the open doors for the gospel – both demonstrated and declared – and learn how to enter into the gospel crossroad (Consider Paul in Acts 17)

Listen... We set aside regular times to listen to God both backward and forward. Jesus listened to God in prayer to know his Father's will. We are also called to listen to God. We listen 'backward' by regularly interacting with God's Word—the Story and the Son. We also believe he speaks today through his Spirit in us and through creation. We spend time actively listening 'forward' to hear what God is saying to us today. (Mark 1:35–37; John 16:7–15; Hebrews 1:1–3; Romans 1:20)

There are thousands of voices and messages competing for our attention and we are listening. We ebb and flow all day long from one voice to the other. The question is which voice informs how to listen to all the others?

In The Story, we see in the very beginning what happened when God's voice was no longer the dominant voice – Adam and Eve listened to the serpent and to themselves – and God's original mission for humanity moved into rebellion.

In order to faithfully walk in the gospel, we must walk dependently on God through the ongoing rhythm of listening...

...TO GOD

The gospel informs us that we are fully dependent upon God's Spirit to teach us the truth, convict of sin, show us the way to go and empower us to do everything God wants. So, we learn to walk in submission to the Spirit if we are going to live as God intends. Listening itself is an act of submission and dependency on God – it is clearly one of the most obvious and profound ways that we live out our gospel need.

...TO OURSELVES

We need to pay attention to what we say to ourselves. C.J. Mahaney states in his book, *Living the Cross Centered Life*, that we should not just listen to ourself, but begin speaking the gospel to ourselves. In order to regularly realign ourselves to the truth of the gospel, we need to listen

closely to what we say to ourselves and compare that to the gospel and our gospel identity. Where what we are hearing doesn't match up to the gospel, we should preach the gospel again to ourselves.

...TO EACH OTHER

If we are going to *gospel* each other, we not only need to know each others stories, but we must listen carefully to hear where others are not yet gripped by the gospel. Pay close attention to when the story is about them or dependent on them. Also, listen to the heart – our emotions and a words are an overflow of the heart (Matthew 12:34) and they reveal who or what is the god we are submitting to (Galatians 5:16–25). If the outward demonstration is not the fruit of the Spirit we are just seeing/hearing the fruit of another god. God is gracious to let the false gods be seen as ineffective (Romans 1:24–32)

...TO THE CULTURE OR COMMUNITY

The culture and people around us are telling us what they believe and why. We need to learn to ask questions and listen. If we are to be prepared to give an answer for the hope that we have, we must spend less time just preparing answers and as much time listening for the questions. Listening to others first is prerequisite for gospel engagement. We should be listening constantly to determine what story they believe in and where that story has proven weak and ineffective to save.

Celebrate... We gather together to celebrate God's extravagant blessings.

God calls people to regularly celebrate his goodness and grace. We gather weekly in missional communities and regularly as a larger family, to share stories and celebrate all that God is doing in and amongst us. We invite everyone to these celebrations as a way of displaying God's glory. (Leviticus 23; Acts 2:42–47; Hebrews 10:24–25)

Everybody loves a good party. In fact, most people are regularly on the lookout for the party. Why? Because God made us to be worshippers – to be rejoicing and satisfied in someone other than ourselves – namely Him. This hunger to celebrate – to worship – is in every person.

If we are to engage the missionary activity of God must regularly enter into celebrating...

...GOD'S GRACE

If we truly understand and believe the gospel, we should be the most celebratory people on the planet. God regularly called his people to celebrate through feasts and parties because he did not want them to forget His grace and abundant provision. The very celebration wasn't just a response – it was also a demonstration of what God is like and has done. We must engage in a regular rhythm of celebrating God's extravagant blessings in ways others can access and understand.

...IN THEIR LIFE

Part of our ability to live out the gospel is dependent upon our regular reflection on the gospel. We need to regularly set our affections on things above – the work of God in Jesus Christ and what is now true of us because of Him. Celebration should be a regular rhythm in all each of our personally lives.

...WITH EACH OTHER

We also not give up meeting together so that we might spur each other on to love and good deeds (Hebrew 10:24–25). Jesus himself demonstrates this through his first recorded miracle – at a wedding feast where he affirms the celebration of life together because celebrating life together demonstrates the working out of the purposes for the gospel – a people being restored to abundant life together.

...WITH THE CULTURE OR COMMUNITY

The people God has sent us to are also celebrating – they happen to be celebrating a different god and a different story. We need to learn to enter into their celebrations and do it unto God and fully aware that even this celebration is within His Story. Then, within the celebration look for ways to serve, redeem, bring gospel light, etc...

Bless... We intentionally bless others through words, gifts or actions.

God desires that all nations—all people—would be blessed through Jesus. And now, as his Body (soma), we believe we live out this mission as we bless others. We intentionally seek God's direction for who he would have us tangibly bless each week. (Genesis 12:1-3; Ephesians 1:22-23; 2:8-10; 1 Peter 2:12)

Everyone has received blessings and chooses to do something with what they have received. Some people give in order to gain acceptance; to appease their guilty conscience or because they simply like the feeling. Others hoard what they have or use it only for themselves. Followers of Jesus believe they have been blessed by God to be a blessing. They are not motivated to gain something through giving, but they bless because have been given something they don't deserve in order to share with others in need.

...BLESSED BY GOD

Just like Abraham (Genesis 12:2) we have been blessed - we have received unmerited favor and provision. This is not because of anything we have done, but because of all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We must remember that we are co-heirs with Christ and blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms (Romans 8:16-17; Ephesians 1:3).

...TO BE A BLESSING

We are not blessed just for our own good. We have been given what we have so that others might also receive. We must regularly take account of what has been given to us and realize that it is not ours, but God's to steward. Then, in light of the gospel that reminds us that He become poor so that in his poverty we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9), we are freed up to pour out our lives and things so that others might be blessed and taste and see that the Lord is good.

...EACH OTHER

We must see that when we believe the gospel and know that what we have we did not earn and since we have been bought with a price nothing is our own anymore, then we also realize that our Father in heaven provides for his children through sharing what we have with each other. When I come to see this I realize that I don't really own anything and yet at the same time I have more than I ever dreamed (brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, houses, cars, clothes, food, etc... Luke 18:29-30). All that we have is His and that is His is ours.

...OUR CULTURE OR COMMUNITY

God's intent in blessing His people has always been so that those who don't know Him and his grace might see Him at work in and through us, taste of His grace and come to Him. We must direct our eyes outward and begin to believe the gospel has given us everything for *life* and *godliness*. All that He has resourced us with is for the purpose of doing the gospel work of blessing others who don't know Him yet.

Eat... We regularly eat meals with others to invite them into the community of God.

Meals are a daily reminder of our common need for God and his faithfulness to provide both physically and spiritually. Jesus called us to remember him and his sacrifice for us through a meal. When we eat together, we commune around this truth. We regularly eat meals with those not in our immediate family or circle of close friends, discipling them toward a life of dependence on God. (Leviticus 23; Matthew 6:11; 26:17-30; Acts 2:46-47; Romans 12:13)

No one would deny that everyone eats regularly - some of us too much and some too little. It is interesting that the means God gave to Adam and Eve to show their faith in him was eating. They choose to eat unto themselves instead of in faith to God. This became a prime means for expressing faith and thanksgiving to God throughout The Story and it is still true for us today.

...UNTO GOD

Whatever we do, whether we eat or drink, we do it unto God. Every meal really is a demonstration of the gospel. We come hungry (a real need) and our need is graciously met (Whatever we have is from God). Since we eat three times a day, we get a gospel reminder over and over again IF we eat

unto God. It's interesting that throughout the Story, food continues to be the prime example of God's provision meeting their need. And in every case, they ate unto God or unto themselves.

...WITH EACH OTHER

When we eat together we commune over our common need and God's provision. In doing this we proclaim the gospel to each other over and over again. That is why it is so important to eat together regularly – a loving community of believers communing around the work of Christ is the best apologetic of the gospel AND eating together is one of the ways we are commanded to do this.

...WITH UNBELIEVERS

The table for the Jews, as also in our day, is very symbolic AND communicative – who we eat with makes a statement. This is why Jesus was called a friend of sinners – he ate with people who were “dirty”, unreligious, and visibly or sociably unacceptable. The table becomes one of the most powerful displays of God's love and acceptance of sinners. We need to see the table as a place to exercise radical inclusivity.

Recreate... We take time to rest, play, create and restore beauty in ways that reflect God to others.

After powerfully and joyfully creating the universe, God rested. We were created in his image and therefore were made to joyfully create and rest as well. We regularly take time to rest, play, create and restore beauty in ways that reflect what God is like to our community. (Genesis 1–2:3; Deuteronomy 5:12; Mark 2:23–28; Hebrews 4)

Recreation is not a new thing in our culture, but we often forget that God is the one who put it in place. After his work of creating was finished he was satisfied with it and he rested. He then set up a rhythm of life that starts with us resting in his creative work followed by us working creatively. Some have a hard time really resting in God's finished work and therefore find it hard to work, create, play and take it easy and rest in all or any of those.

...WE REST IN GOD'S WORK

Because God has accomplished everything necessary for our justification and is the one who will finish the work He started in us, we can rest. Whether working, playing, sleeping or creating – we rest in His work and His abilities and His power. Our rest then is not only a result of the Gospel, but a demonstration to the world NOT at rest in the gospel. We need to know and live this rest.

...WE WORK, REST, CREATE AND PLAY

We should realize that we can approach work, school, sports, social events and creative works not because we need validation or security – we can truly do all we do unto the Lord and be free to do it as worship (not worshipping the pay scale, position, grade, award, or the status that we obtain). We need to walk in faith that we can truly rest because the world is held together and run by Him and it will be restored by His work through us, not our work apart from Him. We should also trust that we can create freely, not dependent on the quality of the creation or the validation of others to say it is good, but rather because we are already called good in Jesus Christ. Finally, we should be the most playful and joy-filled people because we know the Father is in control of the world and He loves us deeply.

...WITH EACH OTHER

We should recreate together as a way of preaching the gospel to one another. By doing this we become a display together of the truth of the gospel to a watching world. Our resting, creating, working and playing all proclaim that God is Creator, Sustainer, Provider and Redeemer.