

FIGHT CLUBS

Gospel-Centered Discipleship

Fight Clubs: Gospel-Centered Discipleship

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INTRODUCTION

This book is the result of my struggle as a disciple of Jesus. Over the past three decades, I have failed in countless ways to obey and honor Jesus. I have wandered the wasteland of religion in an attempt to earn the un-earnable favor of God. I have chased the pleasures of the world, in an attempt to satisfy my infinite longings with finite things. Neither the legalistic rules of religion nor license from rules in worldly living have satisfied. These twists and turns on the path of discipleship have not honored Christ. Yet, despite my failures, year after year, the desire to honor and obey Christ has not withered. In fact, it has grown amidst failure.

Along the way, I've come to understand that following Jesus *alone* is not really what it means to be a disciple. Both the church and the parachurch taught me that being a disciple means *making* disciples. I was told that this meant two primary things. First, I should be active in "sharing my faith." Second, I should find Christians who are younger in the faith to demonstrate how to be older in the faith. It took me quite a while to realize that this practice of making disciples was incomplete. *Making disciples requires not only "sharing our faith", but also sharing our lives— failures and successes, disobedience and obedience.* Discipleship is not a codeword for evangelism, nor is it a hierarchical system for spiritual growth, a way for professional Christians to pass on their best practices to novice Christians. Real discipleship is messy, imperfect, and honest. I wanted clean, "perfect" and limited honesty.

Professional vs. Novice

I preferred to disclose only my successes, to pass on my accumulated wisdom and knowledge, while hiding my foolishness and ignorance. It's not that I wasn't making disciples; people gobbled up my platitudes and piety. The problem was the *kind* of disciples I was making, disciples who could share their faith but not their failures. Why did I embrace this kind of dis-

cipleship? Who is to blame? The church or parachurch? Neither. It was my fault. Although I didn't understand it at the time, my motivation for obeying Jesus had shifted from grace to works. It progressed from attempting to earn God's favor, to gaining the favor of my disciples. "Disciple" had become a way to leverage my identity and worth in relationship with others. I was comfortable on the pedestal dispensing wisdom and truth. The more disciples I made, the better I felt about myself. My motivation for discipleship was mixture of genuine love for God and lust for praise. I sincerely loved God and wanted others to fall more deeply in love with him, but my motives weren't always pure. I quickly became a disciple who lacked authenticity and community.

Don't get me wrong, there were good intentions and good fruit from these relationships, but in a sense, I was still following Jesus *alone*. The professional/novice relationship created a comfortable distance from admitting my failures in genuine community. I stood at the top of the stairs of discipleship, instead of sitting in the living room with fellow disciples. I put the best foot forward and hid the ugly one. Disciple had become more of a verb than a noun. It was less about a community centered on Christ and more about an activity centered on what I knew.

The Gospel is for Disciples Not Just Sinners

Fortunately, Jesus is big enough for my misunderstanding of what it means to follow him. As I continued to "disciple" and read the Bible, I was struck by the fact that the disciples of Jesus were always attached to other disciples. They lived in authentic *community*. They confessed their sins and struggles alongside their successes—questioning their Savior and casting out demons. They also continually came back to Jesus, as their example and as their identity, their entire sense of self. The New Testament is filled with exhortations to keep Christ at the center of our discipleship (Rom 12:1-2; Gal 2:20). I began to realize that Jesus is not merely the start and standard for salvation, but that he is the beginning, middle, and end of my salvation. He is my salvation, not just when I was six, but every second of every day. The gospel is for disciples who are also sinners. The gospel is about saving and transforming entire communities in relationship, not mere individuals who go it alone.

Contrary to the unforgiving demands of religion, Jesus not only forgives us

when we fail but also dies for us. Unlike the deceptions of worldly pleasures, Jesus offers true satisfaction and joy. Instead of wooing me into death, he leads me into life, his resurrection life. It slowly became apparent to me that the gospel of Christ was where I was meant to find my identity, not in impressing God or others. Refusing to share my life with others, especially my failures, was a refusal to allow the gospel of Christ to accomplish its full breadth of redemption in me. Very simply, God was leading me into a kind of discipleship with the gospel at the center, a constant, gracious repetition of repentance and faith in Jesus, who is sufficient for my failures and strong for my successes. Jesus frees me from trying to impress God or others because he has impressed God on my behalf. I can tell people my sins because my identity doesn't hang on what they think of me. I can be an imperfect Christian because I cling to a perfect Christ. In this kind of discipleship, Jesus is at the center with the church huddled around him. Discipleship is both Jesus-centered and community-shaped. It is for disciples and for sinners, disciples who sin.

This kind of discipleship is, in the end, not about how I perform but who I am—an *imperfect person, clinging to a perfect Christ, being perfected by grace*. And in this I am not alone. I am one disciple among many. I no longer stand at the top of the stairs but sit in the living room, where we share *our* faith and our un-faith, our obedience and disobedience, our successes and our failures. But we don't stay there. We don't linger in imperfection, unbelief, disobedience, and failure. We fight. We fight the good fight of faith. We struggle to believe the promises of God over the fleeting promises of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We press into Christ-imitating obedience and victory over sin. But how? How do we fight without falling into a professionalized, individualistic, legalistic, or licentious discipleship?

Gospel-centered Discipleship (and how the book unfolds)

We can fight in a way that is not professional or amateur, legalistic or licentious. There is a way that adorns the gospel instead of diminishing it. That way is at the heart of this book. If you read no other chapter, read *Chapter Three*, which explains how to fight with the gospel at the center of our discipleship. Once we understand and embrace how God has designed us to fight the fight of faith, we can move away from defective and toward gospel shaped discipleship. However, there are obstacles to making the gospel central. Sometimes we put Jesus in the past. We may have “placed

our faith in Jesus”, with hope of a heavenly future, but express no faith in the present. We surrender the fight. This calls our faith into question altogether. Other times we put ourselves in the place of Jesus. We become the surrogate Master for our disciples, instead of pointing them to Jesus. We climb out of the ring into the coach’s corner. We are too important to fight. Perhaps this is you? Or maybe you simply find yourself forgetting how important it is to fight the fight of faith? Your faith isn’t as vibrant as it used to be. Your obedience is slacking. Whether you are in the ring or out of it, a new disciple or old, this book is for you. It will help you continually re-center your discipleship on the gospel, calling you deeper into the fight of faith.

Here is how the book unfolds. *Chapter One* lays out a biblical case for fighting the fight of faith, which I hope stirs you up to fight. Once the fighting begins, it is easy to slide into fighting people instead of sin. We start beating one another up with judgment or fighting the wrong things with the wrong motives. We fight against the church instead of with her. *Chapter Two* explores where we go wrong in our fighting, by uncovering legalistic and loose patterns in discipleship. In turn, *Chapter Three* calls us away from these extremes into a gospel-centered discipleship. With the gospel at the center of discipleship, we can live as Jesus intended—fighting the *good* fight of faith, which leads to true change. However, if weren’t not careful we’ll start to fight on our own. Failure to grasp the community focus of the gospel can cut us off from the grace God gives through the church. *Chapter Four* reminds us that discipleship is a community project because the gospel is community focused. Jesus created and redeemed us as people in relationship, people who need one another in the fight of faith. Instead of fighting against the church, we can fight with her, to live a life that is motivated by all that God is for us in the Spirit and the Son. In conclusion, *Chapter Five* offers a practical way to apply the gospel to everyday life. It is a call for Fight Clubs—small, simple, biblical, reproducible groups of people who meet together to regularly help one another keep the gospel at the center of their discipleship. Fight Clubs have been crucial in my life and my church. I hope and pray that you’ll find them helpful too, that you’ll form a Fight Club and start fighting with the church, in the gospel, for the glory of Christ.

1

WHY FIGHT?

THE CALL TO FIGHT

Though war has not breached the shores of American soil in over a hundred and fifty years, America is no stranger to fighting. The steady stream of war headlines continue to remind us that there are many who fight every day to defend our rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Despite these reminders, the presence of fighting *abroad* has left an absence of fighting at *home*. With very little left to fight for at home, Americans are turning to alternative forms of combat.

It's ironic that the very rights our soldiers die to secure are the rights we fight to sabotage in the gaming world. According to a recent statistic, the online gaming industry will exceed movie rentals in 2009. Virtual fighting is among game favorites. The overnight success of games like *The World of Warcraft* and *Grand Theft Auto* demonstrate that our desire for a fight is far from gone. In a new game called *Deadspace*, the goal is not merely killing but dismemberment. Consider www.666games.net, a website entirely devoted to violent games like *Whack Your Boss*, *The Torture Game 2*, and *Orchestrated Death*. The 666 Games tagline reads: "Welcome to 666 Games, we serve you the most violent, brutal, sadistic and bloody flash games on the internet. *Always keep in mind it's just digital violence*" (emphasis not added). Is this the kind of combat we have stooped to? Killing our digital boss, torturing virtual people, and orchestrating death? Is our fighting pointed in the right direction? Josh Jackson, editor of *Paste* magazine, cautions our unthinking participation in violent media:

Violence in the media is a terrible thing. Except of course, for those great battle scenes in The Lord of the Rings...I am really repulsed by the idea of torture-porn flicks like Saw and Hostel, and don't understand how anyone could enjoy watching them. And I'm bothered by games like Grand theft Auto that put you in the shoes of a gangster. Yet I gleefully watch Samuel L. Jackson burst onto the scene like the vengeful hand of God and lay waste to pathetic junkies in Pulp Fiction... From the Bible to the work of Cormac McCarthy, the best stories are filled with conflict, and often that takes the form of violent antagonists and heroes who fight for justice...¹

Why do we fight? For justice or for fun? For entertainment or eternity? Our view of fighting is skewed. We jack into the virtual world to fight, unplugging from the real world of our everyday passivity. Gamers work

Many Christians are content to entertain themselves (and others) to death, while surrendering the fight of faith.

hard to improve skills and defeat opponents. They spend hours in front of the screen. Do we work equally hard to improve our understanding of grace and defeat sin? Do we spend hours in front of the gospel? Many Christians are

content to entertain themselves (and others) to death, while surrendering the fight of faith. Are you fighting? If so, why do you fight?

Fighting for Image

All too often, our online identity is very different from our offline identity. Our Facebook status projects what we want others to think of us, not who we truly are. Our blog posts are shrouded in airs of intellectualism or edginess. We all face the temptation to project a false image of ourselves because we find the real image inadequate. If we are honest, the real image is nowhere near as attractive as we want it to be. We want to be more beautiful, more successful, more creative, more virtuous, more popular, and more intelligent than we actually are. We all have an image problem. The problem, however, is not that we lack beauty, success, creativity, virtue, popularity, or intelligence. The problem is that we believe the lie that obtaining those images will actually make us complete, happy, and content people.

Believing the lie, we fight rigorously to obtain (or retain) our image of choice.

Why Fight?: *The Call to Fight*

We discipline ourselves to lose weight, climb the vocational ladder, learn new techniques, make moral decisions, and strive to be in the know, all to gain the image we so desperately want. The image we believe will make us truly happy, content, and complete. We will fight with whatever it takes—money, time, sacrifice, overworking, and the occasional white lie. We fight and scrap to obtain our desired perception. Why? Because we believe that being perceived a certain way will make us truly happy. We believe a lie. We express faith in what is false. We depend on the undependable. Once we realize that we are building our identity on things that are untrue and unreliable, we can begin to sink our identity into what actually is true and reliable. This kind of image building moves us towards Jesus.

Christianity is about image. It affirms that we were created in God's image (Gen 1:26-28), which was wrecked in our fall with Adam (Rom 5:12-21), and so desperately needs renewal in Jesus (2 Cor 3:18). The gospel restores and renews our image. It holds up the image of Jesus as most glorious and desirable (2 Cor 4:6) and aligns us with him. Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15) and his face reflects the refulgent beauty and glory of God. The gospel is about correcting our vision and reshaping our image so that we can see and reflect "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4).

We become what we behold. If we behold the beauty of Christ, we become beautiful like Christ. This happens, not just once, but over and over throughout the Christian life. To follow Jesus is to so look at him that we actually begin to reflect his grace and glory in everyday life. The gospel gives us the eyes to see him and the power to look like him. It transforms us into the image of his glory: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, *are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another...*" (2 Cor 3:18). Gospel-centered discipleship focuses our heart's attention onto Jesus, beholding and becoming like him. But this transformation does not come without a fight. Our sin nature prefers to behold and become like lesser images. We must fight against the lies behind our sins in order to enjoy the truth of the gospel. This fight is possible through the Lord the Spirit (3:18), who we will consider at length in chapter three. But in order to truly engage in this Spirit-empowered fight, we must humbly acknowledge our failures in fighting—fighting the wrong things or not fighting at all. Once we accept this, the fight of faith can begin.

And once we begin, we must never stop. We must “not lose heart” (2 Cor 4:1, 16). Like anything worth believing, the gospel requires a fight.

Gospel change comes through pain, struggle, suffering, and staring your ugly sin right in the face. The trick is to stare it down with truth. Nobody sins because they want to be deceived. We sin because we believe what sin offers is true. We believe that being sexually aroused will bring us personal satisfaction or being socially in the know will bring us meaningful acceptance. So, we look at porn and gossip about others. If we really believed that porn and gossip were based on lies that don’t satisfy, we wouldn’t participate in them. Sin lies to us. We

Gospel change comes through pain, struggle, suffering, and staring your ugly sin right in the face.

need to get in the habit of talking back with the truth. Instead of expressing faith in the lies of sin, we need to have faith in the truth of the gospel. The gospel is “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). It is the heart-warming, mind-renewing truth that image of the glory of God in the complexion of Jesus is all we need to be truly satisfied, complete, and accepted. We receive it by faith, over and over again. When we labor to look at Jesus, we begin to look like him, to be transformed into his image. This is why the fight of faith is important. It is based on the truth and it truly changes our image. It simultaneously holds Jesus up and draws us to him. Although the fight of faith is humbling and hard, it is worth it. It is a *good and glorious fight*.

The Fight of Faith

We have already seen why the fight of faith is good, because it is true and it lifts Jesus up. It is a fight to believe that the image of Jesus is the best image to fight for. All else that is good and beautiful flows from him, but our thoughts don’t naturally drift to Christ. This is precisely why we need to *fight*. We are called to tenaciously struggle in order to believe what is true, cherish what is beautiful, and live out what is good. Beholding and becoming like Jesus doesn’t come without a fight.

In the New Testament, the primary Greek word for “fight” is *agonizo*, from which we get the word “agonize.” It means “*to contend, struggle, with difficulties and dangers antagonistic to the gospel*”.² This metaphorical fight is

a fight in and for the gospel, to believe and cherish what is true. Paul uses *agonizo* throughout his letters (1 Cor 9:25; Col 1:29, 4:12; 1 Tim 4:10; 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7) to communicate the struggle associated with believing and living out the gospel. In his letters to Timothy, Paul repeatedly reminds him how important it is to *fight* for faith in the gospel:

- *Fight the good fight of the faith.* Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Tim 6:12)
- This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son...you may *fight the good fight*, keeping faith and a good conscience. (1 Tim 1:17-18)
- I have *fought the good fight*, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2 Tim 4:7)

Together with Timothy, we have been called to “take hold” of eternal life, to “fight the good fight of faith,” to believe the gospel. We fight to believe *that Jesus’ death and resurrection is our death and resurrection*, that the lie-believing, image-chasing life is dead, and in its place we have received a truth-believing, Christ-cherishing life. This life is a life of faith until we see Jesus, when faith will correspond with sight (2 Cor 5:6-7; Gal 2:20).

We fight to believe that Jesus is more precious, satisfying, and thrilling than anything else his world has to offer.

Until then we fight, contend, and struggle. Believing the Gospel is not a passive, one-time decision; it is an active, continual fight for faith in God’s Word. Refusing to fight has devastating consequences. Paul reminds us that

surrendering the fight makes shipwreck of our faith: “This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son... you may fight the good fight, keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme” (1 Tim 1:17-19, NAS). If we lay down the gloves, we can end up in the hands of Satan. Real faith is fighting faith. This faith fights, not for perfection but for belief. We fight to believe that Jesus is more precious, satisfying and thrilling than anything else his world has to offer. We fight every day of our lives. We fight from salvation not for salvation. This is the faith that works

through love (Gal 5:6). It is faith that works, not faith in works. It is faith in the Gospel—the grand announcement that Jesus has defeated sin, death, and evil and is making all things new—which includes us. Our faith is a faith that fights.

In summary, disciples of Jesus are called to fight, but not in physical or virtual combat. We are called to fight a fight of faith for what is true and against what is false. The Bible calls us to a fight of faith, a spiritual war that contends for the transforming power and truth of the Gospel. It is a fight to behold an Image—the image of the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ. It is a fight to behold and become like Jesus, not in our own strength but in the power of the Spirit. This fight centers us on the gospel, not on our own fighting or lack of fighting, while cheering a fight nonetheless. We are cheered on by focusing on the infinite merits of the gospel, which compel us to fight. Gospel-centered discipleship equips us to fight for the image and glory of Jesus!

2

FIGHTING FOR THE CHURCH

THE FAILURE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

There are many things worth fighting for, especially in the Church. Our churches should be filled with fighting—fighting for justice, for peace, for healing, for perseverance, for faith, for one another, and for the gospel. The problem is that most of us either don't fight at all or fight for the wrong things. All too often Christians are either wimps or bullies. Wimps wuss out of the fight of faith, pathetically following the vain promises of the world. Bullies beat one another up over petty issues instead of fighting together. When Christians fight, very few fight in faith for one another.

Accountability Groups

Christians who spiritually bully one another are often applauded. We sometimes bully through what is often called *accountability (groups)*. Christian accountability typically tries to foster obedience to Christ by “holding a person accountable” to a checklist of virtues. This checklist is often stated in the negative, i.e. “Did you lust this week?” The accountability is to not commit a vice. Very often, the accountability list is covered each meeting with a final question that goes something like: “Have you lied in any of the questions above?” Although accountability starts with a noble aim—commitment to confession, encouragement, and prayer for one another—it often ends up producing more wimps and bullies. Good intentions slide into legalistic or loose obedience, whereby we punish or absolve one another for not keeping the rules.

When I recall some of the popular discipleship disciplines I advocated in college, I shudder. Did I really think that they were *biblical* or even helpful? When one of the guys I was discipling caved into a particular sin he was “being held accountable for,” he had to put ten bucks in a jar. Sounds

Accountability groups often end up producing more wimps and bullies than gospel-centered disciples.

awfully close to an indulgence doesn't it? Yet, in our aim to promote “holiness,” ten bucks was the penalty for pandering to sin. We thought this approach to accountability was especially good for fighting sexual sin. If one of

the guys I disciplined had a particularly lustful week, (viewing inappropriate TV, reading pornographic material, or masturbating), he had to “pay the price.” When we met for our weekly accountability meeting, I would ask a range of questions designed to promote accountability, but as I recall, we only assigned sexual sins the steep penalty of ten dollars. “Other sins” were considered less grievous. Sometimes the accumulated cash was put in the offering, other times it was used to celebrate “not sinning” over dinner. Somehow, this practice was supposed to motivate holy living, but instead, it fostered a legalism that undercut a more biblical approach to fighting sin.

Legalistic and Confessional Booth Accountability

Although the aim of accountability groups is good, misguided accountability practices can lead to legalism. In legalism, performance replaces obedience, we are motivated by works not grace. In legalistic accountability, failures to perform are punished through graduated penalties (an increased tithe, buying lunch or coffee for the “partners,” or unspoken ostracism from one's peers). Even if the intention is to honor God; the motivation is reduced to merit-making before God. Instead of holding one another accountable to trusting God, we become accountable for exacting punishments. The unfortunate result is a kind of legalism in which the healing of repentance and faith in the gospel is substituted by peer prescribed punishments. As a result, our motives for holiness get warped. Confession in such contexts is relegated to “keeping from doing it,” making discipleship a duty-driven, rule-keeping journey. We fight against the church instead of with her. We act like bullies.

Alternatively, accountability groups can devolve into a kind of confessional booth. We confess our sins and depart absolved of any guilt, fearing merely the passing frown of our fellow confessor. I confess my sin; you confess yours. I pat your back. You pat mine. Then we pray. Accountability groups become circles of cheap grace, through which we obtain cheap peace from a troubled conscience. Confession is divorced from repentance, reducing holiness to half-hearted morality. Accountability becomes a man-made mix of spineless confession and cheap peace. This approach to discipleship is hollow. It lacks the urgency required by the fight of faith. We fight without the church instead of with her. We act like wimps.

With legalistic accountability, the main motivation for not sinning is punishment or embarrassment. We refrain from sinning because we don't want to lose something or to be embarrassed by confessing sin to a friend. Our motivation for obedience to Christ hardens. We don't need a group

We need to remove accountability from the center and replace it with the Gospel.

We need to orbit around Jesus, not rules or confession.

to foster this hardened, rule-driven discipleship. Many of us are quite good at legalism on our own. With confessional booth accountability, the motivation for not sinning slips away. At most, we fear the frown of our fellow confessor. Our motivation

for obedience to Jesus hollows out. Earnestness for holiness is replaced by ritual regurgitation of sin. Confessing sin to purge our conscience becomes most important, while we play fast and loose with our devotion to Jesus. Many of us practice a confessional, hollow, and loose discipleship. Others of us prefer rules and punishments. Whether we drift towards legalism or license, we diminish the seriousness of sin and strength of the gospel. We fight in our own strength or not at all. We end up acting more like bullies or wimps than disciples.

Thankfully, my accountability experience and practice has improved with time. Over the years I've come to realize the shortcomings of fighting the church through legalistic and confessional booth accountability. I don't want to be a spiritual bully or a pillow-fighting wimp. So how do we avoid these two extremes? We must replace what is at the center of our discipleship. We need to remove accountability from the center and replace it with the Gospel. We need to orbit around Jesus, not rules or confession. Instead of

groups gathered around accountability, we must gather around Jesus. Only then will we find something truly worth fighting for. The question, then, is not only “Will we fight” but “How will we fight?” What will *motivate* us, and how can we keep the gospel central in our obedience?

3

HOW TO FIGHT

MOTIVATIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

If legalism and license are ineffective, unbiblical motivations for Christian discipleship, what do biblical, gospel motivations look like? The question of motivation in discipleship is all too frequently overlooked.³ Standard motivation is duty-driven and religious. Dutiful discipleship retains the appearance of piety, while remaining indifferent to our inner motivations for obedience. In contrast, Jesus incessantly emphasized the importance of motives: “The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks” (Luk 6:45). Jesus taught his disciples, not merely to do good, but that true goodness comes from the heart. Why the heart? In Jewish theology, the heart encompassed the mind, will, and emotion. It was the motivational center for human action (cf. Gen 6:5; Deut 6:5; 1 Sam 12:8; Ps 51:7; Prov 4:23; Act 16:15; Rom 10:9; Heb 4:12). As Jesus points out, our hearts are a treasure trove of motives, whether good or evil. Therefore, if we want to bear the good fruit of Christian discipleship, it follows that we must pay attention to our heart motivations. It is here, in our motives, where following Jesus really begins. Our motives are more important than our actions. This may sound heretical, but that’s because we’ve built our discipleship on unbiblical grounds. What *motivates* Jesus’ followers is what *makes* his disciples.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on three overlapping areas of motivation—Religious Affections, the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit. Authors like John Piper and Tim Keller have written extensively on the topic of Christian

motivation. Keller uses the language of motivation more explicitly, frequently referring to role of the gospel in motivating obedience. Piper, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of joy or religious affections in motivating obedience to God. Both Keller and Piper have been significantly influenced by the writings of Jonathan Edwards. I, too, have benefitted tremendously from Edwards, in large part because of Piper's influence. Therefore, much of what I will say about religious affections and the gospel will reflect the influence of these men. I will also offer some additional insights regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in being a disciple of Jesus, which I will elaborate on in a future book.

Religious Affections

One can hardly hear the name Jonathan Edwards without thinking about his emphasis on "religious affections." Religious affections are heart-generated appetites for the triune God. They compel us to follow Jesus, not because we have to, but because we get to. Religious affections motivate obedience to Jesus as Lord, not out of religious duty, but out of a foundational *delight* in Jesus. Edwards writes: "The first foundation of the delight of a true saint has in God, is his own perfection; and the first foundation of the delight he has in Christ, in his own beauty; he appears in himself the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely."⁴ This foundational delight in Jesus is chief over all other delights. Edwards emphasizes the affectional nature of Christian faith. It is not merely enough to believe God, we must also desire him. It is through this desire-charged faith that we glorify God and grow as disciples. Our joy and God's glory are not at odds. John Piper collapses these two aims into one aphorism: "God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him."⁵ Our aim to be satisfied and God's aim to be glorified are not mutually exclusive. They are, in fact, intimately related. We confer honor on God, as we do our friends, when we account for our actions by saying (and sensing): "It's my pleasure." When we take pleasure in a person, we demonstrate their value and worth. Whomever we take pleasure in most, is the person we honor the most. Your boyfriend, wife, friend, boss, or Jesus. The Person most deserving of our affection is our triune Creator and Redeemer.

Assuming the God-glorifying goal of discipleship, Tim Keller often alludes to Edwards' famous honey analogy to illustrate the role of religious affections in motivating obedience. Edwards explains faith by comparing it to honey.⁶

Allow me to summarize:

I can show you honey. You can marvel at its golden hue, the way it refracts light, and its viscosity. And I can tell you that it is sweet...and you can believe that it is sweet. But unless you have tasted it, you don't know it is sweet. Believing honey is sweet doesn't mean you really know it is sweet. I could be lying to you. You only know honey is sweet when you have tasted it.

Similarly, faith does not merely believe Christ, but also tastes *Jesus*. Our faith is in a Person—Jesus Christ—not an idea. What does it mean to “taste” Jesus? It’s not getting whipped up into an emotional frenzy. What Edwards was talking about is *genuine affection*, sincere adoration that changes our behavior. Do you long for Christ? Do you talk to him? Do you spend time with him? Do you trust him with the outcome of your life, job, and family? God-honoring disciples are motivated by holy affection for God. However, affection alone does not constitute the whole of faith. Piper states: “Delight in the glory of God is not the whole of what faith is.”⁷ Faith also includes trusting God, even when we don’t desire him.⁸ It is by this faith that we follow Jesus, even when we don’t feel like it. What do we place this faith in? What are we called to believe? We are called to believe both the promises and warnings of God. Whether joy is high or low, God’s Word remains the same, promising both joy and victory over sin.

Believing God’s Promises and Warnings

As Christians we are called to believe God’s Word, both its promises and warnings. In Psalm 19:11 David remarks, “Moreover, by them [decrees of God] your servant is *warned*; in keeping them there is great *reward*.” God’s word holds out warnings and rewards. All too often we read over the warnings as if they don’t apply. Consider the following warnings written to disciples of Jesus:

- Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. *I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.* (Gal 5:19-21)

- But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), *has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.* (Eph 5:5)

These warnings are written to Christians in order to strengthen their faith, promote their joy, and honor the gospel of God. They are not empty threats from a temperamental apostle. They are God-breathed warnings from a loving Lord (2 Tim 3:16). The sinful patterns and accompanying idols in these lists should not be *characteristic* of Christians. It is one thing to aggressively *fight* them, and another to passively live with them. The warnings remind us how serious God is about discipleship. He will not be mocked by mile wide and inch deep religion. As each text indicates, the proof of our inheritance in the kingdom of God is our present faith. To be a disciple of Jesus is to fight sin with sober belief in God's warnings *and* abounding delight in his promises.

Fortunately, God is not a mean-spirited tyrant issuing threats in order to flaunt his power. He is a loving, gracious, just, and infinitely desirable God who also binds himself to thousands of promises for the good of his people. Peter tells us that we have been given "everything we need for life and godliness" through God's "very great and precious promises" which make us more like God and less like the world (2 Pet 1:3-4). Paul reminds us that all the promises of God are "Yes" and "Amen" in Jesus (2 Cor 1:20). They are doubly trustworthy. Consider the following promises God has made to us and guaranteed in his Son:

- "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." (Ps 37:4)
- "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matt. 5:8)
- "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Rom 8:28)
- "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet

what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.” (1 John 3.2)

- “Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time.” (1 Peter 5.6)

These promises offer us joy, hope, strength, glory, and a place in the kingdom of God. All of God’s promises require faith. If we don’t trust them, then they don’t prove true for us. God’s promises are vastly superior to the fleeting promises of this world. God motivates us with unblushing promises of reward as well as with the sobering warnings of judgment. Daniel Fuller refers to these two motivations as the pitchfork and the carrot.⁹ God prods with his holy warnings and woos us with his staggering promises so that we can live a life of joyful obedience. But how does the gospel fit into all of this? Is the gospel a motivation that differs from the motivations of promises and warnings?

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

The gospel is the bedrock of Christian faith. As a result, it is simultaneously simple and complex. Tim Keller points out that the gospel has three dimensions: doctrinal, personal, and social.¹⁰ We will focus primarily upon the

God motivates us with unblushing promises of reward as well as with the sobering warnings of judgment.

personal dimension, how it affects individual persons. The gospel of Jesus calls us to both repent from our sin and to believe in God: “*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel’*”

(Mark 1:14-15). Notice that John both *proclaimed* the gospel and called for *belief* in the gospel. The gospel is something we speak and something we believe. It is the message and the medium of redemption.

As *message*, the gospel is the good and true announcement that the kingdom of God has arrived in the person of Jesus to make all things new. Its all-encompassing kingdom claim calls us to respond personally. As *medium*, the gospel guarantees its message to all who believe. It is not like an email message that can be deleted or saved. It is a living message that

possesses the power to save, redeem and renew (Rom 1:18). How is this message inherently redemptive and renewing? It is inherently redemptive because the gospel comes through the medium of a person, three persons, to be accurate. The three persons of the Trinity have pledged themselves to cooperatively redeem and renew all things. This pledge brought Jesus to earth, placed him on a cross, called him out of the grave, up to heaven, and will bring him back to earth to consummate the Trinity's goal in redemptive history. Father, Son and Spirit promise forgiveness of sin, not as a mere declaration, but through a definitive historical act—the substitutionary death and resurrection of God for us in Jesus. In redemption, Jesus is central. There is no other way to God (Jn 14:6). The message of the gospel is proven in its medium—the person of Jesus Christ. As a result, Jesus is called Redeemer and Savior (Lk 2:11; Acts 7:35; Eph 5:23; Phil 3:10; Tit 2:13). God is crucified on behalf of sinners in order to atone for the great injustice of our God-belittling lives. The gospel is a redemptive, Christ-centered message and medium.

Repentance & Faith

How then do we receive the benefits of such a marvelous message? In order to receive the redemptive benefits of the gospel, we must *repent* from trusting in false gods and exercise *faith* in the one true God. When it comes to identifying motivation for discipleship, Keller points us to the gospel that “creates a radical new dynamic for Christian growth.”¹¹ This “new dynamic” or motivation is comprised of two parts—repentance and faith. Repentance and faith are two sides to the coin of the gospel. They are not a one-time act to get us into heaven, but an entire way of life to maintain Christian joy. Repentance is not a work we tack onto our faith; it is an expression of faith. Tim Chester helpfully illustrates how repentance and faith are one:

How do we repent? We repent through faith...turning to God in faith and from sin in repentance are the same movement. Try it now. Stand facing the window. Then turn to face the opposite wall. The act of turning from the window and turning towards the wall is one movement. You can't turn towards the wall without turning away from the window. And you can't turn to God in faith without turning away from sin in repentance.¹²

Repentance and faith are one movement made possible by grace. We need this grace of the gospel continually. Martin Luther said: “The entire life of

believers is to be one of repentance.” Why our entire life? Because we are in continual need of grace and forgiveness from sin. The cross and the resurrection are relevant every second of every day. Not a day goes by that we stand self-sufficient before God’s righteous gaze. Tim Keller underscores the

The Christian life is a constant repenting from belief in false promises and an increasing belief in the true, good promises of God.

role of repentance when he says: “all-of-life-repentance is the best sign that we are growing deeply and rapidly into the character of Jesus.”¹³ It is a sign of progress in the Christian life. *Repentance* can be described as giving up our sinful behaviors *and* turning

our affections away from false gods. God wants our hearts, not just our morality. Repentance is a stepping stone to true joy. *Faith*, then, is trust in the one, good, true, dying, and rising-from-the-dead God. It is relying on the person of Jesus through the power of the Spirit by the promises of God. It is not blind faith but perceptive faith.

Biblical faith sees the truth, goodness, and reliability of God’s promises and chooses to trust them over the fleeting, false, and bad promises of the world. For example, the world tells us that the way to happiness is often through impurity of heart—greed, lust, power. But God tells us: “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God” (Matt 5:8). The Christian life is a constant repenting from belief in false promises and an increasing belief in the true, good promises of God. Repentance, then, is letting go of false gods and promises, both with our affections and actions. Faith is grabbing onto the one true God and his promises, with our affections and actions. Faith is not merely belief in the facts of the gospel message; it is trusting and treasuring the gospel medium—Jesus Christ our Lord.

So how does the gospel fit together with the promises of God? As message, the gospel offers us the reliable promise of a redemptive medium—Jesus Christ crucified and risen. As medium, Jesus secures all the goodness of God promised to us in his Word: “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory” (1 Cor 1:20; Ps 84:11). The gospel is both promise and warning. It is the promise of redemption to those who walk by repentance and faith, and warning to those who refuse to repent and believe that Jesus is Lord.

To summarize, the motivation of the gospel is expressed through warnings and promises, which are characterized by religious affections (holy fear and Christ-centered joy), which in turn motivate repentance and faith. Keller makes this clear when he writes: “In the gospel the purpose of repentance is to *repeatedly tap into the joy of union with Christ* in order to weaken our need to do anything contrary to God’s heart” (emphasis added).¹⁴ The purpose of repentance is to lead us into true joy! This intoxicating joy of the Lord exposes our lesser joys for what they are—false and empty. Faith leads us into the reward of God’s good and true promises thereby magnifying God as our greatest good. Repentance and faith form the bridge that leads us away from union with false gods or promises and into the promise of joyful union with the one true God. This is a gospel that motivates the life of a disciple of Jesus!

The Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit

But where does the power to believe God’s promises and to desire him come from? How do we get religious affection? Perhaps the most neglected motivation for Christ-imitating obedience is the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. This neglect is the result of a variety of factors. One primary factor is theology-by-reaction. Fear of charismatic excess has driven many evangelicals to emphasize Jesus to the exclusion of the Spirit, not only in the area of spiritual gifts, but also in discipleship. Those who have taken an “open-but-cautious” position towards spiritual gifts of healing, tongues, and prophecy have carried their caution to excess. In turn, “safety barriers” are erected around the third Person of the Trinity, effectively dividing him from the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus. This reaction to “Spirit-related” excesses has reduced the Spirit to red-headed step-child of the Trinity. As a result, evangelicals rarely emphasize the role of the Spirit in our motivation for obedience. I recommend we teeter over the edge of caution, plunge down the cliff of the Spirit, and recover a biblically-informed, Spirit-motivated discipleship.

Regeneration and Motivation

Regarding the motivation of religious affections, it is important to understand that the presence of the Spirit is theologically prior to experiencing an affectionate faith in Jesus. Because we are natural born enemies of God (Rom 5:10), who are spiritually dead in our sin (Eph 2:5) and darkened in our

hearts (Rom 1:21; Eph 4:18), it is impossible to express genuine faith in God apart from the Spirit's wooing and life-giving work. The good news is that, through the work of Christ in the new covenant, we receive new hearts. However, these new, lifeless hearts require the animating presence of the Spirit in order to beat: "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules" (Ezek 36:25-26). The repeated phrase "put the Spirit" emphasizes the central role of the Holy Spirit in making us new. This newness generated by the Spirit's presence is called *regeneration* (Tit 3:5; Gal 6:15). Notice that only through the presence of Spirit is it possible for these new hearts to beat, generating religious affection and causing us to walk in obedience to God. The Spirit not only *regenerates* us but also *motivates* us to obey the Lord. Calling upon Ezekiel 36, Paul explains that the regenerating work of the Spirit is inevitably a renewing, motivating Presence that leads us into inevitable good deeds (Tit 3:5-8). These deeds are the natural fruit of newly born friends of God in Christ—the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5).

The Spirit regenerates us so that our lifeless hearts can beat for God in a life of obedient, Christ-centered worship and adoration.

The Spirit regenerates us so that our lifeless hearts can beat for God in a life of obedient worship and adoration of the one true God in Christ. The Gospel gives us both the Son and the Spirit in order to honor the Father. In short, because the Spirit makes us new we can have affectionate faith in Jesus that is demonstrated in a life of God-honoring discipleship. But how does the Spirit motivate us? How do we stay on the path of believing both the warnings and the promises of God? How can we continue in gospel-centered repentance and faith?

Scripture clearly calls for a life-giving connection between the Spirit's regenerating presence and his motivating power. This connection between the presence and power of the Spirit are evident in the life and ministry of Jesus. Although Jesus had no need for regeneration, he depended on the presence of the Spirit to motivate his obedience to the Father. In accordance with Scriptures, Jesus had to be anointed with the Holy Spirit prior to his public ministry (Isa 61:1). This anointing lined Jesus up with the prophets who

possessed the Spirit in a unique way. In Luke 3, Jesus is baptized by the Holy Spirit and approved by the Father for ministry (3:21-22). Then Luke tells us that the Spirit compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness for a forty day trial (4:1-2). After succeeding where Adam and Israel had failed in their “temptations”, Jesus emerged from the wilderness “in the power of the Spirit” and began teaching and being glorified by all (3:14). Jesus then made his way to his hometown to announce that he was the much-awaited, Spirit-anointed messiah the Jews had been longing for (Luk 4:18-21). After this, Jesus’ ministry is marked by a cycle of prophetic teachings on the kingdom of God, performance of exorcisms, and profound healings. Luke, theologian of the Holy Spirit, goes out of his way to emphasize the necessity of the presence and power of the Spirit in the life and ministry of Jesus. It was the motivating power of the Spirit that enabled Jesus to endure temptation and live in obedience to the Father. If Jesus required the Spirit for life and faith, how much more are we in need of the Spirit to live a life of pleasing obedience to God?

Walking in the Spirit

We frequently look to Jesus as an example of godly character, but fail to see his example of dependence upon the Spirit. The life of Jesus is exemplary not just in what he did but also how he did it. Jesus was not immune to temptation or impervious to suffering. He fought the good fight of faith but not alone. Jesus did not sever himself from the Trinity in order to accomplish his mission. He remained in communion with the Father and the Spirit because he was relationally and motivationally dependent upon them to carry out his mission. The Spirit empowered and motivated everything Jesus did.

In order to discern how the Spirit motivates obedience, we will examine how he empowered Jesus in decision-making, temptation, and suffering. After his baptism, Jesus is “led by the Spirit in the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil” (4:1-2). Notice that the Spirit played a directive role in life of the Son of God. Mark tells us that the Spirit “drove” Jesus into the wilderness (1:12). Jesus clearly relied on the Spirit for direction. This sensitivity to the directing influence of the Holy Spirit is characteristic of the disciples in the book of Acts. Philip is directed to speak to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8). Peter is directed to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10). The Jerusalem Council is directed in their decision-making (Acts 15). Paul is

directed to not go to Bithynia (Acts 16). How is the Spirit directing your life? Very often, our modern, self-reliant sensibilities cut the Spirit right out of everyday decision-making. Rarely do we request or expect the Spirit's direction. Yet, we are repeatedly told to "walk" in the Spirit throughout the Bible (Ezek 36:27; Rom 8:4; Gal 5:16, 25), and to make decisions by seeking the Lord (Prov 3:4-6; Jas 4:13-15). Being motivated by the Spirit should affect not just moral decisions but our general approach to life. Paul tells us to "be filled with the Spirit" (Eph 5:25). How often do we start our day by requesting a fresh filling of the Spirit's power for the day that lies ahead? Instead, we assume his presence and barrel ahead. Our assumption of the Spirit reveals our self-reliant Christianity. We start and continue our days in our own strength, failing to acknowledge the urgency of the fight of faith and our utter need for the power and direction of the Holy Spirit.

In contrast, the disciples in the New Testament often followed their Lord expecting unplanned change. We, on the other hand, like to manage our lives in order to eliminate unplanned change. We regulate everything through clocks, calendars, PDAs, smartphones, routines, and rhythms. When our planned course of action is disrupted, we frequently respond impatiently or angrily. What if began to expect unplanned change and to interpret as an opportunity to rely on the Spirit? Obstacles, challenges, and trials would take on a very different meaning. Instead of becoming inconveniences and injustices, they could become an opportunity to rely on the Spirit to discern God's will and purpose our circumstances. The person cutting us off on the highway might become a reminder to fight sinful busyness or celebrate God's protection. When heading to a coffee shop, we ask the Spirit to take us wherever God wants us be and to whomever he might want us to see. One very practical way we can be motivated by the Spirit in our discipleship is to expect unplanned change and respond to the Spirit in those circumstances. For example:

- Instead of getting angry or frustrated when unplanned things occur, ask the Spirit to show you his purposes in the circumstances.
- Instead of just deciding which restaurant or coffee shop you want to go to, ask the Spirit to lead you.
- Instead of jamming your calendar full of personal preferences, pray and ask the Spirit to guide you as you plan your week, month, or year.

Spirit-empowered Faith

Paul's letters (especially 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Galatians) repeatedly communicate the necessity of the Spirit in imitating the example of Christ. When confronted with temptation, Paul underscores that victory comes through the Spirit: "But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). Our flesh longs for a variety of things, including control and sinful self-reliance. How do we combat these fleshly patterns? Paul tells us explicitly that the way we avoid the desires of the flesh is to "walk by the Spirit." How then do we walk by the Spirit? Many of us have become so dependent upon ourselves that we haven't a clue of how to walk by the Spirit. Like stumbling infants, our walk with the Spirit looks as though we are learning to walk for the first time.

The Spirit will direct us into undesirable circumstances. For example, do you think the Son of God was excited about fasting forty days, in a human body, in the wilderness, under the attack of the devil? The leading of the Spirit sometimes includes suffering, but even that suffering is designed for our joy. Consider how Jesus relied on the Spirit during his wilderness temptations. During each temptation, Jesus relived the temptations of Israel during their forty years in the wilderness. However, instead of failing at each temptation of food, faith, and fame, Jesus succeeded. How? He relied on the power of the Spirit to believe the promises of God. When faced with the promises of Satan, Jesus responded by faith in God's promises. He realized God's words were true and reliable and that the devil's words were false and unreliable. Jesus trusted in the promises of God by the power of the Spirit. When tempted by food, Jesus refused the temptation to turn stones into bread during his fast. Instead, he kept his Spirit-led course by reciting and trusting Deuteronomy 8:3: "*man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD.*" By the power of the Spirit, Jesus refused to distract himself from fasting and devotion to the Father, and instead chose to trust in God's unailing, soul-nourishing promises and truths. In this, Jesus is exemplary for gluttons and bulimics, all of us, who are overstuffed with false promises and undernourished with true promises. In his weakened estate, how could Jesus resist such a temptation—fresh bread in a dry wilderness? First, he walked closely with the Spirit following his leading into undesirable circumstances, a forty day fast in the wilderness! Second, he suffered well by taking up the failures of Israel and all humanity and identifying with our weaknesses. Third, Jesus

fought well by proving that Spirit-empowered faith in the promises of God leads to victory over temptation.

When tempted to flex his spiritual muscle by flippantly throwing himself off the temple to be caught by angels, Jesus recited and trusted in Deuteronomy 6:16: *“You shall not put the Lord God to the test.”* By the power of the Spirit, Jesus believed it was better to trust and revere God, than to one-up the devil through a miraculous display. Jesus rested in God’s humbling design of wilderness dependence, which would prove to his disciples the importance of faithfully relying on the Spirit’s direction and power to honor the Lord. In the third and final temptation, Jesus was promised worldly power and glory

By Spirit-empowered faith in the promises of God, Jesus followed the leading of the Spirit, relied on his power, knew the promises of God, and trusted in what was true in the face of what was false.

in exchange for worshipping the devil. Jesus spots the false promises reciting and trusting in Deuteronomy 6:13: *“You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.”* By the power of the Spirit, in the lowliest of places, Jesus refused the temptation to ascend to the heights of power and believed that it was better to worship the one true

God. In each temptation of food, faith, and fame Jesus succeeds where Israel and all humanity fail. How did he do it? By Spirit-empowered faith in the promises of God. Jesus followed the leading of the Spirit, relied on his power, knew the promises of God, and trusted in what was true in the face of what was false. Jesus was exemplary, not merely because he didn’t sin, but because he trusted the Spirit’s leading and relied on his power.

Are you trusting the Spirit’s leading in your current circumstances? Are you suffering in your own strength? What false promises are you being tempted to believe? What true promises has God given you to fight the fight of faith with? Without reliance on the Spirit and knowledge of God’s Word, we will be pounded in the wilderness of our temptations by the onslaught of the world, the flesh and the devil. We need the power and strength of the Holy Spirit with us and for us in the good fight of faith. God has supplied all that we need for life and godliness in his precious and magnificent promises, promises that erupt with power when we rely upon the Spirit.

The Trinity is at Stake

So what's at stake in our motivation for discipleship? The reputation of the Trinity and the centrality of the Gospel. When we refuse to rely on the gospel of grace, we short-circuit our relationship with the Trinity by not trusting the Father's promises; selling out the Son's sacrifice, and slighting the power of the Spirit. We trivialize the Trinity, undermining God's glory and our own good. In essence, we say to ourselves and those around us that God's promises are unreliable and unsatisfying. We cheapen the atoning work of Jesus for our sin by trying to add or subtract from the cross. We dismiss the Spirit as a negotiable person of the Trinity, relying on our own efforts to be like Jesus. Legalistic or moralistic discipleship produces a very unattractive disciple. Instead of imitating Jesus in the power of the Spirit by banking on the promises of God, we end up bypassing the Triune God and displacing the Gospel from the center of our discipleship. We end up legalistic bullies or moralistic wimps.

In order to avoid hardened or hollowed motivations for discipleship, we need an alternative approach to the Christian life. On one hand, we need a motivation for discipleship that honors our Lord and Master. We need the Gospel, not just to become a disciple, but to continue as a disciple. On the other hand, we need to take God's commands for peace-making and holiness seriously: "Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12.14). God has called us to fight for shalom, for the redemptive repair of creation, society, and humanity. He has also called us to fight for holiness, for an increasing reflection of the beauty and glory of Jesus. He has given us promises and commands, pitchforks and carrots, to motivate us.

The Gospel demands faith and fruit, but supplies what it demands through the promises of God made good by the power of the Spirit. The Father, Son and Spirit are collaborating for joy-filled, gospel-centered discipleship. Oh, that we would adorn the gospel of Christ with our obedience and with our motivations. God is calling us to confess our failures and hope in the grace of repentance and faith. With commands in one hand and promises in the other, we need just one more thing—the Church. Disciples of Jesus are part of *a community* that fights the fight of faith. What we need are small fighting communities that are committed to gospel-centered discipleship.

4

FIGHTING WITH THE CHURCH

THE THREE CONVERSIONS OF THE CHURCH

What would happen if we started fighting *with* the church instead of *against* her? Christians often fight one another over petty disputes instead of encouraging one another in the urgent fight of faith. We need to shift from seeing the church as an enemy to be fought, or a community to fear, to viewing the church as a community of fellow contenders for faith in a world rife with unbelief. We need to fight with the church not against her.

Rediscovering the Gospel in Community

For years Haydn coasted in his Christian belief. Burned out by the legalistic culture of his Christian college experience, his post-grad years were a combination of disillusionment and disengagement with church. Church attendance

One day Nate, an X rock-star buddy turned Jesus freak, shared with Haydn how God was changing his life through community.

was infrequent. Instead of investing in spiritual things, he decided to pursue his career, start a family, and carve out a spot in the good life. He climbed the career ladder pretty quickly. Before he knew it, he was living in a half a million dollar home on

SoCo, father to two, and enjoying a new community among fellow cyclists. What could be better? But after a while, his good life seemed flat. He tried

a few things to jump start it, including increased church attendance, but nothing seemed to work.

One day Nate, an X rock-star buddy turned Jesus freak, shared with Haydn how God was changing his life *through community*. Skeptical but interested, Haydn began to ask more questions and even invited Nate's pastor over to his daughter's birthday party with plenty of beer. The more Haydn learned, the more he was intrigued. Something was different about this church. Not only did they drink beer and care about one another, they also cared about their city. Haydn joined them in social service projects and even showed up at some house church meetings. Deep down, he knew this was something he had been longing for, something much better than the so-called good life. He began asking God if he should sell his house and become a missionary. He was beginning to understand the Gospel in a new way.

However, it wasn't until he started sharing his struggles with others, that he really sensed significant change. As he and his family integrated into the church, Haydn joined a Fight Club. He began meeting with two other Christians who were serious about fighting sin, enjoying God, living in community, and serving the city. It was through these relationships, through being the church, that Haydn rediscovered the power of the gospel. He came to understand that the gospel of grace wasn't just something that makes you a Christian. It is something that keeps you Christian. He began to grow in his understanding of theology, community, and mission. He and his wife hosted members classes, City Groups, and eventually became deacons in the church. What changed Haydn's view of faith and the church? A gospel-centered community. A group of people that made grace, not law, central to their discipleship. Instead of emphasizing legalistic rules, they focused on the grace of God in the promises of Christ. His Fight Club meets regularly to pray together, share life together, and fight sin together. Through these relationships, Haydn rediscovered the power of the gospel and the preciousness of Christ.

The One-third Gospel

Unfortunately, Haydn's story is the exception and not the rule. The American landscape is dotted with churchless Christianity. Church has been reduced to a weekly or bi-weekly event. Instead of *being the church*, we have fallen into merely *doing church*, and far too often our doing is disconnected from

being. We have devolved from being a Jesus-centered community into a loose collection of spiritually-minded individuals.

Churches today have more in common with shopping malls, fortresses, and cemeteries. They have become consumerist, doctrinaire, lifeless institutions not Jesus-centered missional communities. Why this radical devolution? There are far too many reasons to discuss here, but one fundamental reason that Christianity in America is both churchless and in decline is due the fact it is characterized by a one-third gospel.

This one-third gospel is hardly a gospel at all. It focuses on Jesus death and resurrection as a doctrine to be believed, not the way forward into a Person to be trusted and obeyed. The gospel has been reduced to a personal ticket to glory. But the biblical gospel is much more than personal conversion or a heavenly reservation. The Gospel has two more “thirds”. The Gospel calls us into *community* and onto *mission* in Jesus.

The Three Conversions

When we are converted, we are not converted to Christ alone. It was Martin Luther that first spoke of three conversions: conversion of the heart, conversion of the mind, and conversion of the purse. He focused on what needs to be converted in man. However, it is also important to consider *what man is*

***When we are converted,
we are not converted to
Christ alone.***

converted to. Not only does the Gospel convert our heart, mind and money, but it also converts us to some thing, three things to be specific. When we are converted, we are not converted to

Christ alone. The Gospel converts us to Christ, to Church and to Mission. We will primarily focus on our conversions to Christ and the Church.

The New Testament authors repeatedly use metaphors for the church that reveal the need for three conversions, conversion to Christ, community, and mission. These three conversions of the Gospel are not presented as three options, but as three essentials that constitute biblical faith. Our primary conversion, of course, is to Jesus Christ as Lord (Col 2:6). To him alone belongs all the glory, honor, and obedience. To make Church or mission our primary conversion would be an act of idolatry. Jesus alone is Lord;

however, the lordship of Jesus does not stand alone. As Lord of all, Jesus calls us into his kingdom, his family, his church.

The metaphors of Jesus as Lord of the Harvest, Head of the Body, and Cornerstone to the Temple all underscore the inextricable connection between conversion and community. When we are converted to *Jesus*, we are converted *into his Church*. The saving work of Christ through the cross was not to gather a loose collection of souls for glory, but rather a costly sacrifice to create a new community as the proof of the gospel to the world. This community is the Church, and the church is naturally a gospel-centered missional community. Our view of the gospel is considerably undernourished. When we think of the Gospel we think individual conversion but the Bible typically presents conversion into a community. Consider the metaphor of a human body. We receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Head (Col 2:6) but are immediately knit into His Body (Col 1:18; 2:2). The body is then knit together with the ligaments and sinews of love and truth producing a unified, whole body (Eph 4; Col 3). The Gospel calls us to live together by speaking the truth in love to one another (Eph 4:15, 25), forbearing and forgiving one another (Col 3:13), and teaching and admonishing one another in wisdom (Col 3:16). It is through this one-anothering that we can make progress in the fight of faith that we can with the church and not against her.

A second metaphor is that of a field or harvest. Jesus is Lord of the Harvest (Luk 10) and we are his Field (1 Cor 3). As a field, the church grows through the planting, sowing, fertilizing, weed pulling, and watering in community. We need encouragement, correction, rebuke, empathy, prayer, truth-telling, and promise reminding. Although our growth is ultimately caused by God, God has chosen the community to facilitate that growth! Jesus is Lord not merely of the individual wheat stalks but also of the self-nurturing Field. We grow together. Our conversion to mission is expressed in the missional identity of the harvest as it becomes a field of future laborers (Luk 10:2). We pray to the Lord of the harvest (Christ), grow together as a Field (Church), and multiply through our labors (Mission). There are three conversions by one gospel.

The final metaphor is that of a temple or building. In 1 Peter 2 we see Jesus as the Cornerstone of the temple or building of God. The cornerstone is the most important stone in the whole building. The entire building depends on

it for structural integrity. However, the cornerstone alone does not constitute the building. As Peter points out, the temple is comprised of other “living stones” that together comprise a “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession” (1 Pet 2:9). Switching metaphors, Peter turns stones into sojourners in order to emphasize their corporate responsibility to “abstain from the indulgences of the flesh” and to love and encourage one another: “Honor everyone. *Love the brotherhood*. Fear God. Honor the emperor” (2:17). As living stones in a holy temple we have been called to display the holiness of God and proclaim the excellencies of Christ (2:9). The Gospel compels us to fight *with* the Church not against her. The temple grows through the addition of more stones, demonstrating its glorious mission.

When we receive the gospel, there are three conversions. We have emphasized two—Christ and the Church. The Gospel converts us to Jesus

As the church, we are called to live, grow, and fight together for belief in the gospel and obedience to Christ.

as Head *and* to his Body, to the Cornerstone *and* to the Building, to his lordship and to his Field. As Paul says in Romans, we are “individually members *of one another*.”

We were bought with a price and we are not our own, we belong both to Christ *and to the church*. As the church, we are called to live, grow, and fight together for belief in the gospel and obedience to Christ. It is this community-focused gospel that produces Christlike change to help navigate the extremes of legalistic bully and moralistic wimp. How then can we practically fight with the church in the gospel? We need Fight Clubs.

5

FIGHT CLUB

PRACTICAL GOSPEL-CENTERED DISCIPLESHIP

The growing popularity of Ultimate Fighting and the emergence of real Fight Clubs are telling. In basements across the country, white urban professionals meet to fight one another with fists, chairs, sticks, and even computer keyboards. One Silicon Valley Fight Club uses domestic items as weapons such as: dust busters, toilet seats, cookie sheets, and rods wrapped with Martha Stewart magazines. When asked why they fight, they explain that “when you punch somebody or when you get punched there is a kind of grounding effect that makes you really feel alive.” The pain awakens them from the numbness of their mundane lives. One of the differences between war and Fight Clubs is that in war we fight to live, but in Fight Clubs men fight to feel life and to be reminded of their own mortality in an increasingly digitized world.

Fight Clubs were popularized by Chuck Palahniuk’s book by the same name, made familiar by the film starring Brad Pitt and Edward Norton. Palahniuk’s Fight Club depicts the struggle to recover identity in a postmodern, media-saturated world, charged with bogus images of what it means to be truly human. In these Fight Clubs, groups of men meet after hours in basements and back alleys to fight one another barefooted, bare-chested, and bare-fisted. It’s a bloody ordeal. In a speech just prior to a Fight Club, Tyler Durden charges the men:

We are the middle children of history, man. No purpose or place. We have no great war, or great depression. Our great war is a spiritual war. Our great depression is our lives. We've all been raised by television to believe that one day we'll all be millionaires and movie gods and rock stars — but we won't.

In this speech, Durden pinpoints something that should confront Christians every day—the great depression of a life lived in the flesh. Christians are tempted daily to believe the empty promises of the millionaire, movie god, and rock star lifestyles. We are tempted to believe that if we had a little more money, power, notoriety, respect, success or whatever, we would be truly happy.

Our spiritual war is a war against the flesh, that lingering vestige of our pre-Christian lives that must be beat to death so that we can live in the fullness of life given to us in Jesus.

Durden calls us out of our depressive, fleshly lives into the rewarding fight of faith, out of the great depression to a great spiritual war. Our spiritual war is a war against the flesh, that lingering vestige of our pre-Christian lives that must be beat to death so that we can live in the fullness of life given to us in Jesus (Rom 8:13).

Durden isn't the only one calling us to fight. The apostle Paul says: *“Fight the good fight of faith”* (1 Tim 6:12). We are to beat the flesh in the power of the Spirit: *“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live”* (Rom 8:13). These texts call us to “fight” and “put to death” our sinful patterns of anxiety, self-pity, anger, fear of man, vanity, pride, lust, greed, and so on. Upon becoming a Christian, we are inducted into a Fight Club, the Fight Club of faith.

What is a Fight Club?

Fight Clubs are small, simple groups of 2-3 who meet regularly to help one another beat the flesh and believe in the promises of God. Men meet with men and women meet with women in order effectively address gender-specific issues head-on. I have been in Fight Clubs for years, though I haven't always called them that. Some have been better than others. Along the way,

I discovered that when the gospel was the focus of our fighting, Fight Clubs were much more effective in promoting God-honoring discipleship. We officially started Fight Clubs a couple years ago in our church, Austin City Life. We started them “underground” because we didn’t want them to compete with the primary community structure in our new church plant —City Groups. There were no sign-ups or classes. I simply preached a sermon on fighting the fight of faith and cast a vision for Fight Clubs.

Fight Clubs are small, simple groups of 2-3 that meet regularly to help one another beat up the flesh and believe in the promises of God.

People started forming them right away. I quickly wrote an article to give the groups some guidance. The groups went viral. People started meeting all over the city to fight the fight of faith during the week, in bars, coffee shops, and homes. Fight Clubs can vary in health and are difficult to monitor, which is a big reason I wrote this booklet. I wanted to equip our people to fight well, with Spirit-empowered faith and gospel-centered motivation. As the church grew, we started some sign-ups but continued to insist that Fight Clubs remain relationship-based whenever possible. Good fighting springs from relationships of trust and confidence. So how do they work? Durden laid down eight rules for his fight clubs, we have three: 1) Know Your Sin. 2) Fight your Sin. 3) Trust your Savior.

The 3 “Rules” of Fight Club:

1. Know your Sin

2. Fight your Sin

3. Trust your Savior

1. ***Know Your Sin.***

The first rule of Fight Club is “*Know your sin.*” If we don’t know our opponent, how will we beat him? We must become well-acquainted with the areas in our lives where the flesh gets the best of us, where we are prone to sin. Consider the circumstances that surround your sin, where and when you find yourself tempted. Identify these sins. For example:

- Do you find yourself tempted to *vanity* or *self-pity* when lingering in front of the mirror?

- Does sexual *lust* or *despair* creep in on late, lonely nights watching TV?
- Are you prone to *pride* when you succeed or receiving a compliment?
- Are you easily angered in traffic or while waiting in line?

In order to beat the flesh, we have to know how, when, and where it hits. This means we need to think about the circumstances in which we are tempted to sin—rejection, compliment, late nights, standing in front of the mirror. Consider the circumstances of your sin and know the flesh. Ask the Spirit to convict you of those sins that need to be fought, to help you know your sin.

A second, equally important way for us to know our sin is to know why we gravitate to certain sins. *Ask yourself why you are inclined to certain sins? What do you believe they will do for you? What are you desiring or valuing most when you do X?* Look for the false promises of *acceptance, approval, satisfaction, self-worth, significance* and so on.¹⁵ Go back to the section on motivation for discipleship and reread how Jesus fought false promises with true promises. Identify your motive for sinning, the motive that has displaced the gospel and the Spirit. We need to cultivate a habit of looking beneath our sin to expose the lie behind it. If we don't, we will end up legalistic bullies, moralistic wimps, or indifferent idolaters who check out of the fight altogether. As Tim Keller says, get to the sin beneath the sin. Know the lie you believe when you give into the flesh. *Know Your Sin* is the first rule in Fight Club.

2. Fight Your Sin.

The second rule of Fight Club is "*Fight your sin.*" Once we know our sin, we know *where* to strike. The challenge then is to actually strike, to beat up our flesh. Many of us have been lulled into thinking that sin is really no big deal, that Jesus paid for it at the cross and we are home free. But this is not the message of the Bible. There are numerous warnings in the Bible that warn us against the deceitfulness of sin that can disqualify us from the kingdom of God (Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5; Heb 3:7-13). The proof of your faith is that it *fights*. And the flesh doesn't give up easily.

In my personal discipleship, the writings of the great Puritan pastor and theologian, John Owen, have been tremendously helpful. In particular, I have drawn from Owen's *Mortification of Sin* and *On Temptation*.¹⁶ In his preface to *Mortification* (an old word meaning "to put to death"), Owen articulates the purpose for his writing on the subject:

*that mortification and universal holiness may be promoted in my own and in the hearts and ways of others, to the glory of God; so that the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may be adorned in all things.*¹⁷

Owen sets the mortification of sin in its rightful place, as a means to glorifying God and making much of the gospel of Christ. If this is not our aim, these "rules" will be easily perverted into rules for self-righteousness. Owen reminds us of the relentless foe we face when he writes: "*Be killing sin lest it be killing you.*"¹⁸ We mustn't let our guard down. It's dangerous to not fight. Here's what it means to fight your sin: it is *a habitual weakening of the flesh through constant fighting and contending in the Spirit for sweet victory over sin*. In other words, it is constant and progressive, not occasional and instant. As my former seminary professor, Scott Hafemann says: "It isn't perfection overnight but perseverance over a lifetime."

Now, here's what Fight Club isn't. It's not about morbid introspection and ascetic legalism. It's not a religious, legalistic way to impress God or get on his good side. It's a fight for true joy, lasting happiness, for life. Romans 8:13 tells us: "*For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*" Though fleshly living leads to spiritual death, Spirit-empowered fighting leads to life! Fight Club is ultimately about life, not death, about joy not sorrow. It is about the gospel not good works. This rule stresses the importance of taking the fight of faith seriously. *Fight Your Sin* is the second rule in Fight Club.

3. Trust Your Savior.

The third rule of Fight Club is "*Trust Your Savior.*" How do we fight? We fight, not in our own strength but with the strength of the Spirit. Romans 8:13: "*For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*" We are to fight in a particular way—*by the Spirit*. What does it mean to fight by the Spirit? Well,

the context of Romans 8 makes clear that the Spirit is the opposite of the flesh. The Spirit inclines your heart to believe the promises of God. He does not incline us to believe the promise of vanity to feel important, self-pity to rectify poor self-image, sexual lust for satisfaction, or anger to get justice. The Spirit wants to empower us to believe better promises, promises that are true and lasting. When we are faced with temptation, that part of us that inclines our hearts away from sin is the presence of the Spirit. Yield to him. Trust in his truth-telling and power. Instead of trusting fleeting, fleshly promises put your faith in the promises of God. Ask the Spirit to strengthen your faith to believe God over the flesh. Look for counter promises in God's Word. For example:

- Instead of sexual lust, choose purity of heart: *"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God"* God is eternally satisfying; lust is fleeting.
- Instead of vanity, consider the beauty of God: *"what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."* We will see, reflect, and rejoice in the beauty of God in Christ unveiled!

Romans 8:13 is also a promise: If we *"put to death the deeds of the body,"* we are promised life. This is eternal life, life that is vibrant and soul-satisfying, both now and forever (Rom 8:10-11). Those who trust in the res-

The greatest weapon against our opponents is Spirit-empowered faith in the promises of God, promises that have been guaranteed by the death of Jesus.

urrected Christ for spiritual and eternal life will receive immortal bodies in which they may enjoy God and his renewed creation forever. No more flesh, sin, suffering, no more Fight Club! The greatest weapon against our opponents is

Spirit-empowered faith in the promises of God that have been guaranteed by the death of Christ. Don't trust the promises of the flesh. Trust in the promises of your Savior.

How does a Fight Club Work?

Fight Clubs are small, simple, biblical, reproducible, and missional. No more than 2-3 people to a group. *If the group grows beyond three, it is important that the newest member participate only a couple of times to get the idea and then start a new group.* This retains the intimacy and trust built in the initial group, while also fostering reproduction—more Fight Clubs! In order to maintain missional discipleship, make a practice of sharing your stories and conversations with non-Christians and pray for them together. Fight Clubs are simple and biblical in their content, following a progression of *Text-Theology-Life*.

Text-Theology-Life

Text: Fight Clubs focus on a common biblical text. Each person in the Fight Club commits to devotionally read the same chapter from a book of the Bible each week. For example, your group could read through Colossians in four weeks. As you read, make a point of asking the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to whatever he wants you to know. The Spirit may be prompting you repent of a sin, rejoice in a promise, meditate on an insight. Each week when you get together, make the text your initial focus. Remember that it is the Word of God that pierces our hearts and helps us to see sin and Jesus more clearly (Heb 4:12). Groups that don't make the Word central typically fall into license or legalism. By removing the God-given motivation of God's promises and warnings, we default to our natural legalistic, moralistic, or indifferent tendencies. Scripture keeps us in the fight and focused on the gospel.

Strive to be Christ-centered, not application-centered. Jesus is sufficient for our failures and strong for our successes.

Theology: Work through Scripture in community, trying to follow the flow of the author. Ask the Spirit for wisdom and understanding. From there, try to understand the central theological message of the chapter. Be sure you ask the question: "How does the person and work of Jesus inform this text?" Strive to be Christ-centered, not application-centered. The goal isn't merely to look like Jesus but to know him. By focusing on the Son, the Spirit, and the Father, our discipleship will become more about communion with God and less about moral performance. Take confidence in the fact that Jesus is sufficient for our failures and strong for our successes. Ruminates on

the promises and the warnings. Press one another for honest responses. Encourage one another with the promises of God. In order to remain gospel-centered, be sure to glance twice at Jesus for every glance at your sin. Consider how his various roles offer you grace in the fight. If you are tempted to self-righteousness, remember that Christ is your righteousness. Be Christ-focused, not fighting-focused. Go back and reread the chapter of motivation for discipleship in order to promote a gospel-centered approach to fighting the fight of faith.

Life: While discussing Scripture, bring your personal struggles and successes into the conversation. Be sure to allow plenty of time for this. Don't make Fight Club a Bible Study. Share your lives; promote grace-driven fighting and faithful prayer. Be sensitive to one another. Very often, one of you will

Fight Clubs are simple, biblical, reproducible, and missional.

need more time to share than others. Defer to one another in love. Fight with and not against one another. Finally, be sure to

share the names of people whom you are trying to bless with the gospel. Pray as a group asking God to help you trust his promises, as well as to give unbelievers the same gift of faith.

Fight Clubs are simple, biblical, and missional, following the pattern of Text-Theology-Life. They avoid legalism by promoting a Christ-centered reading of the Scriptures and underscoring the importance of gospel-centered motivation for discipleship. They avoid license by taking seriously the fight of faith against the flesh. Best of all, they promote lasting joy in Jesus and adorn his gospel.

CONCLUSION

One day the fight will be over. Faith will become sight. Our image will be perfectly aligned with Christ's image. Our affection for Christ will be so strong that it *will* be chief among ten thousand. All competitors for his attention will bow before him, and we will recover a childish yet mature delight that will never cease to thrill our souls. Every act will be a natural act of obedience sparked by joy. The warnings will fade and the promises will be fulfilled. Threats will no longer be necessary and rewards will abound. The Spirit will have full sway in our gladdened hearts as we live forever in Spirit-led worship. We will no longer treat one another as bullies or wimps, veering from legalism to license. The gospel will be central forever. Our conversions will be complete, our community characterized by love, and our mission colored in with worship. We will no longer know our sin, fight our sin, or struggle to trust our Savior. But until then, may God grant us his sovereign grace to fight the good fight of faith, for our joy and his eternal glory.

Notes

¹ Josh Jackson, “Signs of Life and Death,” *Paste Magazine* 47 , October 2008.

² Electronic Thayer Greek Dictionary in BibleWorks 6.0.

³ While writing I only had time to read parts of Dane Ortlund’s new book, *A New Inner Relish* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2008), which summarizes motivations in three areas—past (gratitude), present (identity), future (personal benefit). Ortlund supports these helpful categories primarily through the writings of Jonathan Edwards. This appears to be a promising book on the much neglected topic of motivation.

⁴ Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, in *Three Parts in The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. I, rep. (Carlisle, Penn: Banner of Truth, 1995), 277.

⁵ John Piper, *Desiring God* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2003), 12.

⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 280.

⁷ John Piper, *Future Grace* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2005), 203.

⁸ See John Piper, *When I Don’t Desire God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004).

⁹ As quoted by John Piper when teaching through the TBI seminar *Faith in Future Grace*.

¹⁰ Tim Keller, “The Gospel: Key to Change”

¹¹ Tim Keller, “All of Life is Repentance”

¹² Tim Chester, *You Can Change* (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), 123.

¹³ Tim Keller, “All of Life is Repentance”

¹⁴ Tim Keller, “All of Life is Repentance”

¹⁵ For a set of helpful questions, read through David Powlison's "X-ray Questions" which help get to lies we believe in Seeing with New Eyes (Grand Rapids: P&R, 2003).

¹⁶ All references to Owen's writings are from The Works of John Owen vol. 6 ed. William H. Goold (Bath, England: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850-53; rep., Carlisle, Penn: Banner of Truth, 2000).

¹⁷ John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, 4.

¹⁸ John Owen, Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers, 9.

Appendix 1 | *Gospel-Centered Questions to Ask*

Here is a list of questions that are intended to get at heart motivations and drive us to the gospel. This is a provisional list. I hope you will improve upon it.

1. What are you desiring more than anything else?
2. What do you find yourself day dreaming or fantasizing about?
3. What lies are you subtly believing that undermine the truth of the gospel?
4. Are you astonished with the gospel?
5. Where have you made much of yourself and little of God?
6. Is technology stealing attention from your family?
7. Is work replacing your spouse's place in your heart?
8. Where do your thoughts drift to when you enter a social setting?
9. What fears are paralyzing your heart from enjoying God?
10. What consumes your thoughts when you have alone time?

Appendix 2 | *Gospel Centered Resources*

Here is a brief list of helpful Gospel centered resources.

The Gospel Centered Life, Bob Thune & Will Walker

The Enemy Within, Chris Lungaard

When People are Big and God is Small, Ed Welch

Future Grace, John Piper

When I Don't Desire God, John Piper

The Mortification of Sin, John Owen

Death by Love, Mark Driscoll

Renewal as a Way of Life, Richard Lovelace

Dynamics of Spiritual Life, Richard Lovelace

Instruments in the Hands of the Redeemer, Ted Tripp

You Can Change, Tim Chester

Prodigal God, Tim Keller

How People Change, Tim Lane

Relationships: a mess worth making, Tim Lane

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For More Information on Fight Clubs Go To:

<http://www.austincitylife.org/fight-club>

austin // city life

For Further Resources Visit:

<http://www.austincitylife.org>

<http://creationproject.wordpress.com>