

Gospel Threads

Thread 1: The Character of God

Key Question: *How can we weave truths about God's character and attributes into our everyday conversations?*

What are Gospel Threads?

- **We know that a key discipline in the life of every disciple is sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ.**
 - **Psalm 96:3** *Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!*
 - **Matthew 24:14** *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*
 - **Romans 10:14-17** ¹⁴ *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?* ¹⁵ *And how are they to preach unless they are sent? ...* ¹⁷ *So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.*
- **Overcoming Obstacles:** What are some obstacles that stand in the way of obedience to sharing our faith?
 - Gospel articulation
 - Turning the corner in conversation
 - Lack of affection for Christ
 - Not knowing how to navigate the Spirit's leading
 - Fear and feelings of insufficiency in the task
- **Evangelism is not an event, but a way of life.**
 - Should salt lose its flavor?
 - **Matthew 5:13** *"You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.*
 - Should a light stop shining?

- **Matthew 5:14-16** ¹⁴ *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.*

- The early church was spread by everyday disciples living for the glory of God. Consider Acts 8:1-2, Acts 11:19-21. Who planted the church at Antioch?

- **Gospel Threads: The Idea**

- Common Challenge: "Full" gospel conversation, or partial?
- Some patterns (like door-to-door or on-the-street evangelism) may be effective in certain settings, but surveys regularly estimate that 60-90% of Christians cite a "friend or relative" as God's means of having led them to Christ.¹
- We see *connecting* for relationship as a key method that Jesus develops in his disciples, both in their own spiritual journeys and in his instructions as he sends them out (see Luke 10:1-12).
- While we should certainly be willing and available to participate in all kinds of evangelism, **the most consistent field for sowing seed is our own relational sphere.**
 - **Active Spheres:** Spheres we create through intentionally placing ourselves in the path of non-believers (community events, ESL, serving at local schools, etc.)
 - **Passive Spheres:** Spheres we create through everyday life (neighbors, grocery store, coffee shops, pool with the kids, waiting at bus stop, etc.)
 - Both require intentionality!

- **The Key:** *We need to develop habits of intentionality in our speech and actions that open pathways to share the gospel, trusting the Spirit to lead us by faith.*

- **The Method: Weaving Gospel Threads**

- **The Threads:** Gospel themes.
- **The Fabric:** Our everyday lives.
- **The Needle:** Our obedience.
- **The Process:** Keep weaving threads until a door opens to take the next step.
- **The Goal:** Share the gospel as an overflow of your already-established connection and friendship.

¹ <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2014/what-person-led-you-to-faith-in-christ>

Gospel Thread #1 - The Character of God²

- **Why Focus on the Character of God?**

- God is the reward of the gospel.
 - **Revelation 21:3** *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."*
- God is the creator and author of the gospel.
 - **Hebrews 12:2** *[Let us look] to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*
 - **1 John 4:9** *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.*

- **Attribute 1: God is Holy.**

- God's holiness is one of his defining characteristics.
 - **Isaiah 6:3** *And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"*
 - **1 Peter 1:16** *Since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." (Citing Leviticus 19:2)*
- God's holiness means:
 - ...that he is completely unique in his separation as creator.
 - ...that he is the only morally pure being.
- God's holiness should motivate us to worship him.
 - **1 Samuel 2:2** *"There is none holy like the Lord; there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God."*
 - **Psalms 96:9** *Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth!*
- God's holiness must permeate our description of him, otherwise we present a distorted picture.
- **Question:** In what ways might we accidentally distort the holiness of God in our words and actions?

² Lesson material for this thread leans heavily on the material provided in David Platt's book, "Gospel Threads". You can download a free PDF of this book here: <https://radical.net/book/gospel-threads-2/>

- **Attribute 2: God is Just.**

- Flowing from the holiness and perfection of God is his absolutely perfect justice.
 - **Proverbs 17:15** *He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the LORD.*
 - **Psalms 89:14** *Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you.*
- God is judge, and will execute justice for sin.
 - **Romans 2:6-8** *He will render to each one according to his works: ⁷ to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; ⁸ but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.*
- All people have fallen short of God's holy standards.
 - **Romans 3:23** *...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...*
- As a result, Scripture presents a tension: How can a just God look at guilty sinners and call them innocent?
- **Question:** Why might God being just appeal even to non-believers?

- **Attribute 3: God is Gracious**

- If holiness and justice were God's only attributes, there would be no hope for sinners.
- God's grace is the disposition in the heart of God to do eternal good to those who deserve eternal condemnation. (Paraphrase of Andy Davis' definition of God's grace).
 - **Titus 2:11** *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people...*
 - **Ephesians 2:8** *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...*
- World religions are built on actions, rules, regulations, and life patterns intended to earn the favor of God (or gods). The good news of the gospel is that God does not require anything to earn his favor, for there's nothing we can do to earn his favor.
 - **Titus 3:5** *[God] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit...*
- **Question:** What are some ways we can point to God's grace in our everyday speech?

Weaving the Thread of God's Character

- Acknowledge the glory of God in creation whenever you can and how his character impacts your life. *Examples:*
 - God is working in my life (in this way).
 - God has blessed me by his grace (in this way).
 - God is leading/guiding me (in this way).
 - God is teaching me (this truth).
 - God is showing me (this realization).
- **Talk about His Holiness.**
 - Speak about God with reverential awe.
 - Speak about yourself with genuine humility.
 - Draw attention to attributes that distinguish God from people in this world.
 - Draw attention to ways in which God reigns above the gods of this world.
- **Talk about His Justice.**
 - Express confidence in God before others even when things go wrong.
 - Express remorse before God and others when you do something wrong.
 - As you work for justice in the world, speak about the Judge of the world.
 - As you observe evil and suffering in the world, speak with hope about the world to come.
- **Talk about his Grace.**
 - Constantly point out evidence of God's grace in and around you.
 - Consistently credit God as the source of everything good in and around you.
 - Continually acknowledge your need for God's grace.
 - Unceasingly express your gratitude for God's grace.

Case Studies for Consideration

- **A Discouraged Mom.** You're at the park with your kids, and you strike up a conversation with another mom on the playground. As you're talking, you discover that she's stressed about her kids' behavior; she remarks at different times that she feels overwhelmed, and like a failure as a mother.
 - **Question:** What questions could you ask or aspects of your own testimony could you share to weave the thread of God's grace?
- **Observant Neighbor.** Your neighbor invites you to a community cookout where multiple neighbors are gathered. In the midst of the small talk, you notice that the conversation turns toward worldly themes and impure topics. One neighbor notices that you're strangely silent and asks what you're thinking.
 - **Question:** How would you explain your lifestyle choices in a way that points to God's uniqueness and moral purity – without coming across as judgmental or self-righteous? What questions might you be able to ask to draw out your neighbors' sense of right and wrong?
- **A Disgruntled Coworker.** Your co-worker is visibly upset. She tells you that a dishonest colleague just got promoted over her, despite doing far less work and cutting corners to get ahead. She complains that this isn't fair and expresses anger at the injustice of the situation. It's clear she's just venting, but it's also apparent she's hungry for some framework to make sense of injustice.
 - **Question:** How might you respond to this coworker in a way that demonstrates genuine empathy but weaves in the truth of God's justice? What questions could you ask to draw out where she thinks justice is found?
- **A Worried Father.** You're at your child's sporting event, watching along with other parents. You've gotten to know one dad fairly well. Today he seems distracted, and when you ask how he's doing, he shares that his teenager has been making increasingly destructive choices, and he feels helpless. "I keep thinking – where did I go wrong? I've given that kid everything." He pauses. "I just don't know how to fix this."
 - **Question:** How might you respond in a way that acknowledges his pain while gently weaving in what God's grace has meant for your own failures and inadequacies? What questions might help you understand what he's trusting to make things right?

Lesson Summary

- It's important to make the character of God clear in evangelism, both in our words and deeds.
- Specifically, we can introduce God's holiness, justice, and grace as avenues to express the gospel.
- Opportunities abound to respond counter-culturally, rooted in the presence and power of God's holiness, justice, and graciousness in our lives.
- We can weave aspects of God's character into our conversations as a starting place for ongoing discussion through intentional questions and intentional answers.