

“Witnessing is not thought of as bringing knowledge, but as attempts to convince people to do things. When you divorce faith from knowledge, you wind up in the position of trying to get people to do things, not of providing them with a basis on which they can then decide how to live and how to lead their lives together... Many, many of the people who are identified as Christians have never been invited to become a disciple of Jesus. We don’t have discipleship evangelism, but we need to have it because of the multitudes of people who are ready to go, who just need to understand and see and have the invitation to become disciples of Jesus.”

Dallas Willard, *Living in Christ’s Presence*

Evangelism is one of the biggest challenges for the 21st century Western church. In a world where everything is relative (except for the absolute fact that everything is relative, of course), how do we talk about the absolute nature of God? In a world that’s completely intolerant of intolerance, how do we talk about Jesus as the exclusive way to the Father? And how do we tell the successful and independent people around us that they need what Jesus has on offer? When we think about evangelism, I often find we have half of Isaiah’s heart in Isaiah 6: “Here am I, Lord... send someone else!”

However, preaching the gospel (literally, the “good news”) was a core component of the life of Jesus, and a significant part of how He called and commissioned His first apprentices. Much of our problem with this practice is that we have defined the gospel quite differently than Jesus did, and we have therefore built our practice of evangelism around a model that would have been quite foreign to Jesus and His early followers. When we properly understand the good news of the gospel, and we begin to see how the gospel is good news for the people around us, we will step into this practice with much greater ease and even joy.

Both the teachings in this series and the practices in this booklet will focus both on the why and the how of preaching the gospel. The specific exercises in this booklet will stretch over the next eight weeks and will tie directly to the teachings from Sunday morning. You can find the teachings at www.yorkalliance.org/sermons-embedded. We believe that it is impossible to gain the life of Jesus without practicing the

lifestyle of Jesus, and Jesus intentionally chose to live in community. The way that we believe God changes us is through the intersection of Biblical teaching, community, and practice. As such, this practice series and others like it, have a high potential for transformation for Jesus followers. If you don’t currently have a connection to a Community Group or another committed group of believers with whom to engage this material, you are strongly encouraged to get connected to one. You can get more information and sign up at yorkalliance.org/groups.

As with many of our practices, I have relied heavily on the teachings and writings of *Practicing the Way* in the development of this practice. A few other resources that I have found especially helpful in preparing for this series and would recommend for further study: *Simply Good News* by N.T. Wright, *Eternity is Now in Session* by John Ortberg, *Living in Christ’s Presence* by Dallas Willard, *How to Reach the West Again* by Tim Keller, and *The Gospel Comes with a House Key* by Rosaria Butterfield.

The weeks will be laid out as follows:

- Week One: The True Gospel
- Week Two: The False Gospels
- Week Three: Hospitality
- Week Four: Joining God
- Week Five: Contextualization
- Week Six: Through Living
- Week Seven: Through Actions
- Week Eight: Through Disrupting Culture

These eight weeks will come on the heels of the introduction of the first of our formational tools, which we’ve called the “Story” tool. There will be multiple times throughout the practice guide where this tool will be referenced. You can find a copy of this tool at the back of this practice guide, and information can be found at yorkalliance.org/practices. Understanding and learning to use the Story tool is an important component in the practice of Preaching the Gospel.

Once, when His disciples thought that Jesus move towards a place of comfort and relative ease, He told them: “Let us go somewhere else so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” May it be so for us!

Week One: The True Gospel

“When Paul told people his good news, he didn’t mean for them to say, ‘Well, that’s interesting. I’ll see if that’s going to suit me or not.’ He wasn’t inviting them to try on a new way of thinking or living that would enable them to live differently or think differently. He was telling them that something had happened which had changed the world, that the world was now a different place and that he was summoning them to be part of that new, different reality. He was telling them about an event that would cause them to adjust their entire lives in order to come into line with the way things now were.”

N.T. Wright, Simply Good News

At the time of Jesus and in the culture of ancient Rome, the word *gospel* wasn’t a religious word at all. Rather, it was a military word that referred to the proclamation of victory in a major battle or a war. The Greek word is *euangelion*, which literally translates as *good news*. N.T. Wright tells the story of the struggle for power after the murder of Julius Caesar between Mark Antony and Caesar’s adopted son Octavian. When Octavian prevailed in the battle at sea in 31 B.C., the *gospel* of Octavian’s victory was pronounced throughout Rome. The meaning was clear—the world has fundamentally changed, and a new era has arrived.

Jesus and the New Testament writers repurposed this word. Rather than a military victory, this *news* was rooted in the ultimate victory of Jesus and the arrival of the Kingdom of God. However, the word *gospel* has taken on many different meanings since then, at different times and in different traditions. The way we understand the word *gospel* is a key factor in how (and if) we preach it.

Discuss in Community

Before you read the Scripture for this week, discuss the following questions:

- If you grew up in the church, in one or two sentences, what would you say was the gospel you were taught (or at least what you heard)? If you didn’t grow up in church, in one or two sentences, what would you say you thought the gospel was?

- If your understanding of the gospel has changed, how would you define the gospel now?

Have somebody read Mark 1:14-15. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- In literal terms, what did Jesus say was the gospel?
- What would you understand Jesus to have meant by this?
- What might Jesus have meant by “the kingdom of God?”

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- Whether it’s a new movie coming out, a new restaurant, or someone getting a new job, we love to share good news. Why do you think the gospel isn’t something that we often share?
- Why do you think people and churches have different understandings of the gospel?
- Why does having the right understanding of the gospel matter?

Take some time to pray for one another. Consider connecting with a consistent prayer partner/group throughout this series so that you can encourage one another in this practice.

Individual Practice

The first four books of the New Testament are known as the “gospels,” originally called “The Gospel According to…” Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. These were meant to be more than biographies—they intended to detail what each apprentice of Jesus understood the gospel to be. For the week ahead, choose one of those gospels, and commit to reading it all the way through at least once. You are also encouraged to read through all four gospels at least once during this practice.

As you read, take the one or two sentence version of the gospel you shared earlier and compare it to the gospel you’re reading. How would you say these biographers defined the gospel? What do you need to add or take away to line up with their accounts?

Week Two: The False Gospels

“Somewhere along the way the power and the promise of the gospel has been lost. We’ve shrunk it down by making it solely about going to heaven when we die, and in doing so, we’ve shrunk God down too. We have often preached a gospel that does not naturally call for... disciples. What if we stopped thinking about eternal life as something we can only experience after we die? What if we stopped thinking of Christians as people who know about God and instead focused on becoming disciples who are learning to know God? What if salvation isn’t mostly about getting us into heaven but about getting heaven into us?”

John Ortberg, Eternity is Now in Session

As we saw last week, the term “gospel” is a cultural term, full of ties back to the first century when the term was regularly used. Over the course of millennia, as well as passing from culture to culture, the original meaning of “gospel” can get lost and we can get bogged down with things less than the full gospel of Jesus as He taught it. When we’ve defined the gospel in a way that is completely foreign to the New Testament writers, we know that we’ve wandered too far!

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read Matthew 19:16-30. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this passage?
- What are some of the implications of having a wrong view of the gospel, and how do they play out in this story?
- How does a truncated view of the gospel impact our journey with Jesus?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group.

Every other week over the next few weeks, your group will use videos and discussion guides from the “Life Shared” series by Alpha. Group leaders will either be able to access the videos or forward links to others in order for you to watch these videos together.

Practice in Community

Watch the Week One video.

Consider the following questions as a community:

- What feelings or thoughts come up for you around this idea of sharing your faith?
- What stood out to you from what Jon shared? What inspired and challenged you?

Ask someone to read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. Discuss this passage:

- What do these verses tell us about evangelism?
- Have you ever had a moment in conversation where you felt like you stepped into what God was already up to?
- What prevents you from slowing down and noticing God and people more?
- Why do you think our culture has such a negative perception of the word “evangelism?”
- What excites you about sharing your faith? What makes you nervous about sharing your faith?
- Can you share a time when you were inspired by radical hospitality?
- How can we practice the art of hospitality more frequently and effectively in our context?

Spend time as a community naming three people in your life that don’t yet know Jesus personally and spend time praying for them in groups.

Individual Practice

Commit to praying consistently for your “three” this week, as well as praying for the “three” of at least two other people in your group. Follow up with each other throughout the week to encourage one another to continue to pray as well as giving updates.

Pray for God to prepare their hearts for a spiritual conversation. Pray that God would meet their needs in a way that clearly shows His glory and love for them. Pray that there would be opportunity to engage in a new and/or deeper way. Mostly pray that God would draw their hearts toward Himself through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Week Three: Hospitality

“Radically ordinary hospitality characterizes those who don’t fuss over different worldviews represented at the dinner table. The truly hospitable aren’t embarrassed to keep friendships with people who are different. They don’t buy the world’s bunk about this. They know that there is a difference between acceptance and approval, and they courageously accept and respect people who think differently from them. They don’t worry that others will misinterpret their friendship. Jesus dined with sinners, but he didn’t sin with sinners. Engaging in radically ordinary hospitality means we provide the time necessary to build strong relationships with people who think differently than we do as well as build strong relationships from within the family of God. It means we know that only hypocrites and cowards let their words be stronger than their relationships, making sneaky raids into culture on social media or behaving like moralizing social prigs in the neighborhood. Radically ordinary hospitality shows this skeptical, post-Christian world what authentic Christianity looks like.”

Rosaria Butterfield, The Gospel Comes with a House Key

Our world is becoming increasingly secular by the year. In fact, according to the General Social Survey released in 2019, the religious “nones” (those who claim “no religion” when asked what is their religious tradition) is, at 23.1%, equal to Catholics at 23% and slightly ahead of evangelicals at 22.5%.

How do we combat this trend? The simplest way is just like Jesus did—one meal at a time. The Greek word for hospitality (*philoxenos*) literally means “love of the guest.” Through hospitality we can express the love of Jesus for those who are far from Him.

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read Luke 7:36-50 and 19:1-10. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in these passages?
- Is there a character in one of these stories that you really resonate with? Why is that?

- How do the responses of both the woman who anoints the feet of Jesus and Zacchaeus compare to Simon’s response to Jesus?
- How do those responses compare to your response to Jesus? Why do you think that is?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- Any thoughts or creative ideas on this coming week’s practice?
- Have you ever done this in the past? How did it go?
- Is there anybody in your life who immediately comes to mind that you want to share a meal with?

Take some time to pray for one another. Consider pairing up family units (singles and couples) if you haven’t already to encourage one another as you go into this week’s practice. Continue to pray for your three!

Individual Practice

The practice this week is exceedingly simple: Have a meal with someone who has not yet experienced or embraced the love of the Father in their lives. No agenda, just learning about them and loving them as Jesus does. Follow this two-step process:

1. Through listening prayer, ask the Holy Spirit to bring a name or face to mind for you to share a meal with in the coming week. This person will very likely be one of the “three” that you prayed for last week, but not necessarily, so be sure to listen to the Spirit.
2. Reach out to them and invite them to a meal! Dinner in a home is always best, so try to figure out a way to invite them into your home. If needed, a restaurant or coffee shop will do. Ask them lots of questions and get to know them! Feel free to speak into the conversation as well but make your primary concern intentionally loving your guest. The goal is not to “sell” them Jesus—get to know them and make space for them to tell their story. However, certainly pray for them (out loud is fine if you feel that the situation allows it, but certainly silently!) before, during, and after your meal. Pray the heart of God into reality in their life!

Week Four: Joining God

“Jesus was the Son of God. Yet He never took the initiative to dream a dream or launch a new ministry. He lived His life in absolute dependence upon His Father. If Jesus was that dependent on the Father, then you and I should realize how ludicrous it is for us to set out on our own without any direction or guidance from the Father... We don't choose what we will do for God; He invites us to join Him where He wants to involve us...”

People don't ask questions about spiritual matters unless God is at work in their lives. When you see someone seeking God or asking questions about Christianity, you are witnessing God at work.”

Henry Blackaby, Experiencing God

In an effort to “prove” that Jesus was God in the flesh, we have often made a mistake that changes our perception of what it means to follow Him. Here’s what I mean—people will say that we can prove the divinity of Jesus because of the miracles that He performed. However, Paul tells us in Philippians 2 that Jesus “set aside” His rights as God, and Jesus tells His disciples in John 14 that they/we would do “greater things” than He did. A strong case can be made that Jesus never worked out of His divine power as God, but instead, listened to the voice of the Father and was empowered by the Holy Spirit, just as He’s invited us to do.

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read John 5:16-23. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this passage?
- Is it more difficult for you to recognize the voice of God or do what He’s called you to do? Why is that?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group.

Your group will be using videos and discussion guides from the “Life Shared” series by Alpha again this week. Group leaders will either be able to access the videos or forward links to others in order for you to watch these videos together.

Practice in Community

Watch the Week Two video.

Consider the following questions as a community:

- How do you feel about the idea that God wants to partner with you?
- What fears come up when you think about God wanting to use you to reach others?
- In what way(s) does the Holy Spirit empower us to share our faith?
- What do you think about the idea of God using unlikely people?
- Have there been times when you have viewed people as projects? What do you think Danielle meant by that statement? Have you seen evangelism practiced like this?
- When it comes to the idea of God using us to reach others, what kind of unnecessary pressure do we put on ourselves?
- Think back to the person that God used in your life to invite you into a relationship with Him. What made their witness so compelling and attractive to you?
- What would it look like for you to change your posture by asking the questions that Danielle suggested like, “How can I serve? How can I love? How can I connect?” in your local context?

Spend some time as a group or in smaller groups of two or three, praying that the Holy Spirit would give you:

- Love (Romans 5v5)
- Boldness (Acts 4v29)
- Fearlessness (Romans 8v15-17)
- Power (Ephesians 3v14-21)
- Wisdom and Opportunity (Colossians 4v2-6)

Individual Practice

As you continue to pray for the three people that God has laid on your heart, and you continue to pray for the “three” of others in your group, ask God for an opportunity to serve them this week. Even better (although often more difficult!) pray for a way that they could serve you! Allowing someone else to serve you can be a great way move a relationship forward. You will likely need to rearrange your schedule to make either thing happen, so as a practice this week, prioritize both serving and being served.

Week Five: Contextualization

“As a reaction against an unsophisticated, manipulative, and at times cruel kind of ‘preaching’ that often left people feeling degraded and demeaned, many of us have lost our sense of witness entirely. But it is core to our faith and essential to our discipleship that we reach out to others with this good news of Jesus. But how do we announce the good news in a culture that is increasingly hostile to it? All around us people are in pain. The loneliness epidemic is raging—the percentage of Americans who say that they have zero close friends has quadrupled since 1990. We ache to be seen, known, and loved. Could the way forward be as simple as meeting people in the place of pain? Cooking a meal for a neighbor? Gently offering a prophetic word to a friend? Inviting your co-worker to Alpha? An act of quiet service in your city?”

John Mark Comer, Practicing the Way

One of the fascinating things about the connection Jesus had with people in the gospels was how individualized each encounter was. For one person it was a gentle word of an encouragement. For another, rebuke. For one it was pre-emptive healing. For another, they needed to ask. Sometimes a lot. Some people told Jesus their story. Sometimes He told them their story. But each time, the encounter valued and loved them where they were and led them toward the Kingdom, even if they ultimately refused to enter.

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read Acts 1:1-8. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this passage?
- How does the continued misunderstanding of the disciples make you feel?
- How do you know when you are being empowered by the Spirit to be a witness?
- If Jesus was giving you this commission, what groups of people or geographical areas might He be sending you to?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- How comfortable are you talking through the four parts of God’s story? Which parts are difficult for you? Why?
- How comfortable are you telling your story in those same four parts? Which parts are difficult for you? Why?
- Have you ever tried to share the gospel with someone? How did that go?
- What’s your emotional response to speaking the story of the Bible, or your own story, to someone in your life?

Take some time to pray for one another. Consider pairing up family units (singles and couples) if you haven’t already to encourage one another as you go into this week’s practice. Continue to pray for your three!

Individual Practice

The practice this week is in two parts, one of which you likely have started when this “Story” tool was introduced a few weeks ago.

1. Take some time this week to write down some notes regarding the way you might tell God’s story, and the way that you might tell your own story. Use the Story tool prompts to help you develop a story. Then find a time to talk with someone from your community to “practice” telling both stories in less than five minutes total. If you go too long, keep working to refine them. Using the graphics might be helpful for some people.
2. Think about someone with whom you already have some kind of a relationship (possibly one of the three you’ve been praying for!) and how you might shift that relationship towards eternal things. There might be an opportunity to serve them, have a meal with them, or love them in some other practical way. As you do that, ask God for opportunities to lovingly share your story with them. Every context and situation is different, so ask the Spirit to help you speak in a way that honors them and also honors Jesus.

Week Six: Through Living

“There is a special evangelistic work to be done, of course, and there are special callings to it. But if those in the churches really are enjoying the fullness of life, evangelism will be unstoppable and largely automatic. The local assembly, for its part, can then become an academy where people throng from the surrounding community to learn how to live. It will be a school of life (for a disciple is but a pupil, a student) where all aspects of that life seen in the New Testament records are practiced and mastered under those who have themselves mastered them through practice. Only by taking this as our immediate goal can we intend to carry out the Great Commission.”

Dallas Willard, The Spirit of the Disciplines

The apostle Peter admonishes a scattered and persecuted church to “be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks the reason for the hope that they have.” It’s a fascinating concept in the midst of a culture that is persecuting Christians already, and the pressure is increasing, which Peter references later in the letter. What kind of “hope” could Christians have in that kind of an environment?

As we worked through last week, it’s vitally important that we learn to “speak” and tell God’s story and our story. But it’s even more vital that we learn to live the gospel in practical and visible ways. As Willard says (above), at that point “evangelism will be unstoppable and largely automatic.”

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read 1 Peter 3:8-15. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this passage?
- Based on what you understand about practicing the way of Jesus, how would someone live the way that Peter is admonishing believers to live? Do you live that kind of life?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group.

Your group will be using the final video and discussion guide from the “Life Shared” series by Alpha this week. Group leaders will either be able to access the videos or forward links to others in order for you to watch these videos together.

Practice in Community

Watch the Week Three video.

Consider the following questions as a community:

- What comes to mind when you think about practical steps to sharing your faith?
- What stood out to you from what Jay shared? What inspired and challenged you?

Ask someone to read Luke 10:25-37. Discuss this passage:

- How does the story of the Good Samaritan connect with what Jay shared in the session?
- Do we define neighbor in our culture differently than Jesus does?
- Praying for people by name, getting to know your neighbors, extending an invitation etc. These are all things that you can do. What would it look like to take the next step in any one of these areas as a group or individually?
- Jay made the statement that, “Evangelism moving forward will be mostly worked out and lived out through hospitality.” What do think about that statement?
- Given your own context, what are some practical ways you can get to know your neighbors?
- Are there needs in your group that you can start to meet in a practical way, together?

Spend some time as a group or in smaller groups of two or three, praying that God would give you clear next steps to take with people around you.

Individual Practice

The practice this week is to take the next step. That will look different for everyone, but there’s a “next step” for all of us as we reach out to the people around us. It might be an intentional invitation. An act of service. The conversation that you keep putting off. Or something else entirely. Through listening prayer, ask God what the next step is for you, and then commit to doing it.

Week Seven: Through Actions

"Christ has no body on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which He looks compassionately on this world. Yours are the feet with which He walks to do good. Yours are the hands with which he blesses all the world. Christ has no body now on earth but yours!"

Saint Teresa of Avila

"The Loving Presence does not burden us equally with all things, but considerately puts upon each of us just a few central tasks, as emphatic responsibilities. For each of us these special undertakings are our share in the joyous burdens of love. We cannot die on every cross, nor are we expected to."

Thomas Kelly, A Testament of Devotion

There is a tension within which we are called to live as followers of Jesus. On one hand, we are called as the body of Christ to love and serve the world around us on behalf of Jesus. Every need is one that we are invited to meet. However, we can't possibly meet every need. There are more orphans, more prisoners, more injustice, more... more... more... than we can possibly tackle. It can be incredibly overwhelming.

Preaching the Gospel through actions means quite simply "do something." We can't do everything, but we mustn't do nothing. Instead, we should do something. Take a step. Make a forward move. As Kelly says above, "We cannot die on every cross." But we all still must die if we are going to have real life. (Galatians 2:20)

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read John 14:9-14. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this passage?
- How would you describe the tie that Jesus is making to His own connection with the Father and the works that He's done?
- What is your reaction to the promise of Jesus regarding prayer?
- What is something that you're asking God for right now that you believe lines up with His will?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- How has this practice been for you so far?
- What has been the most valuable part of the practice for you, and what's an area that you're still working through?
- As you think about the BLESS practice (below), which area do you think you need the most help and support? Where do you tend to "stall out" in your relationships?

Take some time to pray over one another, and if you've had pairs or groups that have remained consistent throughout this practice, take some time to debrief where things stand with the three people you've been praying for in terms of the BLESS rhythm.

Individual Practice

Over the course of the last six weeks, you have been led through a practice step by step that is among the most effective and helpful ways to preach the gospel: BLESS. The BLESS practice stands for:

- Begin with prayer
- Listen to their story
- Eat together
- Serve and be served
- Share your story

You'll notice the "preaching" part of preaching the gospel comes at the very end of the process! There's much more to it than knowing how to present Jesus clearly.

This week think about some of the people in your life that don't yet know Jesus. As you consider your relationship, where do they fall in this matrix? Make a simple prayer chart that recognizes where your connections are and where they are headed. Relationships don't always follow a linear progression, so it could be that you've eaten together before you've heard their story and so on. However, this five-step practice is a great way to engage the world around you. As you review your chart, develop a plan to take the next step in BLESS with at least one person.

Week Eight: Disrupting the Culture

“Christians do not withdraw from culture, but they do not compromise and they do not try to dominate. They simply enter every field trying to be salt and light, trying to serve, and yet at the same time being true to their Christian faith. They’re faithful, which means they stay true to the Bible, but they’re present... We need to create, above all, possibilities in every congregation for laypeople to seek illumination from the gospel for their daily secular duty. The church should train Christians not to seal off their faith from their work, but to think out the implications of their Christian beliefs from their work.”

Tim Keller, How to Reach the West Again

The most difficult way to follow Jesus—in fact, a way that makes following Him basically impossible—is to layer Him over your current life. Jesus doesn’t fit into blank space in our schedule on Tuesdays between 1:45 and 2:15. He doesn’t fill up your currently open second Monday of the month. He won’t slide into your priority list, bouncing nicely between 1 and 3, depending on how pressing the needs of family and self-care are in the moment. In fact, Jesus doesn’t even want to reside at the top of your already filled priority list. He wants to be the lens through which you see all your priorities.

The reason Jesus disrupts our culture, and our lives, so much is that He is nothing more or less than God. The good news (gospel) of the Kingdom disrupts every other kingdom and becomes the locus around which everything else must revolve. This is both what Jesus called “life to the full” (John 10:10) and what His disciples called “a hard teaching.” (John 6:60) Those things are not mutually exclusive.

Discuss in Community

Have somebody read Acts 19:23-41. Break into groups of 3-4 and discuss the following questions:

- What jumps out to you in this passage?
- What are some of the idols in our culture that Jesus pushes against and a crowd might riot to keep?
- How does your faith impact your relationship to cultural idols?

Come back together as a whole group and share any insights that seemed to particularly resonate with your group. Then, take a moment to have someone read through the individual practice below. As you think about engaging this final practice this week, consider the following questions:

Questions for Community:

- What was the best part of this practice? The hardest part?
- Is there a way that you notice that you’ve changed during the time we’ve been working through this practice?
- What’s one thing you will take away from this practice?

Take some time to pray for one another. Pray that both the truths and the practices from this series would take root in your lives over the long haul.

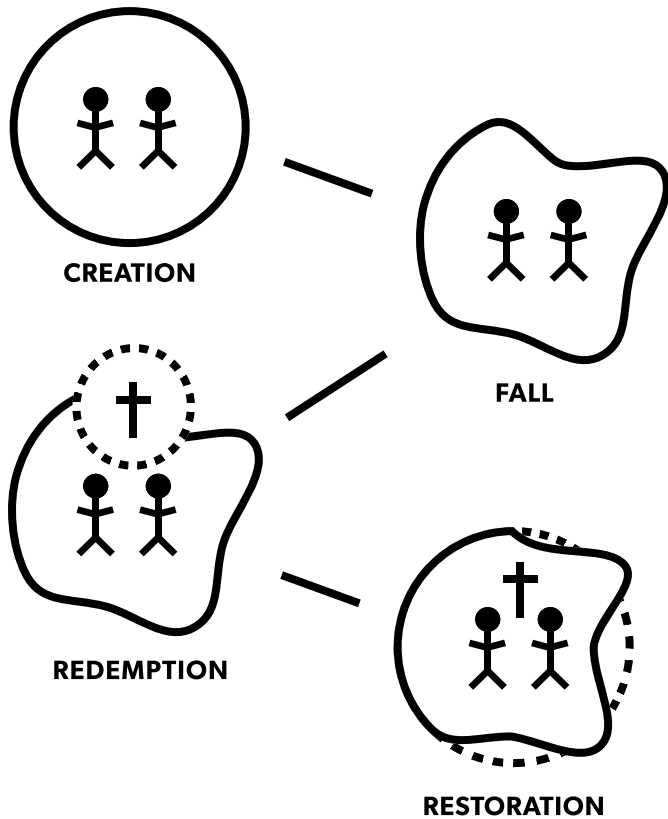
Individual Practice

The goal of this final practice is to make a plan. The world around us has a strong, formative effect on us, and when we are not intentional, the busyness of the world “unintentionally” forms us. We may have the best of intentions for the proclamation of the gospel, but the pressing things in our lives can easily get in the way.

Last week we put the “puzzle pieces” of this practice series together using the BLESS acronym to represent the rhythms of connecting with people. Remember that the gospel of Jesus is one of freedom and not obligation (Matthew 11:28-30), so the invitation into preaching the gospel to those around us should be part of that—it might have the scary and exhilarating thrill of stepping out onto a cable on a high ropes course, but it shouldn’t feel like carrying around a 100 lb. weight. Also, relationships with people are given to us to enjoy not exploit, so our goal is never targeting, but loving and engaging people where they are. As we learn from them, they will learn from us as well.

All that said, consider what a “regular” practice of preaching the gospel might look like for you. Who are you praying for? Listening to? Eating with? Serving or being served by? And who is ready to hear your story? Last week you figured out a next step for one of those relationships—take some time this week to figure out how preaching the gospel will fit into your life in an ongoing way. Think about the when and the how, not just the who, and make a plan that is sustainable. Share your plan with at least one other person in your community.

STORY



STORY



CREATION

God created us and the world for good.

When I think about the way that I'm put together (personality, passions, talents, etc.), what can I celebrate as good gifts from a good God? What are some of the blessings of my past and my story?



FALL

Both us and the world around us are damaged by evil.

When did you first recognize your dark side? How did the brokenness of your life and the world around you play out in your story? At what point did that come to a point of crisis?



REDEMPTION

God has gifted us for life in the new Kingdom of Jesus.

When did you step into the story of Jesus and intentionally decide to follow Him? As you have stepped into the rhythms of Jesus, what work of the Spirit have you seen in your life?



RESTORATION

The Kingdom expands as God empowers us to heal the world.

How has God used your personality, gifts, and connections to bring healing to the world around you? What are some ways that you've experienced the forward move of the Kingdom in and through your life?

