

4 THE G^S

GOOD. GREAT. GRACIOUS. GLORIOUS.

THE 4G^S

PRIMER.

Discuss

- *What does it mean to believe?*
- *Where does belief happen? Head or Heart?*
- *What is the difference between what you know and what you believe?*

Romans 10:9-10 sheds some light on this:

Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Belief happens in the heart. A common misunderstanding when it comes to the nature of belief is that you can believe something in your head but not believe it in your heart. But scripture makes no provision for that dualistic understanding of belief. Either you believe it in your heart, or you don't believe it at all.

Scripture refers to the heart as much more than the physical organ that pumps blood through our body and keeps us alive. The word "heart" appears in Scripture more than 850 times, and we are told that it does many things. It makes decisions, emotes, and desires things. Our heart lusts, thinks, reasons, and can be deceived.

When the Bible speaks of "the heart", it is describing the real you, the true self. The heart is the core of man, the very center of our being. It includes your mind, your will, and your emotions. It's not less than any of those things, but it is actually the totality of all those things. The heart is the deepest part of who you are.

Not only is the heart the deepest part of who you are, but it is the root of all your behavior, thoughts, and emotions. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." Everything you do in your life is an outpouring of your heart. Jesus said, "What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart," (Matt. 15:18). Jesus also told us that you will know a tree by its fruit (Matt. 7:16). In other words, your behavior reveals your heart.

If you looked at all the behavior, thoughts, and emotions of your life and realized those things are indicative of what is happening in your heart, you would have to admit that at times, we are all unbelievers. This doesn't mean that we are unbelievers in the sense that we are not Christians or we have denied Jesus as Lord. Rather, it means there are times where the things that we know to be true about God's character and nature do not line up with our actions. Which means in that particular moment, we have stopped believing those things are true about God.

If we were to take a quiz on God's sovereignty and I were to ask, "Is God in control of all things?" Most of us would pass the test, no doubt. Some of us could even point to stories in

Scripture that support the answer. We can say all day long, “God is in control of everything,” yet in the last 24 hours you have probably worried. Even though you know it is true, in that moment you have stopped believing that God is in control.

Discuss

- *Can you identify a truth about God that you “know” but have a hard time believing? What patterns of behavior does that produce in your life?*
- *To help this discussion, have the group acknowledge areas of life that:*
 - *cause you to be stressed*
 - *make you crave approval*
 - *you often complain about*
 - *you are overly sensitive about*

In his book, “*You Can Change*”, Tim Chester says, “The process of closing the gap of what we know in our head and what we believe in our heart is called sanctification.”

Sanctification is about becoming more like Jesus, but we only become more like Jesus as our actions line up with what we believe to be true about God.

Tim Chester continues by saying, “Sinful actions always have their origin in some form of unbelief; behind every sin is a lie about God. The root of all our behavior and emotions is the heart, what it trusts and what it treasures.” People are given over to sinful desires because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie (Romans 1:25). This means that when we sin there is an exchange that occurs where we trade truths about God—that would lead us toward right living—for a lie about God—that leads us into sin.

Behind every sinful behavior, thought, or emotion—envy, greed, sexual sin, anger, pride, impatience, jealousy—there is some lie that we have believed about God. Paul makes this clear in Romans 14:23 when he says, “Everything that does not come from faith is sin.” This view of sin might seem radical because it goes deeper than right and wrong behavior and gets to what we are believing in our heart.

This helps us make sense of what King David says in Psalm 51:4 which comes after being confronted about committing the sins of murder and adultery. He says to God, “Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what was evil in your sight.” How could that be that David only sinned only against God? In the moment he was believing things about God that weren’t true. David was believing that God was holding out on him. He believed that God was not good. He believed that God couldn’t satisfy his desires.

Fundamentally this wrong belief about God was what was fueling his sinful behavior. The reason David can say that he only sinned against God was because at the root of all the other sin was a false belief about God. But this idea can be taken a step further, and we can say that behind every sin is a finger-wagging accusation against God. Saying, “behind every sin is a lie,” can make us seem like a passive victim that got duped into believing something wrong. So to say that behind every sin is a finger-wagging accusation about God makes us completely culpable.

David didn’t just get tricked into sinning. He shook his fist at the sky and pointed his finger and said, “You don’t satisfy! You’re holding out on me! You are not good!” Unless we, like

David did, admit that God is the most offended party when it comes to our sin, we will never hate our sin and we will never experience real and lasting change.

Discuss

- *When you think of sin, do you usually think of actions (do's and don'ts) or attitude and beliefs?*
- *What do you think about our sin being first and foremost against and offensive to God?*

If you want to experience change in your life, sin must be dealt with. Often times our approach to with dealing sin is behavior modification or sin management. We tell ourselves in order to get past our sin problem we need to stop doing “this” or “that”. Do more good stuff, do less bad stuff. We need to buckle down and try harder. Thus, we take a very behavioral approach to sin. And consequently, when we deal with sin by behavior modification we find ourselves eventually saying, “I can’t believe I did that again.”

But, if every sin is a finger-wagging accusation against God then sin is a belief issue. This means I don’t need to primarily focus my attention on changing my behavior. I need to focus on getting my heart right. When we view sin as a heart issue, we can see that the sin in our life stems from believing lies about God. When we see the problem accurately, we are able to find that the antidote to this problem is believing the truth about God. Thus, true and lasting change starts in the heart and works its way out.

When we think about sin like this, it also changes our view of repentance. Now, when we yell at our kids or we get impatient with the checkout clerk at the grocery store, repentance not only includes repenting about what we did wrong but how we failed to believe the truth about God. True repentance addresses both our actions and the “lie beneath the sin.”

Discuss

- *Share an area of your life that you’d like to change. It might be a type of behavior (lying, lust, overeating, excessive spending, or inappropriate relationships) or an emotion (cynicism, envy, anxiety, greed, fear, or anger). Or it might be a Christian virtue, a fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) that you feel is particularly lacking in your life. (Use wisdom while guiding this conversation. You may need to start the conversation by sharing some sin in your own life to set an example for the group.)*
- *Can you identify or speculate on the “lie beneath the sin?”*
- *Using some of the answers from the group, ask: What would repentance look like if you started to address the “lie beneath the sin?”*
- *When we see the root of all sin as believing a lie about God, how does it change the way we view others and their sin?*

Not only does God desire for us to turn from our sinful ways and experience true and lasting heart change, but it is his love for us that changes us. Ephesians 2:4 says, “God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our sins, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...”

There is no greater change than for something dead to be brought to life, and this is precisely what happens when we believe the gospel. Not only are we made alive in Christ, but we are seated with him in the heavenly places! The same great love God has for us that brings us from death to life also brings change right now as we move from one degree of Christlikeness to the next! Over the next four sessions we will take a look at four truths about God that, when believed, have the potential to radically transform what we believe and how we live.

THE 4G^S

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Review

As a quick refresher, ask the group what they remember from the last session. Refer to the bullets below to help direct your conversation.

- *Belief happens in the heart.*
- *The process of taking what we know in our heads moving to what we believe in our heart is called sanctification.*
- *Behind every sin is a lie about God.*
- *Sin isn't fixed by behavior modification but by a change of heart.*
- *Biblical repentance goes beyond apologizing for what we did and goes to the heart of what we are believing.*

Watch

Mark's Story | God is Great by Soma

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8-EyZ_S9CI

Discuss

- *Was there anything that stood out to you from Mark's story?*
- *Can you relate to some of the struggles that he faced?*

In this study, we are going to spend some time discovering and rediscovering four great truths about God. And each of these truths has an implication statement attached to it. In this session we are going to take a look at the first great truth about God; **God is Great, so I don't have to be in control.**

Discuss

- *What does it mean to be great?*
- *What are attributes of greatness?*
- *What is the greatest thing you can think of?*

When something is great, it is bigger, better and more valuable than other things. It is more powerful, more numerous, more remarkable, more exceptional, more outstanding, more notable, more significant, more consequential, more distinguished, more noble. The dictionary says to be great is to be "unusual or considerable in degree, power, and intensity."

It's important to remember that we often devalue words. We might finish a really good meal and say, "That steak was great!" It might have been a good steak. It might even have been the best steak you've ever had, but a steak is not great in the same way that God is great.

God's greatness is a central part of what we believe about him. Psalm 145:3 says, "Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom." A fathom is actually a unit used to measure deep waters. What the Psalmist is saying, is if you tried to measure out the depth of God's greatness you would not be able to quantify it because of the massive amounts of greatness.

We see evidences of God's greatness all throughout scripture and in creation. Have you ever thought about the absolute insanity that we live on a near perfect sphere hurtling through space at around 67,000 miles per hour? This is mach 86 to pilots. This sphere is also spinning while it hurtles, so tack on an extra 1,000 miles per hour at the fat parts. And it's all tucked into a giant hurricane of stars.

Scripture also tells us that God has all power, there is nothing He can't do. In addition to making all of creation, He is also in control of the entire universe. A word we sometimes use to describe the greatness of God is sovereignty. It means that he is in control of all things, nothing escapes his notice, and nothing happens that he doesn't know about. He is the one who keeps the Earth spinning on its axis and rotating around the sun.

Discuss

- *What are some scenes in God's story that remind you of God's greatness?*
- *When you think of God's greatness, what do you think about?*
- *Has there been a time in your life where God's greatness was explicit to you?*

Nearly every page of Scripture reveals the power and greatness of God. And yet, we frequently find ourselves trying to take the place of God and control of our lives and of the people around us. For many of us, it is easy to agree that God is great until things don't go your way. It could be as small as getting in the wrong line at the grocery store or on the wrong lane on the interstate. Or it could be as big as your kids not following your instruction or losing your job. There is something about these situations that produces a degree of frustration, anxiety, or worry.

Discuss

- *What areas of your life do you find yourself trying to control?*

If we were to be completely honest, we would probably say that we have at one time or another tried to control every part of our life. We have adopted the mindset that says, "My life is up to me." Not in a way where we neglect our responsibilities, but in a way where we try to create a desired outcome. We can easily wear ourselves out with busyness and stress when we aren't trusting that God is in control. On top of that, we can hurt others as we manipulate or play the system to get what we want. Even when we do that, we can never guarantee that it will work out.

We might live with the illusion that we have a high level of control over our lives. Yet, when God shows us the truth of the matter, it is very clear that we have zero control. We don't even have control over our heart to make it beat in the next second. And when we come to this reality, one of two things happens. Either we freak out, or we worship God.

Discuss

- *What is produced in us by our efforts to control all these areas of our lives?*
- *Why do you think we keep trying to take control in these areas?*

With all this negative fruit being produced in our lives that runs contrary to the good theology we have in our minds, what is going to break this pattern of desiring control? The only thing that will set us free is realizing that through the life, death, resurrection of Jesus, we are shown once and for all that God's control is so thorough that we can trust him with every aspect of our life. The stories in the Old Testament are helpful and important for reminding us of the greatness of God, but they are not enough to get our hearts over the hump of unbelief. We need a bigger story, and the story of Jesus is that bigger story.

Look at Jesus's birth, for starters. Jesus was born of a virgin. God himself, the uncreated Creator, squeezed himself into a two-celled zygote and implanted himself in the womb of a young woman. Then we see the power of Jesus when he speaks to the wind and the waves and instantaneously they become still. We even see his power over spiritual things when he commands demons and they do exactly what he says. His is undeniably in control over the physical and spiritual.

And then we see Jesus's death. We see our great sovereign God, the one who is seated above all rulers and authority, make himself nothing. He gives up all power, control, and authority to forgive us from our sin. By Jesus giving up his control, he shows us the ultimate control that his Father has.

By his death on the cross, Jesus has addressed our main concern. He has answered our toughest question and released our biggest tension. He has calmed our most overwhelming fear, met our deepest need, and brought peace to our most paralyzing anxiety. He has removed our biggest worry, the one thing that humanity has zero hope of ever controlling. Namely, our reconciliation with God. If you believe that God, through his Son Jesus, has the power to reconcile you to God, then you should be able to trust God with anything!

But then even further, God shows his power through the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Ephesians 1:20 says, "According to the working of his great power that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places." God's power is so strong that not even death can limit him! And now, that same power lives in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit when we put our faith in Jesus.

So when you are tempted to be in control and you see the negative effects of trying to be in control—worry, fear, anxiety, doubt, frustration—produced in your life, let that be a clue to you that your heart is not right. That tells us that you are not believing what is true about God. Even more so, it tells us that we have begun worshiping something other than God. It could be financial security, reputation, or your own efforts to reconcile yourself to God. In that moment of realization, we need **repentance** and **faith**.

Repentance means to change your mind about who or what is God. It is a matter of worship correction. It sounds like this, "God, I have believed that I could actually control things. I have believed that my significance was based on my ability to control things and I have failed. And there is a lot of evidence—listing out sinful behaviors—that I have been doing

this. It hasn't worked and this isn't the life you have designed for me to live. I turn from worshiping that and turn back to worshiping You."

Then in faith, we have the opportunity to affirm that God is trustworthy. That he is the one who is in ultimate control. And we remind ourselves of the gospel—that it is only by God's gracious plan that we are restored back to right relationship to Him, through Christ. And because God has handled the biggest issue that we will ever face in our lives, we can trust Him with any area of life. Repentance and faith are the essence of the Christian life. We will do this over and over again through the entirety of our lives.

To the paralyzed man who was lowered down through the roof, Jesus says, "Don't worry, your sins are forgiven." In other words, Jesus has the power to take care of this man's biggest problem so he doesn't need to worry about the fact that he can't even walk. Compared to the fact that he needed to be made right with the Holy God, his paralysis is a minor issue.

To the disciples who are freaking out while they are out at sea in the middle of a huge storm Jesus says, "Don't you believe in me yet? Why are you worried about a storm when your Messiah is with you? Don't be afraid, trust in me."

To Jairus, who had a sick daughter on her death bed, Jesus says, "Don't be afraid. Just trust me." Even in this life and death situation Jesus tells this man that there is no reason to fear because he has taken care of this man's biggest issue.

We often associate the sovereignty of God with theological debates. But for all of us, it's a daily practical choice. And when we choose to live in the truth that God is great so I don't have to be in control, we experience freedom, peace, joy, and a life of resting in the sovereignty of our Heavenly Father. **God is great, so I don't have to be in control.**

Discuss

- *Where do you see the fruits of unbelief—worry, fear, anxiety, frustration—in your life right now?*
- *What fears do you have concerning the future? How does the truth that God is great change how you feel?*
- *If God is truly great, should this affect you personally? As a missional community?*



Review & Follow Up

In the last session, we spent time discussing the first great truth about God; **God is great so we don't have to be in control.** Hopefully our conversation was helpful to you and the Spirit has been reminding you of how that is true. Before we jump into the second great truth about God we are going to take a couple of minutes to reflect on what the Holy Spirit has been doing in our hearts this past week and look for evidences of grace and growth. As a community, we want to acknowledge God's work and encourage one another to allow God to continue working.

Discuss

- *Over this past week, has the Spirit been reminding you God is great so you don't have to be in control?*
- *What is an evidence of grace or growth in relation to this first great truth about God?*

Watch

Megan's Story | God is Glorious by Soma

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q3B4wPcECto>

Discuss

- *Was there anything that stood out to you from Megan's story?*
- *Can you relate to some of the struggles that she faced?*

In this session we are going to look at the second great truth about God; **God is glorious so I don't have to fear others.** The word "glory" gets thrown around a lot in Christian circles. In Sunday worship gatherings at Sacred City the Call to Worship reminds us of the glory of God. When we vacation and witness a beautiful sunset over the ocean we might say, "This view is glorious." Or when we see a bride walking down the aisle to meet her groom we might say, "She was in all her glory." But what does "glory" mean?

Discuss

- *What is glory?*
- *What does it mean when we say something is glorious?*
- *Where in God's story do you see His glory on display?*

The modern idea of something being glorious is closely related to the idea of greatness. When we say something is glorious, we mean that we get delight from it, it is big, we might even just mean that it is really great. Wonderful. Delightful. Completely enjoyable. Brilliantly beautiful or magnificently splendid. Jonathan Dodson, pastor of City Life Church in Austin, TX, defines glorious as: "possessing consummate worth, beauty, virtue and excellence." In

Hebrew, the idea of glory is related to the idea of “heaviness,” to the idea of weight. Not a physical weight, but to the importance or value of something. If something is glorious, it carries a deep significance.

One of the places in scripture that God explicitly displays his glory is just after God has demonstrated his greatness—that he is in control—by leading the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. God says in Exodus 19:4, “You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.” And now as God has brought his people to himself he is going to show them, in verse 16, his absolute glory.

Exodus 19:16-20:

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

Here’s what’s happening in these verses: There is this huge mountain and there is a thunderstorm camping out on top of this thing. Thunder cracks as the lightning shoots like electric darts. To make it more interesting, there is fire shooting out the top of the mountain and smoke fills the air, like a volcano. All the while, there is an earthquake shaking the ground violently. And just for effect, if all that wasn’t enough, the super loud trumpets are blasting.

This scene is a depiction of the undeniable glory of God. This is God saying to his people, “I am the ultimate form of glory.” But how are we to respond when we see God as glorious? This scene on the mountain seems rather terrifying. Look at how the people responded to this fiasco.

Exodus 20:18-20

Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.”

People are indeed terrified! But to those who are witnessing this chaos unfold; Moses says, “Do not be afraid of God but honor and respect him. Take heed of his words because they are there to keep you from sinning.” Proverbs 9:10 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” This isn’t the type of fear that is equated to terror, but reverence and awe.

The reason that God displays his glory is so that his people will see him for who he is and see the significance of what he says. The more glorious something is to you the more influence it carries. Yet, there are people and things in our life that we allow to compete

with God's glory, and we find ourselves listening to what that person or thing says about us more than what God says about us.

If you want to know how glorious you think something or someone is, just examine how much energy you exert pursuing it. Look at how much you trust it or how much you heed its demands. If you want to know how glorious something is in your life, ask how much it affects your behavior, how much time you spend with it or pursuing or thinking about it. Ask how much money you are spending on it. These are questions that can help you determine what thing or person you are ascribing glory to more than God.

Discuss

- *What or who carries the most weight or influence in your life?*

The Bible has a term to describe this act of ascribing glory to someone else other than God. It is called, "fear of man." In the simplest explanation, it means that we are in awe of others more than God.

Discuss

- *What might it look like if you are fearing other people? How does that affect you?*
- *How has that person or thing become more glorious to you than God?*
- *Have you assumed the role of being most glorious in someone else's life?*

When we live for the approval of others, we are fearing them. They are weightier or more glorious than God. Although God is the ultimate reality of glory, when we fail other people or don't gain their approval, they actually seem more real to us than God. We might say, "Sure, what God says about me is important, but I want someone's approval that I can see or experience immediately." Often times, in the moment, people's opinions carry more weight than God's. If you were to put what others say about you on one side of the scale and what God says about you on the other; the scales would often times tip in favor of that other person.

For most of us, there is only a handful of people whose approval we really desire - people we intentionally go out of our way for in order to gain their favor. It might be your boss, parents, spouse, or closest colleagues; whoever it is, you work hard to make sure that they find you acceptable. Although the list of people we crave approval from might be small, the list of people who we don't want disapproval from is nearly infinite. From the impatient lady waiting behind us in the check-out line to the irritated driver on the interstate, we don't want anyone to disapprove of us.

No one enjoys the feelings provoked by disapproval. Disapproval can make us feel insecure and devalued and often times gnaws away at us, creating an obsession with the way others view us. And it is not uncommon for these feelings to stay with us for days or weeks, sometimes even years!

Wanting someone's approval and not wanting to be disapproved of by others is motivated by the same thing. Working hard to get people's approval: fear of man. Trying to fly under the radar making sure everyone is cool with others: fear of man.

Discuss

- *Who do you fear?*
- *Whose approval do you crave?*
- *Whose rejection or disapproval do you most fear?*

Think of that person and now imagine that God is standing next to them. The contrast between the two is enormous. On one hand you have God, whose glory is unfathomable: the one who angels and all things living declare that all honor and glory and might are his forever and ever (Revelation 5:13). And on the other hand you have someone who, in contrast, looks more like a speck of dust. And now imagine yourself looking at the two of them trying to decide who is more worthy of your affections, and you choose the speck of dust. This is ludicrous, right? To see God in all his glory and choose to worship something of significantly less glory doesn't make sense. However, in the moment, it is easy for us to lose sight of the glory of God.

While we highly value the way other people perceive us, the person whose approval we want the most and the person whose disapproval we want to avoid the most is our self. At the end of the day, we want to look in the mirror feel "ok" with our own self-assessment. Because if we are not satisfied with ourselves, then the struggle follows us everywhere. No matter what we do or who we please, none of it matters because at the end of the day all we can hear is the internal voice that says, "You could have done better."

Contrary to what our culture says, the cure for this issue isn't to have better self-esteem or to buckle down and work harder to gain the approval of others. The only solution that can bring true and lasting change to our fear of man problem is to see God as ultimately glorious. We need a clear vision of his glory to drive the fear of man and fear of self out of us.

The place where God's glory is most clearly revealed is in the person of Jesus. Ephesians 1:10 says that, "all things are summed up in Christ," (NASB translation). You can think of it like a big, long math problem where you have all these numbers stacked on one another with a plus sign and a line below which contains your answer. If you were to add up everything in the whole universe throughout history, the sum of all that would be Jesus. Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

On the mount of transfiguration Jesus takes his closest friends on top of a mountain and right there Jesus reveals his glory. Mark says, "His clothes became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them." Jesus' glory was shining in a way that had never been seen before and it created awe among his disciples. John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

If you need a clearer picture of the glory of God to get your heart over the hump of unbelief in regards to God's gloriousness you need to look no further than Jesus Christ himself. If you need a clearer picture of the weightiness, centrality, significance, and prominence of God to make everyone else look really small (in a healthy way), you must look to Jesus. He is the reality of God's glory.

What does this glorious Jesus do? He sets his glory aside and sheds it. He is treated like an inglorious, nasty, small, speck-of-dust-criminal. Imagine the humiliation during his crucifixion when he is mocked and ridiculed all night long by the Roman soldiers rather than being praised and honored by the angels. We can't even begin to comprehend the humility of Jesus as he sheds his glory. He does this so that you and I can share in it. Romans 8:17 says, "Now if we are children we are heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also share in his glory."

This is the good news of the gospel of Jesus! On the cross Jesus faced the rejection from both God and man that we deserved to face ourselves. So that when we put our faith in him we are also accepted by the Father as sons and daughters. And as we live in the gospel practicing faith and repentance we know exactly what God says about us as we are called his beloved children and what he says carries far more weight than any other person in our lives.

When we know that God is glorious, we come to know that we don't have to fear others. The gospel liberates us to love and serve people, not in order to get approval, affection, security, or praise from them, but because we already have all of those things in Christ.

Discuss

- *Think again of the person or people you identified before: How would your interaction with that person change if you believed that you were already accepted and loved by God?*
- *What kind of things can we do to remind ourselves of God's glory?*
- *What would it look like for you to practice faith and repentance in the area of fear of man?*

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Review & Follow Up

In the last session we spent time discussing the second great truth about God; **God is glorious so we don't have to fear others**. Hopefully our conversation was helpful to you and the Spirit has been reminding you of how that is true. Before we jump into the third great truth about God, we are going to take a couple of minutes to reflect on what the Holy Spirit has been doing in our hearts this past week and look for evidences of grace and growth. As a community, we want to acknowledge God's work and encourage one another to allow God to continue working.

Discuss

- *Over this past week, has the Spirit been reminding you God is glorious so you don't have to fear others?*
- *What is an evidence of grace or growth in relation to this second great truth about God?*

Watch

Stacy's Story | God is Good by Soma

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G__CqXvfOCY

Discuss

- *Was there anything that stood out to you from Stacy's story?*
- *Can you relate to some of the struggles that she faced?*

Scripture tells us that God created man with needs to be fulfilled. Even before sin entered the world, Adam and Eve needed food and water. God said that it was not good for man to be alone, so they needed relationship or companionship. They needed to work and they needed rest.

Discuss

- *Why do you think God created humans with needs?*

From the beginning of the story, God is weaving right into the fabric of humans that reality that they are dependent in multiple aspects of their lives. There is a physical need for food and water as a source of nutrition. They have relational needs. They have a need for significance and purpose. And all of these needs have to be met from outside oneself. By giving us these daily reoccurring needs, God wanted to show us that because he is good, he gives us good things to meet those needs. James 1:17 says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

In this session, we will look at the third great truth about God and that is: **God is good so I don't have to look elsewhere.** God shows us his goodness by meeting our physical needs and giving us good gifts over and over again. In fact, each meal that we eat should be a reminder of God's goodness. Our bodies have a physical need for sustenance, and God meets that need through food. But he doesn't just give us some sort of bland food to meet those needs. He gives us delicious food; steak, sweet potatoes, and ice cream.

Discuss

- *When we believe God is good and he gives good gifts, what do you think that produces in our lives?*

When we see God as the good giver of gifts, there is a sense of thankfulness, contentment, and satisfaction that is produced in our lives. These are good ways to respond to our needs being met, but there is something deeper happening. God doesn't just want us to be more thankful, more content, or even to acknowledge our dependence. He wants us to see that our physical needs are sign posts that point to a deeper spiritual need.

Just as our stomach aches with hunger so our soul aches for nourishment. Just as our lips thirst for water, our souls have a thirst that longs to be quenched. As our bodies need a good night's rest, so do our souls. As we long for love, physical intimacy, and community, our souls require the same. The psalmist says in Psalm 42, "As the deer pants for flowing streams so my soul pants for you, Oh God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."

Scripture is riddled with metaphors like this to show us that God is able to meet all of our needs. Not just in the fact that he is a good God who gives good gifts to satisfy our physical needs, but that he is a good God who satisfies the needs of our soul by giving us himself. God is good because he has given the very best gift to meet our ultimate need, which is himself.

Discuss

- *Think about the implication line of this great truth; God is good so I don't have to look elsewhere. Where do you find yourself looking for satisfaction?*
- *Where do you turn for joy, peace, comfort, or rest?*
- *What is your "if only"? "(If only" this would happen, then I would be happy.)*

There are times in life when we desire something so badly, yet that desire is left unmet. In those moments, there is a temptation to look up to the sky and question God's goodness. We might say something like, "You knew I wanted this job so badly, why didn't you let me have it?" We might assume that God has stopped being good because he hasn't given us what we want. However, there are things that, in his infinite wisdom, God doesn't give us because he wants to give us more of himself. Perhaps those things were obstacles diverting you from seeking the goodness you can only find in God.

At the end of the day the thing we want—more money, bigger house, better job, better health, better marriages—doesn't compare to Jesus. These things leave us empty. Even when we get all that we want, we are still left longing for something better.

Adam and Eve had everything they could have wanted while they were in the garden. There was an abundance of food, the work was fulfilling, you can only imagine the delight of pre-fall sex, and they had a thriving relationship with God; yet the serpent tempted them with more. The lie of the fruit was, "It will make you wise and it will make you like God." And underneath that was this notion that then they would be satisfied. When you are like God, you won't have to rely on him for any sort of provision, you can just nourish yourself.

But when they ate that fruit, did it satisfy them? Perhaps for a fleeting moment, and then it was gone. Just like anything outside of God that we look to for satisfaction, it scratches the itch for a second and then it is gone and we are left empty.

Again, Psalm 42:1-2 says, "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?" The psalmist knows that God's presence is the only thing that will quench his thirsty soul. This is why he asks God, "When shall I come and appear before you?"

Consider the interaction John explains in chapter 4 of his gospel where Jesus meets the woman at the well. She is obviously thirsty, there is a physical thirst, but Jesus tells her he has a water that can quench her thirst for eternity.

John 4:7-12

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock."

This woman missed it. She thought Jesus was talking about physical water. But God didn't create us with needs just so he could meet our physical needs with good things. God created us with needs so that we would be reminded of a deeper need that only can be satisfied with Him.

John 4:13a

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again..."

God actually created good things both to meet your need but to leave you empty. He designed food to fail you. That food you ate a couple hours ago isn't going to last you until the end of the week. You will have to eat again; it only satisfies temporarily. That is exactly how God designed it, because it isn't about the food. And yet, what do we do? We make it about the created stuff. We think the answer is more food, rather than thinking the answer is something much deeper than food or drink.

Think about this, God designed your marriage to leave you empty. Even if you have a great marriage, on its best day, there will be a little sense of, "Is this as good as it gets?" God designed your marriage to not fulfill you completely, because if your marriage made you

complete then there would be no need for God. Your marriage is meant to point you toward a true and better lover of your soul. That person is Jesus!

John 4:13-15

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

The psalmist says, "My soul is thirsty and I need to go to God so the thirst of my soul can be quenched." And that is true, but here's the amazing truth about what Jesus has done for us. Jesus doesn't just make access to God possible, though he does. Jesus makes it possible for the very presence of God to dwell in you.

That's why Jesus says, "If you drink this living water, there will be a wellspring inside of you." He is saying that you won't have to go to the well anymore because there will be a wellspring inside of you. You don't have to go find a drink because you will be carrying one with you everywhere. You don't have to go to temple to fill up your soul because you will be a temple that God dwells in. That is what Jesus has accomplished for us on the cross.

Right after Jesus feeds the 5,000, the religious leaders are making things hard on Jesus. The religious leaders are trying to get Jesus to do this miraculous thing again and prove that it wasn't a fluke. And Jesus says, "No," and then this dialogue unfolds in John chapter 6.

John 6:30-31

So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

The point that they are trying to make is that Jesus fed 5,000 people one time and he expects them to believe that he is God. In comparison to what God did in the Exodus story where bread fell from the sky to feed a million people day in and day out for 40 years, this is no big deal. They are telling Jesus that he better step up his game if he expects them to believe that he is God.

John 6:32-34

Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always."

These religious leaders, like the woman at the well, think that this is about Jesus meeting physical needs. They think it is about the bread. They think it is about the created things giving them the satisfaction that they are longing for. And while it is easy for us to point out these errors other people have made, we are guilty of the same things.

We are constantly looking for created things to satisfy us. We think satisfaction will come if only we had more food, better beer, the latest technology, better sex, more money, a bigger

house, better behaved kids, a new job, and on and on. And we literally ask God for this stuff like it is going to make us happy when Jesus is standing right there saying, "It's not about the stuff, it's about me!"

John 6:35

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

Jesus is saying, "I am giving you myself so that you won't look to other things for satisfaction." Echoing the psalmist, Jesus knew that it was only relationship and intimacy with God that can satisfy. And this is the way that Jesus lived his life while he walked this Earth. Jesus lived his life before the Father, always in relationship together. Jesus always found joy and satisfaction in his intimacy with the Father, and yet he willingly gave that up on the cross.

If Jesus's source of joy was like a water faucet that was always on and flowing lavishly, then the cross is where he shut that off. He was separated from the Father on the cross. Jesus willingly gave up his source of joy and satisfaction so that we could experience the ultimate source of joy, satisfaction, and contentment that we were built to experience.

Discuss

- *What are you looking to for joy, satisfaction, contentment, and fulfillment?*
- *What would it look like for you to practice repentance and faith?*

When it comes to repenting over our tendencies of looking to created things to satisfy and turning to Jesus in faith, it might sound something like this: "Jesus, you are better than financial security. Jesus, you are better than being entertained. Jesus, you are better than a vacation. Jesus, you are better than sexual intimacy." And when we are in the midst of temptation to turn to the created to satisfy we can be reminded that Jesus is right here and he is the one who can satisfy our deepest longings.

THE 4G^S

GOOD. GREAT. GRACIOUS. GLORIOUS.

Review & Follow Up

In the last session we spent time discussing the third great truth about God; **God is good so we don't have to look elsewhere**. Hopefully our conversation was helpful to you and the Spirit has been reminding you of how that is true. Before we jump into the fourth, and final, great truth about God we are going to take a couple of minutes to reflect on what the Holy Spirit has been doing in our hearts this past week and look for evidences of grace and growth. As a community, we want to acknowledge God's work and encourage one another to allow God to continue working.

Discuss

- *Over this past week, has the Spirit been reminding you that God is good so you don't have to look elsewhere?*
- *What is an evidence of grace or growth in relation to this third great truth about God?*

Watch

Greg's Story | God is Gracious by Soma

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUSHkMKKa1w>

Discuss

- *Was there anything that stood out to you from Greg's story?*
- *Can you relate to some of the struggles that he faced?*

The last great truth that we are going to talk about is: **God is gracious so I don't have to prove myself**. In his book, "You Can Change," Tim Chester talks about three different ways that we try to prove ourselves. The first way is that we try to prove ourselves to God. The second is that we try to prove ourselves to others. And the third is that we try to prove ourselves to ourselves.

Discuss

- *Why do you think we all feel the need to prove ourselves?*
- *What is it that we are trying to prove?*

At the core of our attempts to prove ourselves is the feeling that we have to prove our identity. Not just in the sense of who we are and what we do but also in the ways that we have worth and value. We desperately want to have a hand in proving to the world (God, others, and ourselves) that we are significant. We want to show that we can bring something to the table.

Discuss

- *Why do you think we persist in trying to prove ourselves?*

If we have the Spirit of God in us, we've given up, in an ultimate sense, trying to save ourselves. We have come to the conclusion that it is Christ's saving work that brings us into God's kingdom. But for those of us who have trusted in Jesus, our self-effort manifests itself in many other ways. So it's not that we are trying to earn our way to heaven, but there are other ways our flesh is trying to draw attention to ourselves to prove that we are valuable or capable, rather than drawing attention to Christ.

There are two lies that we are susceptible to believing. The first lie is that we have to do something in order to please our Heavenly Father. Even though we are his children through adoption in Christ, there can still be a feeling that we have to live up to some standards. There is still more for us to do before he is happy.

We might get to the end of the day and realize we didn't get everything checked off our list or some of the things that we did finish weren't done to the desired standard. We get this feeling that God is disappointed with us, as if his disposition toward us is an irritated manager with his arms crossed, shaking his head and telling us that tomorrow we will just have to put forth a little more effort. All this gives us a sense that we have never done enough.

At Jesus' baptism we see the sky being split, a dove descending, and the audible voice of God saying, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased." When we understand God's grace we understand that those very same words are spoken over each one of us. But the moment you think the Father is not pleased with you, you actually see yourself as something other than "one with Christ" (1 Corinthians 6:17).

One of the major themes that runs throughout the New Testament is that by God's grace, through the gospel, we are made one with Christ. We are told that we are in Christ, made one with Christ, hidden with Christ, and that we are clothed with Christ. So if the Father looks at the Son and says, "This is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased," then that is true of you when your faith is in Jesus. So even when I don't get all the things checked off my list - even when I am disobedient - the Heavenly Father is still pleased with me because I am in Christ.

Our flesh wants to destroy this by convincing us that this isn't true. Your flesh wants you to believe that you have to do something; not just to be accepted by God but to please God. This line of thinking isn't consistent with the gospel.

Just to be clear, we do have a Father who does give us things to do—Jesus says that if we love him we will obey his commandments—but the grace of God afforded to us through the work of Jesus goes so far that it puts us in a state where the Father is always pleased with us, by grace.

This is radical news because it means every time you approach you Heavenly Father, he has a smile on his face because of the Son. And he wants to talk to you about what's going on. Your sin still grieves him but there is not a sense of coldness or distance. Our Heavenly

Father doesn't make us pay penance or sit in shame before we can interact with him. He is always happy with us because he is happy with Christ.

Discuss

- *What is grace?*
- *Do you think of God as more of a disappointed manager or a gracious Father?*
- *How do you respond when you hear that your Heavenly Father is always happy with you in Christ?*

The second lie that we are susceptible to believing is that the list of things to do is up to us in our own power. We see this list—being a better parent, employee, or neighbor, praying more, memorizing more scripture—and we think that it is our responsibility to get this done on our own. Even though we are thankful to the Father for what he has done to make us his children and we are fired up to live for him, we think that we have to live for Him in the power of our own strength. Theologically we don't believe that, but when it comes to the execution of those things, we functionally believe that it is up to us.

There are varying degrees of this in our lives. In some settings, we do live dependently upon the Spirit. But there are parts of our lives where we have never even thought of relying on the Spirit to help us. Even in the times when we are being dependent on the Holy Spirit, we typically don't start acknowledging our dependence. Usually we do as much as we can in our own strength, and then when we get frustrated we turn to God for help.

In John 15:5, Jesus uses a botanical metaphor and tells his followers that He is the vine and they are the branches that come from the vine. And he says in verse 5, "Apart from me you can do nothing." Just like a branch is as good as dead when not connected to the vine, so are we when we are not tethered to the power of Jesus.

Sure, you can get things done without him, but you can't do anything with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, or self-control. You have none of those things apart from the Spirit of God. Perhaps the biggest need we have in every single moment is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Every minute those things are needed and they exclusively come from the Spirit of God.

Our need for grace is a moment-by-moment need. As we see that our Father, in his grace, supplies what we need in order to do what he has called us to, it is such good news! It is important to see that he isn't stingy. He gives us grace upon grace upon grace. Just think, we are saved by grace—the penalty of sin has been cancelled, you have been given a new identity, and your Heavenly Father is pleased with you. And you've been given the power you need to live the life God has called you to live - that's grace, too!

Discuss

- *Where in your life do you feel like you are doing it on your own?*
- *What would it look like for you to be dependent upon God's power in that area of your life?*

Jude 24 & 25

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

Think back to the garden before Adam and Eve fell into sin. They were naked and unashamed and they walked with God in the cool of the day. They had nothing to hide. They were completely intimate with each other and with God. And they were full of joy. And now Jude 24 says that we get to stand before the presence of God's glory unashamed and with nothing to hide because of the grace of Jesus Christ where we are clothed in his righteousness—and not our own unrighteousness.

Not only do we get to stand blameless in the presence of God, we get to stand there with great joy! We aren't blameless with great fear or gratitude; it is blameless with JOY! We don't have to look over our shoulder or be sheepish about being in the presence of God. We don't have to cover up, hide, or blame shift because our flesh has no place there standing before God. At the center of this great joy is the grace of God and the truth that God is gracious, so I don't have to prove myself.

Discuss

- *God has graciously provided everything you will ever need, how does that sit with you?*
- *Is it difficult for you to receive grace? Why?*
- *What might change in your life if you truly felt the grace of God?*
- *What would it look like for you to practice repentance and faith?*

EXTRAS

Desire for Change

Change is a natural desire in our human experience. Political campaigns run with the promise of changing a country for the better. As new CEO's and head coaches are hired, there is a hope that they can change an organization and bring success. As we step into the gym, there is a desire for our bodies to change from squishy to toned.

Our desire for change reveals two things. First, it reveals that things are far from perfect. If things were perfect there wouldn't be any need for change. Our jeans would always fit right, our kids would be well behaved, and all of our relationships would be conflict free. The second thing that our desire for change reveals is that there is hope that things could change. Even as things are far from perfect there is hope that our life could take a turn for the better or our country could improve.

While there are all kinds of changes that we would like to see, many of these changes are beyond our control. As much as we can want better behaved children or a more understanding boss, we cannot make those changes. However, we are able to make changes to the way that we respond to our circumstances. So instead of focusing on the change that we would like to see in others, we can focus on changing our unhealthy reactions.

Think of an area of your life that you'd like to change. It might be a type of behavior (such as lying, lust, overeating, excessive spending, or inappropriate relationships) or an emotion (for example, depression envy, anxiety, greed, fear, or anger). Or it might be a Christian virtue, a fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) that you feel is particularly lacking your life.

Discuss

- *Where do you desire change in your life? (Be specific!)*
- *What is the risk of not addressing these issues in your life?*

Heart Change

Once we have identified where change needs to take place in our lives the question becomes, "How can I experience real, lasting change?" If you went to the bookstore you would find shelves loaded with self-help books that promise to reveal the secret ingredients to change. Some books would say you just have to change your behavior and then, with time, your mind will adopt these new principles. Others will say change your outlook and then your behavior will eventually change.

The problem with these suggestions is that without the right motivation these things will fail. Any fitness trainer can tell you that if you try to make improvements in health, but don't have the right motivation you will never see lasting results. The same is true when it comes to making changes in our life, whether it be having more patience with our kids or being more diligent at work.

The Bible reveals that true, lasting change isn't a matter of modifying our behavior or changing our thoughts. True, lasting change happens when our heart changes and the only way that happens is when God does it. It is only when Jesus gives us a new heart are we able to experience true, lasting change.

Discuss

- *How have you changed over the last 2 years? How did that change come about?*
- *Do you feel that you have plateaued in your walk with Christ?*
- *Are there things that you have struggled with for a long time? Do you think you can change?*