

THE
GOSPEL
PROJECT

THE MISSION

Making Disciples

Walter Strickland
Jason C Dukes
Alvin Reid

THE
GOSPEL
PROJECT

THE MISSION

Making Disciples

Walter Strickland,
Jason C Dukes,
Alvin Reid

LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee

© 2014 LifeWay Press®

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted in writing by the publisher. Requests for permission should be addressed in writing to LifeWay Press®, One LifeWay Plaza, Nashville, TN 37234-0152.

Item: 005726282

ISBN: 978-1-4300-3851-1

Dewey decimal classification number: 269.2

Subject heading: DISCIPLESHP \ EVANGELISTIC WORK \ MISSIONS

Eric Geiger

Vice President, Church Resources

Ed Stetzer

General Editor

Trevin Wax

Managing Editor

Faith Whatley

Director, Adult Ministry

Philip Nation

Director, Adult Ministry Publishing

Angela Reed

Content Editor

We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. To review LifeWay's doctrinal guideline, please visit www.lifeway.com/doctrinalguideline.

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible®, copyright 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Bible Publishers. Used by permission.

For ordering or inquiries, visit www.lifeway.com; write LifeWay Small Groups; One LifeWay Plaza; Nashville, TN 37234-0152; or call toll free (800) 458-2772.

Printed in the United States of America.

Adult Ministry Publishing
LifeWay Church Resources
One LifeWay Plaza
Nashville, Tennessee 37234-0152

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THE GOSPEL PROJECT AND WRITERS . . .	4
HOW TO USE THIS STUDY	5
SESSION 1:	6
<i>Good Work</i>	
SESSION 2:	18
<i>Vibrant Fellowship</i>	
SESSION 3:	30
<i>Making Disciples</i>	
SESSION 4:	42
<i>Lasting Witness</i>	
SESSION 5:	54
<i>God's Sending</i>	
SESSION 6:	66
<i>Reaching Unbelievers</i>	
SMALL-GROUP TIPS AND VALUES	78

ABOUT THE GOSPEL PROJECT

Some people see the Bible as a collection of stories with morals for life application. But it's so much more. Sure, the Bible has some stories in it, but it's also full of poetry, history, codes of law and civilization, songs, prophecy, letters—even a love letter. When you tie it all together, something remarkable happens. A story is revealed. One story. The story of redemption through Jesus. This is *The Gospel Project*.

When we begin to see the Bible as the story of redemption through Jesus Christ, God's plan to rescue the world from sin and death, our perspective changes. We no longer look primarily for what the Bible says about us but instead see what it tells us about God and what He has done. After all, it's the gospel that saves us, and when we encounter Jesus in the pages of Scripture, the gospel works on us, transforming us into His image. *We become God's gospel project.*

ABOUT THE WRITERS



Walter Strickland serves as Special Advisor to the President for Diversity and Instructor of Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is pursuing a PhD from the University of Aberdeen. He is married to Stephanie and has two daughters, Hope and Kendra.



Jason C. Dukes is married to Jen, and they have six children. He helped start Westpoint Church and *ReproducingChurches.com* and now pastors First Baptist Church, Booneville, Mississippi. He's the author of *Live Sent* and *Beyond My Church*, and he periodically blogs at *SENTkids.com*.



Alvin Reid is Professor of Evangelism and Student Ministry at Southeastern Seminary. He also leads the Young Professionals Ministry at Richland Creek Community Church. He earned his MDiv and PhD at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He and his wife, Michelle, have two married children.

Barry Cram adapted this material for use with small groups.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Welcome to *The Gospel Project*, a gospel-centered small-group study that dives deep into the things of God, lifts up Jesus, focuses on the grand story of Scripture, and drives participants to be on mission. This small-group Bible study provides opportunities to study the Bible and to encounter the living Christ. *The Gospel Project* provides you with tools and resources to purposefully study God's Word and to grow in the faith and knowledge of God's Son. And what's more, you can do so in the company of others, encouraging and building up one another. Here are some things to remember that will help you maximize the usefulness of this resource:

GATHER A GROUP. We grow in the faith best in community with other believers, as we love, encourage, correct, and challenge one another. The life of a disciple of Christ was never meant to be lived alone, in isolation.

PRAY. Pray regularly for your group members.

PREPARE. This resource includes the Bible study content, three devotionals, and discussion questions for each session. Work through the session and devotionals in preparation for each group session. Take notes and record your own questions. Also consider the follow-up questions so you are ready to participate in and add to the discussion, bringing up your own notes and questions where appropriate.

RESOURCE YOURSELF. Make good use of the additional resources available on the Web at www.gospelproject.com/additionalresources and search for this specific title. Download a podcast. Read a blog post. Be intentional about learning from others in the faith. For tips on how to better lead groups or additional ideas for leading this Bible study, visit: www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

GROUP TIME. Gather together with your group to discuss the session and devotional content. Work through the follow-up questions and your own questions. Discuss the material and the implications for the lives of believers and the mission to which we have been called.

OVERFLOW. Remember, *The Gospel Project* is not just a Bible study. *We* are the project. The gospel is working on us. Don't let your preparation time be simply about the content. Let the truths of God's Word soak in as you study. Let God work on your heart first, and then pray that He will change the hearts of the other people in your group.

THE
GOSPEL
PROJECT

Session 1

Good Work

Many Christians would prefer to hear “What a great guy” from the crowd rather than “Well done, good and faithful servant” from the Master.¹

BILLY GRAHAM

INDIVIDUAL STUDY

In professional basketball there are two opposing teams on the court, but a third team is often overlooked—the officials. The third team is unique because it is not loyal toward either team on the court; the allegiance of the officials is to another organization—the NBA. The officials cannot be persuaded by the crowd, the players, or the coaches; they have their own source of authority, the rule book that comes directly from the league office.²

And like the officials in the NBA, the church is of a different kingdom. We too participate in a battle, but for the hearts of humankind and the restoration of God's created order.

Generally speaking, there are three kinds of officials. The first type frustrates the progress of the game by continuously calling fouls. The second is a chameleon who is more concerned with not interrupting the game than representing the league that has commissioned him. The church is called to be like a third type of official—not simply pointing out shortcomings, nor blending in, but doing the work of being salt and light in the world for the good of all people, both inside and outside of the church. The tendencies of the church are much like the first two types of officials—to be a nuisance to the world or to pull away completely—but the gospel demands our engagement in the world for the glory of God.

Do you typically view sports officials or judges in a favorable or an unfavorable light? Why?

How does this compare with the way people view the church?

As God's people, we are called to work for the good of all—for both the world and the church alike. We work for the good of the world by fulfilling our role as salt and light so that our good works will lead others to give glory to God. We work for the good of the church by taking care of each other so that we might be strengthened for our involvement in God's mission of seeking and saving the lost.

Throughout the week engage these daily study sections on your own. Each of these examines the different aspects of good work mission entails. There are three daily readings to prepare you before your group meets for this session. Interact with the Scriptures, and be ready to interact with your small group.

1 For the Good of All

Therefore, as we have opportunity, we must work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith.

GALATIANS 6:10

This verse is found at the end of a section in Scripture that builds upon the fruit of the Spirit described in Galatians 5:22-23. Notice that a significant implication of the Spirit's fruit is caring for those who are in the body of Christ by not becoming conceited nor provoking or envying each other (5:26). The following verses elaborate upon the theme of building up those in the body of Christ by restoring each other (6:1), carrying one another's burdens (6:2), not thinking too much of ourselves (6:3), and avoiding pride (6:4).

Caring for one another within the body of Christ is not a diversion from the mission of God; it is part and parcel of it. The people of God are a community whose lives are in contrast to those around them. The church's distinction from the world is multi-layered, including relational dynamics. Relationships within the body of Christ should serve as a preview of God's coming kingdom where Christ's rule as King will perfectly inform every relationship. Thus, the bold contrast of God's people selflessly loving and caring for one another pleases God and serves as a testimony to the presence of the living God among His people.

In exploring "doing good to one another," Paul highlighted the source of good in us—the Holy Spirit—and he offered a portrait of what doing good looks like as believers (Gal. 6:1-4). Paul was also concerned with our ability to identify opportunities to bless one another when they arise because we are prone to grow tired of doing good (6:9-10).

Describe the difference you see between working hard and "doing good" for believers and unbelievers.

What are the main differences between the two ministries?

Paul assumed that doing good to one another is an intentionally pursued act. The day-to-day demands of life continually command our attention and arrest our focus from others to ourselves. The mundane yet necessary tasks of taking the kids to school, getting the oil changed, or going to the DMV are ever-present. The tyranny of the urgent phone call, the upcoming appointment, or the project at work may blind us to opportunities to bless those both inside and outside the household of faith. Occasions to work for the good of all people surround us, but Christ-followers must adjust our approach to life from remaining captive to the urgent to being transformed into people who see our daily existence as ambassadors of Christ.

The compassion and care of the body of Christ serves as a real manifestation of God's love to the believer. Sometimes it's difficult to sense God's presence—especially during intense seasons of suffering or spiritual dryness. Your care and support for another believer might be just what they need to reenergize their affections for the Lord.

What can you do to keep a servant's mind and heart—ready and willing to serve fellow believers in your church?

2

For the Good of the World

¹³You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt should lose its taste, how can it be made salty? It's no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled on by men. ¹⁴"You are the light of the world. A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house. ¹⁶In the same way, let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

MATTHEW 5:13-16

These verses find their home in the Sermon on the Mount, the first of five major addresses by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel. In this sermon, Jesus was concerned to speak a message of repentance and to highlight the nearness of God's kingdom (Matt. 4:17). Jesus began His sermon with general qualities of a kingdom citizen in the Beatitudes (5:3-12). Following the Beatitudes, Jesus explained the role of the believer on this earth, and He anchored His encouragement to the church in two significant word pictures—salt and light.

Salt of the Earth. Before the days of refrigeration, salt was an extremely powerful metaphor because of its multifaceted use. *The most common uses of salt were to preserve and to season.*

Despite its brokenness, the world has not completely lost its original goodness, and the church is called to preserve and develop the good that God embedded in it by working it, watching over it, and subduing it (Gen. 1:28; 2:15). Despite our overwhelming sense that work originated after the fall, God instituted work as part of the original design for His people. For example, in Genesis 2, God made the animals, but Adam continued the creation process by naming them. God was certainly capable of naming the animals Himself, but He invited Adam to continue the work of developing His creation.

The second common use of salt is to season. The people of God are called to "season" the earth with the fragrance of Christ (2 Cor. 2:15). God has given all of humanity a yearning for Himself. All people long for divine character traits such as justice and mercy to fill the earth. As Christians, "little Christs," the church has been given the responsibility and has been empowered by the Holy Spirit to manifest the communicable, or shareable, attributes of God both inside and outside of the church.

How does your work in God's mission help preserve His creation and the goodness of the world?

What are you doing to bring flavor so others can taste the goodness of God?

Light of the World. Transitioning metaphors, verse 14 declares that Christ-followers are the light of the world. The Christian is like the light that is put on a lampstand because we should not be hidden. But unlike a flame that produces its own light, believers simply reflect the light of Christ because He is the Light of the world (John 8:12; 9:5).

Christ-followers are humble vessels that carry a profound message. Paul stated:

⁵ For we are not proclaiming ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your slaves because of Jesus. ⁶ For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷ Now we have this treasure in clay jars, so that this extraordinary power may be from God and not from us.

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5-7

Paul intentionally described a common vessel (jars of clay) to highlight the contrast between the value of the messenger and the all-surpassing greatness of the message that we carry. The implication is that the vessel should not distract from or add to the content it carries. Throughout his letters, Paul underscored the need for God's people to remain humble because God's strength is made perfect in weakness. The more humble the messengers of the gospel are, the more radiant the light of the gospel shines.

What's the one thing that can keep your light from shining?

What's the one thing that keeps you humble as you press forward serving God and others?

3

For the Good of the Church

⁴³ Then fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being performed through the apostles. ⁴⁴ Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. ⁴⁵ They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as anyone had a need. ⁴⁶ Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple complex, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with a joyful and humble attitude, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved.

ACTS 2:43-47

Acts 2 is the record of the visible manifestation of the Holy Spirit coming to God's people: first, with tongues of fire (v. 3); second, by men speaking in different tongues, or languages (v. 4); last, with the gathered body of believers. Verse 43 records that everyone was watching the wonders and signs that the apostles were performing. The original language makes it clear that everyone was not simply those who were believers, but the entire community was watching for evidence of the presence of God among His people. Although today's church does not have the uninterrupted gaze of the world, there are still people who are watching the church for evidence of God's existence.

Christians today often look upon the apostles, who were empowered by Jesus to do wonders and signs, with envy. It is common for us to think that if we could do miracles, then the world would watch us too. The people of God, though, have often overlooked or underestimated the power of living in a community as new creations.

Human nature without Christ is selfish and destructive. These negative qualities of fallen humanity are amplified in a group setting. In contrast, when those who are alive in Christ meet in the type of gathering we read of in Acts 2, it is evidence that the people have had a divine encounter because their actions are peppered (or salted) with mercy and grace.

What are some actions of mercy and grace that display the reality of our divine encounter with Jesus Christ?

How can we know when we are fulfilling the miracle of living in true community as new creations? How can we know when we are failing?

In a nation driven by consumerism, individualism, and the myth of the self-made man/woman, these notions are likely to set off alarms for our sinful nature. But those who claim their primary citizenship in the kingdom of heaven should be marked by the sign of the kingdom—love for one another consistent with the self-giving love of Christ (John 13:34-35). The testimony of an otherworldly unity forced those who were not in Christ to admit that God was up to something among the Christians, and “every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

GROUP STUDY

Warm Up

As we identify opportunities to serve each other with renewed focus, it is good to commit (or recommit) to one another in a faith-based covenant fashion. Read aloud the sample covenant below:

“We will meet with one another consistently, pray for one another regularly, serve one another selflessly, and forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us. We will rejoice at each other’s happiness, and seek to bear each other’s burdens with tenderness and sympathy. We will encourage one another with our speech and our actions, and we will spur one another toward love and good deeds. We will walk together in love, exercising care and watchfulness over each other, while faithfully teaching and correcting one another as occasion may require. We will humbly and gently confront one another and receive correction from one another, according to a Biblical understanding of discipline and restoration.”³

How does the kind of community pictured above resonate with your heart?

What are some ways we can show love to brothers and sisters in difficult circumstances?

What thoughts and attitudes of the heart might confront our obedience to God’s call for us to be fully devoted to one another?

Discussion

Luke makes it clear that the experience of forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit led the believers to embrace a radical generosity that put the needs of others before their own. ... Because of Christ, people suddenly became far more important than earthly treasures.⁴

ANDY CHAMBERS

During this time you will have an opportunity to discuss what God revealed to you during the week. Listed below are some of the questions from your daily reading assignments. They will guide your small-group discussion.

1. Describe the difference you see between working hard and “doing good” for believers and unbelievers.
2. What can you do to keep a servant’s mind and heart—ready and willing to serve fellow believers in your church?
3. How does your work in God’s mission help preserve His creation and the goodness of the world?
4. What are you doing to bring flavor so others can taste the goodness of God?
5. What’s the one thing that can keep your light from shining? What’s the one thing that keeps you humble as you press forward serving God and others?
6. What are some actions of mercy and grace that display the reality of our divine encounter with Jesus Christ?
7. How can we know when we are fulfilling the miracle of living in true community as new creations? How can we know when we are failing?

Conclusion

As history has unfolded, the church has swung back and forth on the pendulum of being evangelistically oriented to being focused on those within the church. At present, there is a renewed excitement within the church to be a people about the mission of God, often referred to as being missional. But in order to refrain from swinging violently on the pendulum, believers must remember that the people of God are called to serve all people in every area, especially those within the family of God.

The calls to serve the world and the church are not mutually exclusive. Scripture indicates that by observing the redeemed in Christ serving each other, the watching world observes a preview of the coming kingdom. Our mission is most effectively fulfilled when those in the church serve one another first and then set our sights on the rest of the world.

Spend some time praying this for yourself and for your group:

“God, thank You for the opportunity to serve You. We are honored that You have entrusted to us the good work of pursuing You as we pursue others. Teach us how to serve Your church and Your lost world well. Amen.”

1. Billy Graham, in *Billy Graham in Quotes*, ed. Franklin Graham with Donna Lee Toney (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 307.
2. Adapted from *Kingdom Man*, by Tony Evans (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2012), 8-9.
3. Faith Baptist Church, Youngsville, North Carolina, “Becoming a Member of Faith” (May 2014), 8.
4. Andy Chambers, *Exemplary Life* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 75.
5. Cyril of Jerusalem, Catechetical Lectures, XV.26, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1894; reprinted 2004), 112.



Sent by the Son



As the church of Jesus, we are a people on a mission. We are a people who serve others, enjoy fellowship with one another, and seek to obey the commands of our Savior as we go into all the world and make disciples. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was sent by the Father on His mission to seek and save the lost. The Son now sends us in the power of the Spirit to proclaim Jesus so the lost may be found. *The Mission: Making Disciples* takes groups on an intentional journey into the church's mission of disciple-making.

6 SESSIONS

Good Work
Vibrant Fellowship
Making Disciples
Lasting Witness
God's Sending
Reaching Unbelievers

The Gospel Project invites you to dive deeper into the things of God, lifts up Jesus, focuses on the grand story of Scripture, and drives you to be on mission. This small-group Bible study provides opportunities to study the Bible and to encounter the living Christ. And what's more, you can do so in the company of others, encouraging and building up one another.

ISBN 978-1-4300-3851-1



9 781430 038511