



## HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Each lesson follows a similar format including these elements:

### **BIBLE CONVERSATION**

We want to start by talking about the Bible together. As the name suggests, this section is designed to stimulate your thinking and prepare you and your group for the ideas that will be presented in each lesson.

### **ARTICLE**

The written articles are the primary source of the teaching content for each lesson. They are short, clear teachings of the concepts being presented in the lesson. Each week, your group will take a few minutes and read the article out loud together.

### **DISCUSSION**

This section is where we communally process the concepts being taught in the article. Often the discussion will work in conjunction with the next section (exercise) to help flesh out the teaching and apply it to our lives in concrete ways.

### **EXERCISE**

Each exercise in this study is designed to help you make practical applications of the concepts being taught or help you understand the content at a deeper heart level. Be sure to allow enough time for your group to adequately work through and discuss the exercises as directed.

### **WRAP-UP**

The wrap-up gives the leader the chance to answer any last-minute questions, reinforce ideas and, most importantly, spend a few minutes praying as a group.

## FORMAT OVERVIEW FOR TONIGHT

- I. BIBLE CONVERSATION // Read and talk about 1 John 4:7-12 (10 min)**
- II. ARTICLE // Read article “Gospel Overview” together (10 min)**
- III. DISCUSSION // Process concepts together (15-20 min)**
- IV. EXERCISE // Apply the concepts using “What To Expect” (10 min)**
- V. WRAP-UP // Final thoughts and prayer (5 min)**
- VI. PRAYER // Split up into men and women for prayer (60 min)**



### ARTICLE: GOSPEL OVERVIEW

The study you are about to begin aims to help you live a “gospel-centered” life in a gospel-centered community. The obvious question is, What exactly is “the gospel”? That’s a question we should clear up before going any further. Though many people are familiar with the word *gospel*, we’re often fuzzy about its content.

Many popular “gospel presentations” distill the gospel message down to three or four core principles. These simple summaries can be very helpful. But a richer way to understand the gospel is as a *story*—the true Story that speaks to our purest aspirations and deepest longings. This Great Story has four chapters.

#### CREATION: THE WORLD WE WERE MADE FOR

The Story begins, not with us, but with God. Deep down, we have a sense that this is true. We sense that we are important—that there is something dignified, majestic, and eternal about humanity. But we also know that we are not ultimate. Something (or Someone) greater than us exists.

The Bible tells us that this Someone is the one infinite, eternal, and un- changing God who created all things out of nothing (Genesis 1:1–31). This one God exists in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). Because God is Triune in his being, he wasn’t motivated to create the world because he *needed* something—be it relationship, worship, or glory. Rather, he created out of the overflow of his perfec- tion—his own love, goodness, and glory. God made human beings in his image (Genesis 1:27), which is what gives us our dignity and value. He also made us *human*, which means we are created beings, dependent on our Creator. We were made to worship, enjoy, love, and serve him, not ourselves.

In God’s original creation, everything was good. The world existed in perfect peace, stability, harmony, and wholeness.

#### FALL: THE CORRUPTION OF EVERYTHING

God created us to worship, enjoy, love, and serve him. But rather than live under God’s authority, humanity turned away from God in sinful rebellion (Genesis 3:1–7; Isaiah 53:6). Our defection plunged the whole world into the darkness and chaos of sin. Though vestiges of good re- main, the wholeness and harmony of God’s original creation is shattered.

As a result, all human beings are sinners by nature and by choice (Ephesians 2:1–3). We often excuse our sin by claiming that we’re “not that bad”—after all, we can always find someone worse than we are! But this evasion only reveals our shallow



and superficial view of sin. Sin is not primarily an *action*; it's a *disposition*. It's our soul's aversion to God. Sin is manifested in our pride, our selfishness, our independence, and our lack of love for God and others. Sometimes sin is very obvious and external; other times it's hidden and internal. But "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

Sin brings two drastic consequences into our lives. First, *sin enslaves us* (Romans 6:17–18). When we turn *from* God, we turn *to* other things to find our life, our identity, our meaning, and our happiness. These things become substitute gods—what the Bible calls idols—and they soon enslave us, demanding our time, our energy, our loyalty, our money—everything we are and have. They begin to rule over our lives and hearts. This is why the Bible describes sin as something that "mas- ters" us (Romans 6:14 niv). Sin causes us to "serve created things rather than the Creator" (Romans 1:25 niv).

Second, *sin brings condemnation*. We're not just enslaved by our sin; we're *guilty* because of it. We stand condemned before the Judge of heaven and earth. "The wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). We are under a death sentence for our cosmic treason against the holiness and justice of God. His righteous anger toward sin stands over us (Nahum 1:2; John 3:36).

### REDEMPTION: JESUS COMES TO SAVE US

Every good story has a hero. And the hero of the Gospel Story is Jesus. Humanity needs a Savior, a Redeemer, a Deliverer to free us from the bondage and condemnation of sin and to restore the world to its original good. This Rescuer must be *truly human* in order to pay the debt we owe to God. But he can't be *merely human* because he must conquer sin. We need a Substitute—one who can live the life of obedience we've failed to live, and who can stand in our place to bear the punishment we deserve for our disobedience and sin.

This is why God sent Jesus into the world to be our substitute (1 John 4:14). The Bible teaches that Jesus was fully God—the second person of the Trinity—and also fully human. He was born to a human mother, lived a real flesh-and-blood existence, and died a brutal death on a Roman cross outside Jerusalem. Jesus lived a life of perfect obedi- ence to God (Hebrews 4:15), making him the only person in history who did not deserve judgment. But on the cross, he took our place, dying for our sin. He received the condemnation and death we deserve so that, when we put our trust in him, we can receive the blessing and life he deserves (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Not only did Jesus die in our place, he rose from death, displaying his victory over sin, death, and hell. His resurrection is a decisive event in history; the Bible calls it the "first fruits"—the initial evidence—of the cosmic renewal God is bringing (1



Corinthians 15:20–28). One of the greatest promises in the Bible is Revelation 21:5: “Behold, I am making all things new.” All that was lost, broken, and corrupted in the fall will ultimately be put right. Redemption doesn’t simply mean the salvation of individual souls; it means the restoring of the whole creation back to its original good.

### A NEW PEOPLE: THE STORY CONTINUES

So how do we become a part of the story? How do we experience God’s salvation personally and become agents of his redemption in the world? By faith or trust (Ephesians 2:8–9). What does that mean? We trust a taxi driver when we count on him to get us to our destination. We trust a doctor when we agree with her diagnosis and entrust ourselves to her care. And we trust in Jesus Christ when we admit our sin, receive his gracious forgiveness, and rest entirely in Jesus for our acceptance before God. Faith is like getting in the taxi. It’s like going under the surgeon’s knife. It’s a restful, whole-hearted commitment of the self to Jesus (Psalm 31:14–15). This is what it means to believe the gospel.

When we trust in Jesus, we are released from sin’s condemnation *and* from its bondage. We are free to say “no” to sin and “yes” to God. We are free to die to ourselves and live for Christ and his purposes. We are free to work for justice in the world. We are free to stop living for our own glory and start living for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). We are free to love God and others in the way we live, which is the particular focus of this study.

God has promised that Jesus will return to finally judge sin and make all things new. Until then, he is gathering to himself a people “from every nation, tribe, people and language” (Revelation 7:9 niv). As part of that called-and-sent people, we have the privilege of joining him in his mission (Matthew 28:18–20) as individuals and as part of his spiritual family. By grace, we can enjoy God, live life for his glory, serve humanity, and make his gospel known to others through our words and actions.

This is the good news—the True Story—of the gospel.



## DISCUSSION:

1. **Creation** - We know that God wasn't motivated to create the world because he needed something; what is the danger in thinking God created the world or humans because of something other than the overflow of his perfect relationship as a triune God?
2. **The Corruption of Everything** - What does the author mean when he says, "Sin is not primarily an action; it's a disposition." How do you see this playing out in your life?
3. **Redemption** - What are some of the things you are most anticipating in the redemption and restoration of all creation?
4. **A New People** - How is it possible to be free in Christ (1 Cor 10:31) but also a bondservant to God (1 Pet 2:16)?



## EXERCISE: WHAT TO EXPECT

**EXPECT TO BE CHALLENGED** Most of us have reduced the gospel to something much less than it is. As you work through each lesson, expect your thinking about the gospel to be challenged and expanded.

**EXPECT THE HOLY SPIRIT** to be the one ultimately responsible for the growth of your group, and for the change in each person's life—including your own. Relax and trust him.

**EXPECT YOUR GROUP'S AGENDA TO INCLUDE** an open, give-and-take discussion of the article, the questions, and the exercises. Also expect times of prayer at each meeting.

**EXPECT STRUGGLE** and don't be surprised to find that your group is a mixture of enthusiasm, hope, and honesty along with indifference, anxiety, skepticism, guilt, and covering up. We are all people who really need Jesus every day. So expect your group to be made up of people who wrestle with sin and have problems—people just like yourself!

**EXPECT A GROUP LEADER** who desires to serve you but who also needs Jesus as much as you do. No leader should be put on a pedestal, so expect that your group leader will have the freedom to share openly about his or her own weaknesses, struggles, and sins.

### EXERCISE DISCUSSION:

1. Which of these expectations are you most excited about?
2. Which are you most uncomfortable with?

### WRAP-UP:

Final thoughts and prayer.