

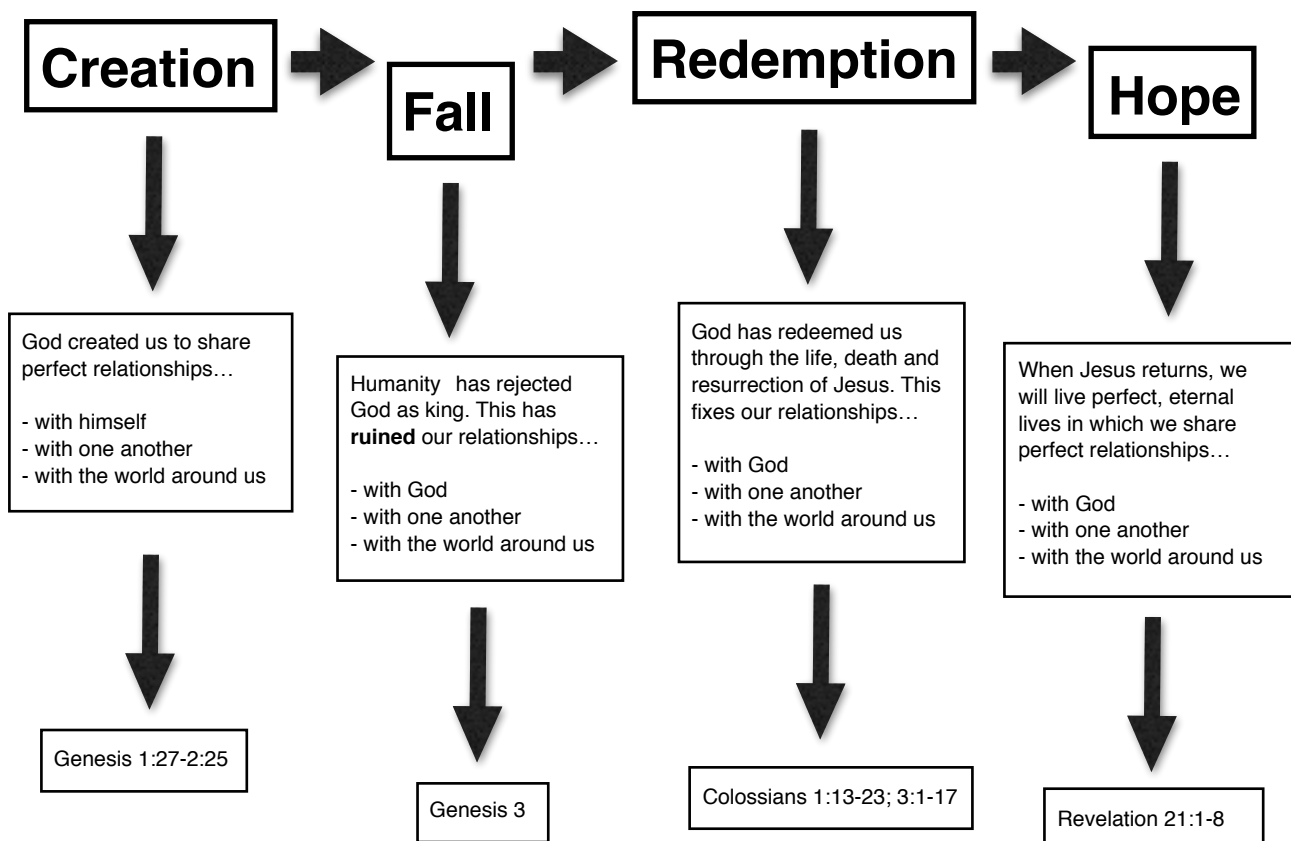
Gospel Fluency

God calls all of his people to...

'always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have.' (1 Peter 3:15).

Sadly, however, many Christians just don't know where to start, or what to include, when called upon to explain the gospel.

The aim of this course is to provide Christians with a very simple frame work for remembering how to communicate the gospel clearly. These sessions provide 4 simple headings to remember (Creation, Fall, Redemption and Hope). These provide the skeleton of your gospel explanation. If you memorise these, they should then remind you of their short summaries (memorise these too) which give you the basic content of each section of your gospel presentation. Finally, these summaries should jog your memory and remind you of the content of the Bible studies (no need to memorise) that provide you with any details you might need to fill out your explanation



Please remember that at this stage all we are dealing with is a *framework* to help you remember essential content. The above is not a script to be recited. When you're speaking to someone about Jesus, you will always use your own words, and some things will require more explanation than others.

However, before you can become fluent in a language, you need to learn the basic building blocks. Only after you have mastered these, can you go on to have a natural, flowing conversation with someone. It is the same with 'gospel fluency'. The first step is to learn the basics well. After you have become comfortable with the content of the first four studies, and memorised the basic framework, we will go on to look at how you might use this material in a real conversation with someone.

Special Note to leaders: This course seeks to equip people with a new skill and this means people need to actually *memorise* some of the material. By the end of the course, participants should be able to remember the 4 major headings and the summaries that describe them. Whilst they don't have to remember all of the content of the studies by rote, it is helpful for them to at least remember which Bible passages to turn to for more detail and perhaps some of the basic content.

Because of the emphasis on memorising, it's worth giving over a bit of your session to testing each other on what has been done so far and trying to reel off the new material. This can be done at the beginning and the end of each session. It is also worth letting people know up front that they will need to do a bit of work between sessions, to make sure they can memorise the material before the next session.

Study #1 - Creation

Consider...

One of the saddest things you can ever see is a creature that is unable to live the way it is meant to live. Think of a battery hen crammed into a small cage with 5 others. It spends its short life standing on wire, unable to peck in the dirt, or stretch its wings. Or consider the lion, stuck in an urban zoo. It spends its time pacing backwards and forwards in a confined concrete area, there is little sun, it has never known a pride and is unable to hunt and run!

Now picture the old man sitting alone in the corner of a nursing home. He is unable to leave the building anymore and no one visits him, or even speaks to him. Or think of a child sitting in the mud of a refugee camp, filthy, malnourished and sick. The Tsunami destroyed her whole village and killed her parents. Finally picture the woman crying herself to sleep. She always dreamed of getting married, but five years of abuse and 3 affairs have left her wishing she'd never met the man lying next to her.

When you think about it, it is pretty clear that we are not living the way we're meant to. But if we're not made for this, what exactly *are* we meant for?

Read...

1. Read Genesis chapter 1:27-2:25. How does this passage describe humanity's relationship with the world around it?

- *It's very good (1:31).*
- *They are to rule and subdue the earth (1:28) and this means caring for it (2:15).*
- *If humans can rule and subdue, they are in control. Things like diseases we can't cure and natural disasters we can't control are not an issue.*
- *The world is a great place for humans to live. There is plenty of food (1:29-30; 2:9)*

2. How does the passage describe the man and woman's relationship with one another?

- *They reflect the image of God (Father, Son, and Spirit) in their their relationships because the two of them together are the image of God (1:26-27)*
- *They compliment each other in ways no other creature does and are perfectly suited to work together (2:20-22)*
- *Their Nakedness shows that there is no shame in their relationship and nothing to hide from one another. (2:25)*

3. How does the passage describe humanity's relationship with God? (Hint: look particularly at what God does for the humans throughout the chapter and think about the point of what God says in vv.16-17).

- *God provides for them and cares for them throughout.*
- *In vv.15-17, we see that God speaks to them and has a relationship with them*
- *In these same verses we see the nature of the relationship is one where God is to be obeyed*

4. What does the passage teach about death?

- *In v.17 we see that death is not part of the ultimate design for humans. It is only there as a consequence for disobeying God. This means that if the humans don't disobey, they won't die.*

Summarise...

God created us to share perfect relationships...

- with himself
- with one another
- with the world around us

Study #2 - Fall

Consider...

Last time we saw that humans were created to share a perfect relationship with God, one another and the world around them. However, you don't need to be a genius to work out that something has gone horribly wrong. Most people ignore God, we all hurt one another (to varying degrees) and whilst we admire and enjoy the extreme beauty of this world, all too often it brings us to our knees in terror, wrecking our possessions and threatening our lives.

What has gone so horribly wrong?

Read...

1. Read Genesis chapter 3. How would you describe Adam and Eve's attitude towards God and his word in this passage?

- *In 3:1-6 we see that there is doubt and mistrust.*
- *In the same verses we see the humans believe a lie about God and doubt that God wants what's best for them (v.5)*
- *Rather than living in obedience to God they want to be on the same level as God (vv.4-6)*

2. Look back over Genesis 2:15-22.

a) How do these verses describe the way God has ordered the relationships between God, Man, Woman, Creation?

- *We see that God is at the top with people living in obedience to his word. Out of the humans, Man is made first (which is a sign that he is meant to lead and take ultimate responsibility).*
- *Then the woman is made to help the man.*
- *They are both to rule over the rest of creation by taking care of it.*

b) What happens to this order in Genesis 3:1-6

- It is turned completely upside down. The serpent (part of the creation) is calling the shots.
- Then the man who is there (v.6) does not take responsibility or lead in any way. Rather he stands back and abdicates all responsibility to his wife (you see this in the way he blames her later v.12)
- Finally God is put last, to be doubted and disobeyed.

4. What does this disorder do to the humans' relationship with God, the world, and each other (vv.7-24)?

- In 3:8-10 we see that man is now afraid of God and wants to avoid him and hide from him.
- Because of human sin, God must punish the humans vv.16-24
- The humans now blame one another v.12
- It looks like there will be a power struggle between the humans. The husband will rule over his wife (not just lovingly lead), but she will desire to rule over him.
- The rest of creation will become a hard and dangerous place to live for the humans (vv.17-19).
- Worst of all Death is now a reality for humanity (vv.22-24). They are cut off from the tree of life.

5. Read 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9. Do the consequences of a broken relationship with God end with physical death?

- No! There is judgement after death and the result is eternal punishment.
- This punishment is described as being shut out from the presence of the Lord forever v.9.

Summarise...

Humanity has rejected God as King. This has **ruined** our relationships...

- with God
- with one another
- with the world around us

Study #3 - Redemption

Consider...

The idea that a broken situation can be turned around and somehow made right, i.e. *redemption*, is an important idea for people. So many songs, movies, books and TV series have a redemptive theme at the heart of them.

So far we have seen that humans were made to share perfect relationships with God, one another and the world around them. But we saw that humanity has rejected God as king, and, as a result, we now have a broken world, full of broken relationships, where God is ignored.

The Good News or 'Gospel', however, is that God has done something to *redeem* humanity...

Read...

1. Read Colossians 1:13-23. How does this passage describe what Jesus' death achieved?

- It rescues us from kingdom of darkness (v.13). When you live in someones Kingdom, you are under their authority, rule and control. We were in the kingdom of sin and death (darkness) but we have been rescued.
- Instead of being in the kingdom of darkness it brings us into Jesus Kingdom (v.13)
- It brings us redemption and Forgiveness (v.14)
- It reconciles us to God and now we have peace with him (v.20)
- It makes us holy in God's sight

2. Read vv.21-23 again. What needs to happen for someone to benefit from all of the above blessings?

- v.23 says that the blessings of Jesus death comes to those who continue in the faith, which is the hope held out in the gospel, the good news of Jesus.

3. Why is his death able to achieve this? (c.f. 1 Peter 3:18)

- Jesus deals with problem of our sin which is what wrecked everything in the first place.
- He takes the punishment that our sins deserve which means our sin is completely dealt with and no longer an obstacle between us and God.

4. According to Colossians 1, does Jesus death fix more than just our relationship with God? (c.f. Romans 8:19-21)

- Yes! In verse 20 we see that Jesus doesn't just reconcile people to God he reconciles all things!
- The whole creation will ultimately be put right through Jesus redemptive work!

5. Read Colossians 3:1-17. How does Jesus' death and resurrection impact our relationships with one another?

- Those who trust in Jesus have undergone an amazing spiritual transformation. Their old self died with Christ and now a new person has been born through his resurrection.
- This new self puts to death all of the things that ruins our relationships (vv.5-9) and instead is increasingly growing (v.10) in all of the things that enables the good relationships we were created to have with one another (vv.12-15)
- All of this is so powerful that even people who are very different from one another can have good relationships (v.11)

Summarise...

God has redeemed us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This fixes our relationships...

- with God
- with one another
- with the world around us

Study #4 - Hope

Consider...

Last time we saw that through Jesus, God has done something to redeem us. Through his life, death and resurrection our relationships with God, one another and even the world around us can be restored!

And yet, the Bible is clear that God's redemptive work is not yet completely finished (Romans 8:18-25). Although our relationship with God has been restored, we still sin. Although our relationships with one another are slowly improving, we still hurt and fail one another. Although as Christians we can do a better job of caring for this world, we still damage it and it still damages us!

However, The Bible promises that one day Jesus will return and when he does, things are going to change (Hebrews 9:28)! This means that Christians are people of hope.

Special Note: In today's Bible passage there is a verse that has troubled many a Christian surfer and fisherman. Revelation 21:1 tells us that there won't be any sea in the new earth. This is symbolic language. For ancient Israelites the sea represented everything that was wrong with the natural world. It was seen as dangerous, untamed, and out of control.

Read...

1. Read Revelation 21:1-8. How does this passage describe what our relationship with God will look like?

- *God will dwell with his people once more. The relationships broken in Eden have been completely restored (v.3)!*
- *He will comfort them and protect them from everything bad (v.4)*
- *God's people are described as his children!*

2. How does the passage describe what human relationships will look like? (Hint: think about what won't be present in the new earth)

- *The fact that there is a new Jerusalem (a City) shows that God's people will be living in a community (v.2).*
- *If there will be no more mourning, crying or pain (v.4) then this means that everything that has gone wrong with human relationships will be completely fixed!*

3. How does the passage describe our relationship with the world? (Hint: think about the 'sea' imagery)

- *The good news is that there will most likely be an amazing ocean in the new earth.*
- *By saying that there won't be a sea (v.1) is symbolic language conveying that the creation will no longer be out of control and dangerous. Rather it will be lovingly ruled and subdued as it was always intended to be (c.f. Genesis 1:29)*
- *Verse 4 also applies to creation. Everything about the creation that causes mourning, crying and pain will be no more.*

Summarise...

When Jesus returns, we will live perfect, eternal lives in which we share perfect relationships...

- with God
- with one another
- with the world around us

Study #5 - Getting Real Part 1

Consider...

Now that you have learnt a gospel outline, how do you actually get around to using it? Unless you want to make people cringe, you can't just try and insert it into any old conversation and trot out a script!

The first step is to realise that most people have their own gospel (good news) and that most people love to talk about their gospel(s). If you want to share the gospel of Jesus with someone in a natural way, it helps to have a good understanding of that person's gospel.

In order to find out what their gospel is, you need to love people. You must spend time with people, build real relationships with people, and spend lots of time *listening* to people. Ask them to tell you about what is important to them. Ask them to tell you their hopes and dreams. Ask them to share their frustrations with you. *Listen, listen, listen.*

If you do this two things will happen. Firstly, you will be genuinely caring for and loving the person. Most people want at least one person in their lives who listens to them, cares about them and takes an interest in them. How awesome would it be if that person was a Christian! Secondly, you will learn about the gospel that person is trusting in.

For example, one popular gospel, that millions have bought into, is 'the Gospel according to Weight Loss.' A gospel Outline for this gospel would look like this:

Creation: People are made to be skinny, toned, and attractive. This is where true happiness and fulfilment lies.

Fall: We live in a world full of junk food, TV, Internet, and busy lives that make exercise difficult. In addition, we can be lazy and lack self control.

Redemption: Through dieting, a great personal trainer, gym membership, self discipline and hard work, I can fight off the fall and get back to what I was made to be.

Hope: One day the new skinny, toned, attractive me will emerge! When that happens, I will feel good about myself, others will like me, and I will be happy and successful!

Exercise

Below are some other popular Gospels that modern westerners believe. See if you can create a Gospel outline for each one.

Note in this leader guide we have worked through the first two just to make sure you get the idea, but it would be ideal to try and do a couple on your own so the last two examples are left blank.

1. The Gospel According to Children

Creation: *We are made to have and raise kids.*

Fall: *A partner can be hard to find. In addition fertility issues can get in the way of having children. Once I've had them the other demands of life can get in the way of me raising them the way I want to.*

Redemption: *I can work really hard and do what ever it takes to find a partner. Even if I can't, I can adopt, or use a sperm donor or surrogate. If I pregnancy is proving difficult IVF may provide redemption. Once I have a child, I can focus everything on them and put the rest of life on hold to raise them properly.*

Hope: *One day I will have children, and when that happens I will find ultimate happiness, meaning and fulfilment*

2. The Gospel According to Career

Creation: *We are made to have careers that we find rewarding, and or enjoyable, and or that fit with my passions, and or that make me a lot of money.*

Fall: Good careers are hard to find. There is lots of competition. Once you get your foot in the door it's hard to get promoted. It's very difficult to make a living doing only what you enjoy / are passionate about.

Redemption: If I study hard enough, get enough experience, put in whatever hours it takes, I can make sure that I get the job I want.

Hope: I will eventually get my dream job / make the money I want. When I do I will be happy and feel fulfilled.

3. The Gospel according to Marriage / Relationships

4. The Gospel according to Materialism

Note: Of course there are many, many other gospels out there, and many people believe more than one. Sadly Christians are a great example of this. Often Christians find themselves trusting in gospels other than the gospel of Jesus, and whenever people are struggling with their faith this is nearly always the cause! On a pastoral note, if you ever find yourself struggling spiritually, the first question you should ask yourself is: 'have I slipped into trusting in a gospel *other* than the gospel of Jesus Christ'.

Study #6 - Getting Real Part 2

Consider...

Last time we discovered that nearly everyone has some sort of gospel they believe in and live by. It's just that these gospels aren't the *real* Gospel.

The big problem with these 'other' gospels is that they all *ultimately* let their followers down. As we saw right at the very beginning, we are made to share a perfect relationship with God. He is the only thing that will ultimately and completely satisfy us. What's more God is the only one who will *never* let us down.

Let us take the example we used last time, 'the Gospel according to Weight Loss'.

As we'll see in a minute, there is much that Christians can affirm about this Gospel. However, if weight loss is seen to be the ultimate source of joy and happiness, it will ultimately disappoint. A person can be let down by any of the following...

- I just keep slipping up, eating the wrong things and not exercising
- My relationships aren't functioning well, because I've become obsessive and am at the Gym too much
- I have become bulimic, or anorexic
- I've injured myself, now I can't train the way I want and I feel depressed
- I'm getting older and no matter what I do my body isn't working anymore
- I've achieved all my goals but I still feel empty

Exercise

Take a look at some of the example Gospels from last week (Gospels according to: children, career, marriage / relationships, materialism). See if you can identify the ways in which these Gospels will ultimately fail people.

Note in this leader guide we have worked through the first two just to make sure you get the idea, but it would be ideal to try and do a couple on your own so the last two examples are left blank.

The Gospel according to Children

- Sometimes it's just not possible to have kids. You never find the spouse, the infertility obstacles are just insurmountable. You're not in a position to adopt, you can't afford the other options, or the just don't work.
- Kids themselves are not perfect. They will hurt you and let you down.
- The pressure, time and effort to raise them *perfectly* can make your life miserable.
- What happens if they die before you?
- What happens if they reject you as teenagers?
- Eventually they leave home and this period of your life will end.
- What if they move countries and you barely ever see them?

If kids are what you live for, any of the above can have a devastating effect on your life.

The Gospel According to Career

- *Sometimes no matter how hard you study, you just can't get the results to get the job you want.*
- *Sometimes no matter how hard you work, you just don't get the promotions.*
- *Workplaces can be unfair. Hard workers can be used and abused, whilst deceptive people seem to get where they want with very little work at all!*
- *What happens if you lose your job (redundancy / fired)*
- *When you over work you can become miserable as you have no relaxation or leisure time*
- *Your work can ruin your friendship, marriage or relationship with your kids, because it takes all your time, energy and headspace.*
- *What happens when you retire?*

Consider

The tragedy is that false Gospels are constantly disappointing people and often the results can be devastating. As Christians we can and must love people through this, but how? Here are some suggestions:

1. Pray for People and ask God to help you reach out to them.
2. Listen to people. Ask them about their interests.
3. Affirm what is good about their gospel. This is a great way to lead into a discussion about the real gospel. Most gospels are based on some aspect of God's good creation. For example with the 'Gospel according to Weight Loss' there is much that is good. We are made to be fit and healthy and when Jesus comes back, we will have perfect bodies. In addition, being fit and healthy is rewarding and increases our quality of life in the here and now. The problem comes when things get disordered and God's creation is placed above the creator.
4. Ask people how important things are to them
3. Think about the ways in which their gospels are / could let them down
5. Ask the question 'how's that working for you?' gently probe and help people think about the potential areas where their Gospel might let them down.
6. Look for opportunities to show how the real Gospel affirms what is good about their Gospel, but brings so much more, and will never let them down.

Exercise

Pick a couple of common Gospels and practise thinking through step 3.

Note in this leader guide we have worked through the first two just to make sure you get the idea, but it would be ideal to try and do a couple on your own so the last two examples are left blank.

Gospel According to Children

- *God Made us to be fruitful and increase in number (Genesis 1:28). So having kids is a good thing that God made us to do!*
- *God also wants us to work hard at parenting and to invest serious time and effort into raising our kids well (Ephesians 6:4)*
- *There is much about this Gospel that is right and that Christians can affirm.*

Gospel According to Career

- *God made us to work (Genesis 2:15). Indeed in Genesis 1 we see God himself working as he creates the world, so work is definitely a good thing and something that God has designed us to do.*
- *We should also aim to provide for ourselves and our families (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; 1 Timothy 5:8).*
- *Christians are to do all of their work for God and so should work at their jobs with all of their hearts (Colossians 3*