

“FIRST LOVE ON PURPOSE”

We've been thinking this last month about loving Jesus Christ as the “first love” [Loving Jesus as the supreme love of our life because he IS the Lord our God]

And I've been unveiling the new formula, “the new recipe,” for spiritual maturity: “discipleship” **Living the Life**” ~ 4 parts

- ⇒ **Living the life with Christ** = your own personal relationship with Christ
ACTION → developing a practice of a personal, meaningful, time with Christ in the Word and in prayer
- ⇒ **Living the life with Christ's power** = his power to resist temptation and fight sin and attain holiness
ACTION → learning to control your “flesh” and being “transformed by the renewing of your mind”
- ⇒ **Living the life with Christ's love** = loving your neighbor, that is, the people who are near you
ACTION → learning how to love people with the love that Christ commands, and strengthens us for
And now we come to the 4th of the 4:
- ⇒ **Living the life with Christ's purpose** Because loving Christ obligates us to love his work.
ACTION → ... → **evangelism**, explaining then “good news” about Christ

THINK ABOUT THIS: When you love someone, you care about what he cares about. That's because you care about his or her joy and peace, and a person's joy and peace is directly connected to what he cares about.'

[We all know this: We “feel the love” when a person asks about something we care about and then really listens...]

QUESTION: *What ARE the purposes of Jesus Christ?* Look at a little detail from Paul's life that shows up in his letter to the Philippians... **Philippians 2:19-21** I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Can you see that Timothy's genuine concern for the well-being of these Christians came out of his commitment to the “interests of Christ”?

QUESTION: *What are “the interests” of Jesus Christ?* Here at West London, we say it this way:

~ **Getting the gospel out** to the people who do not believe in him (yet! Yet?) → **“Evangelism”**

~ **Getting the gospel in** to the people of Christ → **“Discipleship”**

THE INTERESTS OF CHRIST → **The work of the gospel** I'm guessing that some of you breathed **a quiet sigh of relief** to know that it's not just evangelism but discipleship too. **Now what is strange and sort of funny about this** is that many of us are more involved in **getting the gospel in** than in **getting the gospel out**. And one of the reasons is that the whole subject of **getting the gospel out** worries us and scares us. But we might have our thoughts about these two parts of Christ's interests kind of flipped!

NOTES about “the work of the gospel”:

1. The work of ‘**getting the gospel out**’ is a source of **great joy**.

Philippians 1:12-18 I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to all the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ... What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice... An ongoing source of intense joy all through a very difficult time in Paul's life.

2. The work of ‘**getting the gospel in**’ is a source of **worry and fear**. Compare another mention of Timothy in a letter from Paul to another persecuted church: **1 Thessalonians 3:1-10** **Therefore when we could bear it no longer**, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, that no one be moved by these afflictions. ... **For this reason, when I could bear it no longer**, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. Now for sure, as we read on we see that Paul's “discipleship work” was also a source of joy to him ... when his people were doing well. But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— **for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction** we have been comforted about you through your faith. **For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord**. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

OF COURSE, Paul's "discipleship work" was a source of joy to him --- as long as his people were doing well, but he loved them like a father loves his children [1 Thes. 2:11,12] For that matter, he loved them like a mother loves her baby [1 Thes. 2:7!] And so, oddly perhaps, Paul's commitment to the discipleship of the people of Christ was an ongoing source of worry and fear! And now a third note

3. "Getting the gospel out" requires preparation.

e.g.

Acts 20:20-21 ... I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Acts 8:26-38 ... Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

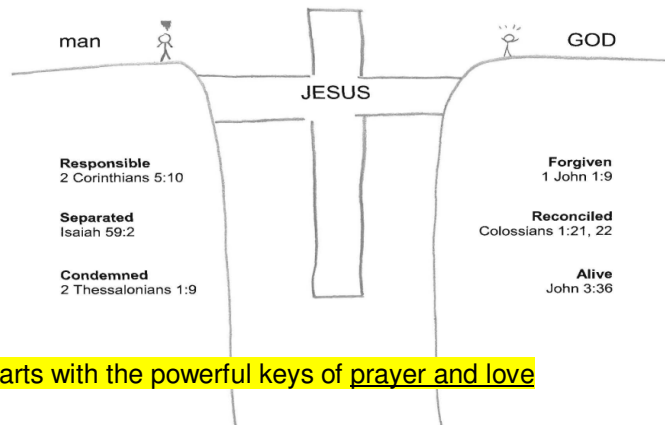
ACTIONS about "getting the gospel out"

a) Prepare yourself to explain.

1 Peter 3:15 ... in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect

One way to explain: **your personal testimony**. Here are 3 WLA examples: Watch for the 3 parts: life before believing in Christ, believing in Christ, life now believing in Christ ---- compressed into two minutes: **Example 1, 2 and 3.**

Another method: "The Bridge Illustration."



b) Open some minds and hearts with the powerful keys of prayer and love

Colossians 4:2-6 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

There are ways in which a church family, working together, can help you open the minds and hearts of your friends and loved ones and neighbors. This December, the West London church family is putting on 3 very different events that we want you to see coming and be praying about making use of.

1. "Rockin' around the Christmas Tree" Saturday morning, December 4 for the whole family
2. Christmas Eve Candlelight Service Friday, December 24 for the whole family
3. "A Tree for Beatrice" Saturday, December 18, Sunday, December 19 for adults