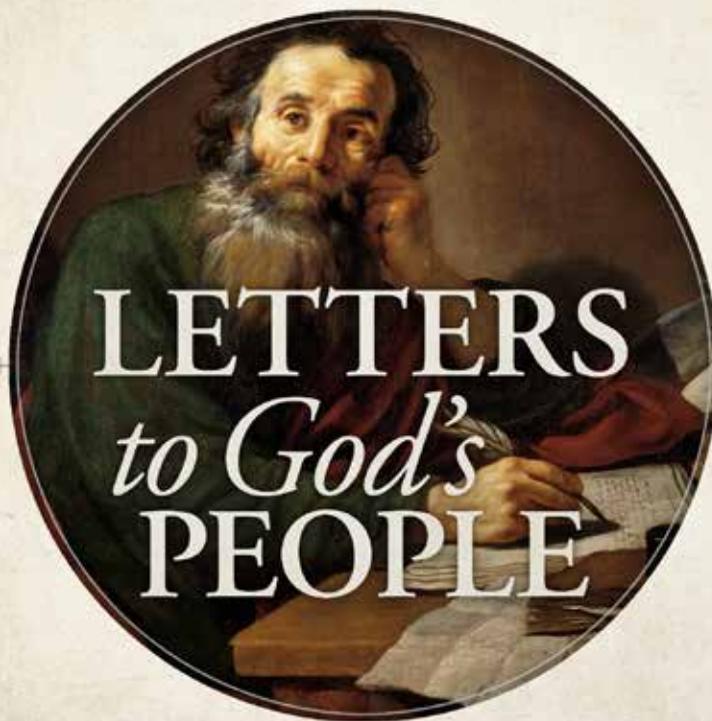


THE
GOSPEL
PROJECT[®]
CHRONOLOGICAL



B.C.

A.D.

Volume 11

SPRING 2018: *Personal Study Guide ESV*
Ed Stetzer & Trevin Wax GENERAL EDITORS
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God's Word to You



A Summary of the Bible

In the beginning, the all-powerful, personal God created the universe. This God created human beings in His image to live joyfully in His presence, in humble submission to His gracious authority. But all of us have rebelled against God and, in consequence, must suffer the punishment of our rebellion: physical death and the wrath of God.

Thankfully, God initiated a rescue plan, which began with His choosing the nation of Israel to display His glory in a fallen world. The Bible describes how God acted mightily on Israel's behalf, rescuing His people from slavery and then giving them His holy law. But God's people—like all of us—failed to rightly reflect the glory of God.

Then, in the fullness of time, in the Person of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to renew the world and to restore His people. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law given to Israel. Though innocent, He suffered the consequences of human rebellion by His death on a cross. But three days later, God raised Him from the dead.

Now the church of Jesus Christ has been commissioned by God to take the news of Christ's work to the world. Empowered by God's Spirit, the church calls all people everywhere to repent of sin and to trust in Christ alone for our forgiveness. Repentance and faith restores our relationship with God and results in a life of ongoing transformation.

The Bible promises that Jesus Christ will return to this earth as the conquering King. Only those who live in repentant faith in Christ will escape God's judgment and live joyfully in God's presence for all eternity. God's message is the same to all of us: repent and believe, before it is too late. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe with your heart that God raised Him from the dead, and you will be saved.

Ed Stetzer

General Editor—*The Gospel Project*

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We typically frown upon reading someone else's mail. It's invading someone's privacy and not how we would want our mail to be treated. Even should a letter be misdelivered to our home, we know the proper and respectful course of action would be to return to sender or to walk it down the street to our neighbor, which could lead to an opportunity for a gospel conversation. God is still working and moving in this world, after all, so let's respond to our circumstances in faith.

But the letters in the New Testament are in a different category. These were written by various apostles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to specific churches and people addressing specific circumstances. So these letters are still very personal, but they are *meant* to be read by others. They are instructive and

corrective in their nature. They convict, strengthen, and bless. They are, along with all of the Scriptures, a means by which God directs His people and changes them to be more like Jesus.

Though from the hands of men, the letters of Paul, John, Peter, and others are still the Word of God. In them, we are warned of our sinful condition, graced with the truth of the gospel, called to repent and believe in Christ, strengthened in our faith, purified of our sin, taught about our new identity in Christ, commanded to obey in the Spirit, and empowered for our gospel mission. So read, respond, and rejoice!

Trevin Wax

General Editor—*The Gospel Project*

AUTHOR OF MULTIPLE BOOKS, INCLUDING *This Is Our Time: Everyday Myths in Light of the Gospel*



The letters of the New Testament comprise a small portion of the Bible, but they are rich in instruction for Christians today. They give us a glimpse of early church life, and at the heart of these letters, we see the heart of the apostles, which happened to be the heart of the gospel: Christ crucified and raised for our justification.

It might be easy during this part of your journey through the storyline of the Bible to miss out on some of the real-life stories of the early church that prompted the writing of these letters. We do our best in this study to show you the background situation so you can see how the apostles' instruction was timely and powerful in the first century. We also show how the gospel impacts our lives today through our careful application of the truths in these letters.

The apostles wrote letters because they loved the church and cared about the mission. The writers and editors of this volume of *The Gospel Project* love the church and care about the mission too. And we pray that your love will grow and your own mission efforts will be stronger as a result of your study of these divinely inspired letters.

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WRITERS

**Suggested for
the week of**

Unit 1: The God Who Directs His People (Epistles)			
March 4	10	<i>Session 1</i>	Toward Faithfulness in the Gospel
March 11	19	<i>Session 2</i>	Toward Unity in the Cross
March 18	28	<i>Session 3</i>	Toward Mercy and Impartiality
March 25	37	<i>Session 4</i>	Toward an Enduring Identity
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Unit 2: The God Who Changes Us (Epistles)			
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THE GOSPEL PROJECT CHRONOLOGICAL

A Journey Through the Storyline of Scripture

Fall 2015

The Story Begins

God the Creator (Genesis 1–11)

God the Covenant-Maker (Genesis 12–50)

Winter 2015-16

God Delivers

God the Redeemer (Exodus)

God the Lawgiver (Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy)

Spring 2016

The Promised Land

God the Savior (Numbers, Joshua)

God the Judge (Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel)

Summer 2016

A Kingdom Established

God the King (1–2 Kings)

God All Wise (1 Kings, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes)

Fall 2016

Prophets and Kings

God the Revealer (1–2 Kings, Isaiah)

God the Pursuer (Prophets, 2 Chronicles)

Winter 2016-17

Exile and Return

God the Sustainer (Daniel, Ezra)

God the Provider (Esther, Nehemiah, Malachi)

Spring 2017

The Rescue Begins

God the Son (Gospels)

God Among Us (Gospels)

Summer 2017

Stories and Signs

Jesus the Storyteller (Synoptic Gospels)

Jesus the Miracle-Worker (Gospels)

Fall 2017

Jesus Saves

Jesus the Savior (Gospels)

Jesus the Risen King (Gospels, Acts)

Winter 2017-18

The Church on Mission

The Spirit Who Empowers (Acts)

The God Who Sends (Acts)

Spring 2018

Letters to God's People

The God Who Directs His People (Epistles)

The God Who Changes Us (Epistles)



Summer 2018

Come, Lord Jesus

God's Prisoner (Acts, Epistles)

The God Who Makes All Things New (Epistles, Revelation)

Unit 1

THE GOD WHO DIRECTS HIS PEOPLE

Epistles

Memory Verses

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

—GALATIANS 2:19-21

Writers

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Toward Faithfulness in the Gospel

THEOLOGICAL THEME: When the truth of the gospel is at stake, we must take a strong stand.

Two-faced. No one likes to be called that. But here's the problem: We live in a world of selfies and social media status updates where we want to present the best image of ourselves for others to see, even if that image isn't accurate. We care about what others think of us, so we present an image of ourselves that others will like. Happy. Successful. Intelligent. Caring. Spiritual. It's easy to stretch facts and exaggerate in order to make ourselves look good to others. But when we do, we can easily become two-faced, acting a certain way with one group and differently with another.

But there is another problem at play apart from social media. I'm pretty good with people and enjoy spending time with others. Folks like me can tend to be people-pleasers though. We like people and want to please them, and we want those people to like us, again leading us to do what we can to please others. How about you? Whether you are outgoing or shy, we all struggle with how we are perceived by others.

Voices from the Church

"Self-image, the concept we have of ourselves, must begin not by looking in the mirror but by looking into the face of God."¹

—Sam Storms



What are some ways you might struggle with the image you present of yourself or with people-pleasing?

As a part of his ministry to the church, the apostle Paul wrote letters to churches to teach, encourage, and rebuke. In a rebuke to the Galatian churches, he shared how he confronted the apostle Peter for being two-faced, or hypocritical. Peter acted one way with one group of Christians and another way with a different group. Peter's hypocrisy wasn't a small problem though. When he chose to separate himself from Gentile believers, he implicitly denied the truth of the gospel by his actions. This was why Paul had to step in and challenge Peter to reflect the truth of the gospel to others through his actions. Paul's challenge reminds us that our salvation rests in our faith in Christ alone. Christ's death in our place, followed by His resurrection, is the basis of our salvation, not our own works.

1. Challenge one another to walk in line with the gospel (Gal. 2:11-14).

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

The early church was still grappling with the different ways Jewish and Gentile Christians lived out their faith and how a unified church could work through these differences (see Acts 15). These differences—the more Jewish-focused Christianity coming out of Jerusalem and the newer, more Gentile-focused Christianity coming from the large Gentile harvest at Antioch—gave occasion for Peter's (Cephas in Aramaic) hypocrisy.



What are some differences within Christianity that should not divide Christians and churches today?

Paul saw Peter acting differently with two different groups of people. Early on, Peter would eat regularly with Gentile believers. Peter had witnessed the conversion of Cornelius and his family, and he knew without a doubt that Gentiles could follow Christ through faith alone (Acts 10–11). But something changed when “certain men came from James.” These men likely were shocked to see the way Peter made no distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians. The verb tense for “drew back” and “separated” gives the idea that Peter gradually gave into the pressure of the group after they arrived.



Voices from Church History

“And this is the truth of the gospel. It is also the principal article of all Christian doctrine, wherein the knowledge of all godliness consisteth. Most necessary it is, therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into their heads continually.”²

—Martin Luther (1483–1546)

There was no nuancing here. Peter was wrong, and his actions had led others astray. Paul made this unambiguously clear: They were “not in step with the truth of the gospel.” When our lives openly deny the gospel, rebuke is the necessary response. There is a time to pull someone aside and quietly speak to him or her about an error. But in this case, due to the public nature of Peter’s sin and the public influence he had, Paul confronted his hypocrisy in front of everyone.

This passage reminds us that leaders, even apostles like Peter, have feet of clay and still sin. We all have blind spots, issues in our lives we can’t see clearly. That’s a reason real community in the local church matters. It’s also why we need to pray for our church leaders. Relationships that go deeper than “How are you?” before a Bible study class are needed to help all of us grow. And sometimes those relationships require that we confront someone because of his or her sin, which is consistent with what we see throughout the Word of God.

At the same time, we need to look in the mirror and purge hypocrisy from our own lives. For example, we live in a time of pronounced racial tension. Do you speak of a certain ethnic group one way when among people of that group but differently when around others? Is the starting point of your attitude toward those who do not look, act, think, or vote like you the biblical perspective of all humanity being created in the image of God, or do you begin by focusing on those differences?



What are some other circumstances that might give rise to hypocrisy in the way we interact with other Christians?



How can we make sure we have Christians who will confront us on the hypocrisy they see in our lives?

2. Remember we are justified by faith, not by works (Gal. 2:15-18).

¹⁵ We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

¹⁷ But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸ For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

Earlier, Paul said that Peter's actions were a deviation from the truth of the gospel. Here he unpacks what he meant. When Christians act with prejudice toward others, we deny the very gospel we proclaim. We are justified by faith and nothing else: not our works, not our ethnic origin, nor any other standard. This is why Paul saw Peter's hypocrisy as being so serious—the gospel was being denied. If left unchecked, the example of Peter would have continued to form a breach between Jewish and Gentile Christians and thus confused the gospel with personal preference.



What are some words or actions from the church that distort the gospel?

Paul's main concern here was not a rift between two apostles or even between two groups of believers but the more important issue of salvation. There is only one way to be saved—faith in Jesus—and this is the only way for all peoples of all times in all places, whether Jew or Gentile.

Paul's words here may be what he had shared with Peter in his rebuke, and he shared them with the Galatians because they needed to be reminded of these truths as well. The Jewish believers had been given a great advantage in the law, a key way they were set apart from the Gentiles. And it was through their obedience to the law that they saw the Gentiles as “sinners”—men and women who failed even to attempt to keep a single aspect of God's law. But it was this same obedience—or more precisely, their failure and imperfection—that led these Jewish Christians to understand the law could not save them. This realization is proven in their faith in Christ, in their turning away from trusting in their own works that had once given them pride and their turning to Christ to save them from their sin.

How then could a Jewish Christian, such as Peter, hold himself above his Gentile brothers and sisters? Where is there room in the gospel to treat Jewish believers and Gentile believers differently? When we fully grasp this, we are compelled to respond with humble surrender to the Lord. He rescued us from hell and gives us new life, hope, and peace with God as well as with others. In light of the cross of Christ, we recognize we are no better than anyone, regardless of our race, standing in society, or any other way we identify ourselves apart from the gospel.

Paul saw Peter's behavior as an affront to the gospel they preached. Yet we don't see Paul rebuking someone with this vehemence because of the kind of clothing they wore or their hairstyle. So how do we determine when to rebuke and when to agree to disagree on an issue? Evangelicals have often grouped doctrines into a few categories to help make this distinction:

99 Essential Christian Doctrines

72. *Justification by Faith*

Justification refers to the moment when a person is objectively declared righteous before God based on the righteousness of Christ's atoning death (Rom. 8:33-34). This act of declaration takes place through faith in Christ and not as a result of human works or effort (Eph. 2:8-9). Through justification, a person is made to be in right standing before God, changing what was once an estranged and hostile relationship to one of adoption into the family of God.

Core Doctrines	
Convictions	
Preferences	



What are some convictions or preferences that can wrongly creep up to be on par with core doctrines?



What benefits are there to emphasizing unity and appreciating our differences with one another on the levels of convictions and preferences?

3. Recognize that holiness is possible only when we are in Christ (Gal. 2:19-21).

¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Dying to the law is the negative; *living for God* is the positive. They both work hand-in-hand and show us the blessed catastrophe of the cross of Christ, the paradox of salvation. The way to life is through death. Christ made eternal life possible for us through His death, and we find life in Christ by losing ours.

Paul was not saying that in Christ we are dead from the need to obey God; he was declaring that we have put the wrong view of that obedience to death. We die to the notion that our obedience can save us. We die to the notion that we are identified by our obedience. We die to what the Jewish men from James argued to Peter that led him astray.

We are certainly not dead from looking to the law to understand God’s character and heart better and allowing that to frame how we live each day. The law shows us what it looks like to love God and love other people, and so, out of gratitude for what Christ has done and with joy, we live out the eternal truths of the law without relying on that obedience to save us, define us, or sustain us.



What are some beliefs or practices we might trust in or find identity in to which we must die in order to live for God more fully?

Because Paul died to the law and to himself, he experienced the positive aspect of those deaths—life. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (v. 20a). Obviously Paul wasn’t referring to his physical life, as if he had died physically when he trusted in Christ; he was speaking of the spiritual reality that guided his life. He explained this clearly in the next sentence: “And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (v. 20b). Christ had indwelt Paul, given him new life, and continued to empower him to live a life of holiness for the glory of God. The gospel that saves us is the same gospel that sanctifies us as we grow in our faith.



Voices from Church History

“We are in mind and meditation to consider Christ crucified: and first, we are to believe that he was crucified for us. This being done, we must go yet further, and as it were spread ourselves on the cross of Christ, believing and withal beholding ourselves crucified with him.”³

—William Perkins
(1558-1602)



How should remembering the gospel of Jesus help propel us toward holy living?

Conclusion

Peter’s hypocrisy in withdrawing from eating with Gentile believers in Antioch probably didn’t seem to be that big of a problem, but Paul saw it for what it really was—a threat to the gospel proclaimed and lived. For this reason, Paul was quick to confront Peter and remind him of the gospel—the gospel that has brought all who trust in Christ into one family of faith.

When we reflect on Paul’s rebuke of Peter, we need to see ourselves in the shoes of each one. Has God placed us as a “Paul” to help correct and guide someone else to live out and declare the gospel faithfully? Are we willing to take a bold and firm stand for truth because of our love for God and that person? Will we act on that?

But at the same time, we need to look deeply within ourselves and see if we are living like Peter in any way. Are we asking the Holy Spirit to give us sight to see our blind spots, any prejudices or wrong views of others and any ways we are not declaring and living the gospel faithfully? Do we have people in our lives who will confront us in grace and truth when we succumb to hypocrisy, and are we listening to them?

May we be faithful Pauls and humble Peters as we strive to live holy lives in faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

CHRIST CONNECTION: When Peter chose to separate himself from Gentile believers, he implicitly denied the truth of the gospel by his actions. Paul’s challenge reminds us that Christ alone is the source of our salvation and faith is the sign of it. Christ’s death in our place is the basis of our salvation, not our own works.

HIS MISSION, YOUR MISSION

MISSIONAL APPLICATION: God calls us to stand our ground and refuse to compromise when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

1. Where do you need to stand your ground without compromise for the sake of the gospel?

2. How does the doctrine of justification by faith help to answer the deepest needs of those in the world?

3. How can we help one another bolster a gospel-centered motivation for our obedience?

SESSION 1

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3. William Perkins, quoted in *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Galatians*, by David Platt and Tony Merida (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 49.

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2. Frank S. Thielman, "Introduction to 1 Corinthians," in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 2187-88.
3. Grant Osborne and S. Cameron Coyle, "Cross, Crucifixion," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. ed. Chad Brand (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 368-69.
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SESSION 3

1. Randy C. Alcorn, *Money, Possessions, and Eternity* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2003) [eBook].
2. Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 111.
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SESSION 4

1. David Brainerd, in *The Life and Diary of David Brainerd*, ed. Jonathan Edwards (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 189.
2. David Walls and Max Anders, *I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*, in *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: B&H, 2005), [WORDsearch].

SPECIAL SESSION—EASTER

1. Billy Graham, *The Reason for My Hope: Salvation* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2013), 82.
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3. Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, vol. 2B in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H, 2014) [WORDsearch].
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SESSION 5

1. C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 37.
2. Corrie ten Boom with Elizabeth and John Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* (Bloomington, MN: Chosen Books, 2015) [eBook].
3. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012) [eBook].
4. Dwight L. Moody, *The Overcoming Life* (Orlando: Bridge-Logos, 2007), 336.

SESSION 6

1. Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Complete Works of C. H. Spurgeon: Volume 28, Sermons 1637 to 1697* (Delmarva Publications, 2013) [eBook].
2. Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, vol. 34 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H, 2003) [WORDsearch].
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SESSION 7

1. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 50.
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SESSION 8

1. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
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SESSION 9

1. John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 156.
2. J. Vernon McGee, *Galatians*, in *Thru the Bible Commentary Series* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991) [eBook].
3. Billy Graham, *The Holy Spirit: Activating God's Power in Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 191.

SESSION 10

1. Jonathan Edwards, "Resolutions," in *The Works of President Edwards*, vol. 1 (New York: S. Converse, 1829), 72.
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3. Amy Carmichael, quoted in *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, by Tony Merida (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 121.
4. Randy Alcorn, *The Treasure Principle: Unlocking the Secret of Joyful Giving* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2017), 47.

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1. Martin Luther, quoted in *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, by Heiko A. Oberman, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 315.
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3. Martin Luther, quoted in *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, by Alister E. McGrath (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 381.
4. Lemuel Haynes, "The Sufferings, Support, and Reward of Faithful Ministers, Illustrated (1820)," in *The Faithful Preacher: Recapturing the Vision of Three Pioneering African-American Pastors*, by Thabit M. Anyabwile (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 59.
5. William Wilberforce, in *The Life of William Wilberforce*, vol. V, eds. Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce (London: John Murray, 1838), 318.



PLAYLIST

To download this quarter's recommended playlist of songs, go to LifeWayWorship.com/GospelProject.

Get the following collection of great songs and artists:

“Come, People of the Risen King”—Keith and Kristyn Getty

“Church Arise”—Shelly E. Johnson

“Spirit of the Living God”—Vertical Worship

“Your Mercy”—Paul Baloche

“One Song”—Evidence

“Build My Life”—Housefires

“Christ the Lord Is Risen Today (He Is Not Dead)”—NCC Worship

“For the Fatherless”—Child of the King

“My Worth Is Not in What I Own”—Keith and Kristyn Getty

“In You”—Michael Boggs

“Strong God”—Meredith Andrews

“Take It All”—Passion

“Do It Again”—Elevation Worship

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After the Lord's ascension into heaven and the Spirit's descent upon the followers of Jesus, Christ's church began to grow. More disciples were made and churches were planted. The apostles maintained some oversight in these churches through personal visits and through their letters. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, these men gave the churches God's directions that they would be more faithful, unified, merciful, loving, and obedient.

The letters of the apostles clearly tell the good news of Jesus Christ giving His life to save people from their sin. They also declare the implications of this salvation. God changes those who believe in Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives. In Christ, slaves to sin become the children of God who gather together as brothers and sisters. And this new identity works itself out in the fruit of the Spirit, impacting the way we pray, the way we give, the way we see the world, and the way we run the race of faith.

What's Next?

SUMMER 2018

Volume 12: Come, Lord Jesus

God's Prisoner (Acts, Epistles)

The God Who Makes All Things New (Epistles, Revelation)

The Journey Continues!

FALL 2018

Volume 1: In the Beginning

Creation and the Fall (Genesis; Job)

God Establishes a Covenant People (Genesis)
God Grows His Covenant People (Genesis)

SOME OF OUR UPCOMING WRITERS

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