

# PERSPECTIVE

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a glowing lightbulb. Inside the lightbulb, a string of warm white LED lights is coiled, creating a warm, golden glow. The person holding the lightbulb is wearing a dark blue sweater. The background is dark and out of focus.

OCTOBER 2018

THE EVANGELIST'S

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*Message*

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# The Evangelist's Message

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Somepastorsandteachers.com*

Author Don Whitney is excited about evangelism: “Only the sheer rapture of being lost in the worship of God is as exhilarating and intoxicating as telling someone about Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup> Do you feel the same way? I’m concerned his attitude is all-too-rare in the church today. We equate sharing the gospel to flossing our teeth—very important but easily neglected.

I want to encourage you to share the gospel more. For some, it may feel like a chore. But the more we understand what the gospel is, the more we will share it freely. There are many good reasons to evangelize. We may share out of obedience, a love for neighbor, and even out of a hope of future reward.

But the gospel itself is a reason to share. The better you know and treasure the gospel, the more you will share the gospel. There is something about the evangelist’s *message* that propels the evangelist to be a *messenger*.

To unpack this, I have four questions: First, what is the gospel? Second, why is the gospel compelling? Third, how do you treasure the gospel? Fourth, what does your heart have to do with your mouth?

## WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

In 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, Paul summarizes the gospel message, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” The gospel is the biblical message of a crucified and risen Savior.

To call Jesus a “Savior” is to say we need to be saved. But saved from what? The answer is in verse 3, “Christ died for our sins.” Our biggest problem is our sin—our rebellion against God. God made us. We are accountable to him. The punishment we deserve for our rebellion is physical death and eternal punishment.

This is why the gospel is a message of a crucified Savior: “Christ *died* for our sins.” On the cross, Christ stood in the place of every Christian, bearing the wrath of God they deserve. He paid their debt.

But that’s not all. The gospel is the biblical message of a crucified and *risen* Savior. Jesus is alive! He is not dead. He is coming back again. When we contend for the faith once for all entrusted to the saints (Jude 3), we aren’t merely contending for a bloody cross. We’re contending for an empty tomb: “he was *raised* on the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:4).

And all this happened according to God’s plan. This is why Paul tells us twice the gospel was “in accordance with the Scriptures.” Throughout history God was at work preparing humanity for the coming of Christ. From Isaac whom God saved by the blood of a ram in Genesis 22 to Job who knew he would be raised from the dead in Job 19, all of the Old Testament points to Christ’s death and resurrection. The gospel is the *biblical* message of a crucified and risen Savior.

Many find this message of forgiveness from sins through the blood of Christ too incredible to believe. But many *are* believing, people all over the world. Reflecting on a Pew Forum study in 2011, author Tim Keller made this important observation about the spread of the gospel:

One of the unique things about Christianity is that it is the only truly worldwide religion. Over 90 percent of Muslims live in a band from Southeast Asia to the Middle East and Northern Africa. Over 95 percent of all Hindus are in India and immediate environs. Some 88 percent of Buddhists are in East Asia. However, about 25 percent of Christians live in Europe, 25 percent in Central and South America, 22 percent in Africa, 15 percent (and growing fast) in Asia, and 12 percent in North America . . . [Christianity] is truly a world religion.<sup>2</sup>

People all over the world are putting their faith in this gospel. Clearly, the gospel is a compelling message.

## WHY IS THE GOSPEL COMPELLING?

What is it about the gospel that has proved irresistible for countless people throughout the world? There are so many answers to this question, and every Christian has his or her own story to tell. But here are three, simple answers.

### *The gospel is a work of God*

In Mark 2, Jesus is in a home, “preaching the word” (Mark 2:2). A small group intrudes, lugging their paralyzed friend. Jesus does the unthinkable; he looks at the

paralyzed man and says, “My son, your sins are forgiven” (2:5). The religious leaders are livid. They scream, “He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” Jesus pronounced forgiveness when everyone knew forgiveness is a gift only God can give. With one declaration, Jesus declared himself to be God in-the-flesh.

Deep down, we all know we have a problem too big and complex for us to fix. The stain of sin is so dark only God can remove it. If we would be forgiven for what we’ve done wrong—fully and forever forgiven—only God can do it. The gospel is compelling because at the heart of it, God is the one who forgives.

### *The gospel is a display of mercy*

The religious leaders hated Jesus for claiming to forgive sins. But they also hated him for hanging out with sinners.

And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, ‘Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners” (Mark 2:15–17).

The scribes considered tax collectors and sinners to be lowlifes beyond God’s reach. Jesus pursued them. He ate with them. Jesus didn’t look down on them. He called them his friends. Jesus saw everyone as a sinner in need of mercy. More than that, he targeted the deplorables and presented them the gospel.

The gospel turns the values of the world upside down. Robin Leach created the show *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*. He took us into homes we could never afford and showed us lives we could never have. Leach became rich and famous trading on our idolatry of fame and wealth.

Jesus was different; he spent his time with the lowly, proving the incredible mercy of God.

God has always been in the mercy business. Ever since he clothed Adam and Eve. Ever since he freed a nation of slaves from Pharaoh. Ever since he brought exiles home. God is merciful. This is another reason the gospel is so compelling.

### *The gospel changes lives*

In the parable of the sower a man scatters seed. Some falls along the path, but where there is no soil the birds eat it up. Some seed lands on rocky ground, but where there is little soil the sun burns it up. Still more seed falls among the thorns, and there the tiny plants are choked out. However, the seed that falls on good soil works wonders. Jesus said it “produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold” (Mark 4:8).

When the gospel takes root in a believer’s heart, his life changes; he bears spiritual fruit. The rate of growth may vary from person to person, but every Christian changes for the better. His life is increasingly marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control (Galatians 4:22–23). If you are a true believer, you can marvel at the fact that your changed life proves the gospel is compelling.

And it’s not just that your life *will* change if you are a Christian—it *must* change! “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:34–35).

We can’t follow Christ and stay the same any more than Tom Brady can spend his afternoons on the couch and still play professional football. Jesus knows the idols of our heart—control, power, materialism, pride—and he demands we put them to death. In that sense, following Christ is costly.

What kind of gospel would it be if it didn’t demand change? And what kind of Savior would Christ be if he didn’t provide the change he demanded? It was Augustine who said, “Lord, command what you will and will what you command.”

God himself came to us that we might avoid his wrath and live forever. Christ will return as judge of the living and the dead. All who die without bowing the knee to Christ in this life will face everlasting torment in the next. This is nothing to dismiss casually. This is serious business. If the gospel is true, your eternal future is at stake. The future of your neighbors is at stake. This is not to be taken lightly.

We should marvel to think God is at work, sparing sinners from this devastating end. He forgives through

the blood of Christ. God shows no favoritism, accepting all who come to him, and he offers unsearchable riches to the poorest of the poor. He is a God who changes us—no Christian is left the same. What's at stake is nothing less than eternal life in the loving company of the Triune God. The gospel is compelling.

### DO YOU TREASURE THE GOSPEL?

This gospel is not merely to be believed; it's to be treasured. This is how Jesus talks about the gospel. Jesus often taught in parables, and one of his favorite topics is the kingdom of heaven. To truly believe the gospel is to have eternal life, life in God's kingdom.

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it (Matthew 13:44–46).

In these two parables, Jesus makes one simple point: you treasure the gospel when you'd give up everything to have the gospel.

For Jim Eliot, treasuring the gospel meant mission work in Ecuador. The natives killed him, but not before he wrote these words, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." These are words inspired by Matthew 13:44–46. Eliot left friends and family and safety behind, but he gained an everlasting kingdom. Eliot proved with his life the gospel shone brighter to him than anything else.

You may not be called to that kind of sacrifice. But does the gospel shine bright in your life regardless of what you lose? Does Jesus matter most to you when:

- + you lose a friend;
- + your plans fall through;
- + your child won't believe;
- + your spouse disappoints you; and
- + life takes a turn for the worse?

The gospel should remain a shining beacon when the darkness of the world tries to eclipse it. Let me say the same thing in a similar way: you truly treasure the gospel when you see yourself as nothing in light of the gospel. A proper view of the gospel causes you to see yourself as a

burning match next to the sun or a drop of water next to the ocean or as a pebble beside Mount Everest.

The apostle Paul saw himself this way. He says to the Ephesian elders, "I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24). Paul was not precious to himself, and so he devoted himself to making the gospel known. He treasured the gospel most of all.

This is how the gospel should affect us. If we treasure the gospel, we'll give up anything and everything for the gospel. If we treasure the gospel, we'll see ourselves as nothing in light of the gospel.

This is a heart issue. What you value, what you *treasure*, what's important to you—it's a matter of your heart. Until you actually treasure the gospel in your heart, you'll never have a will to share the gospel. Not naturally. Not regularly. Not with a sense of urgency. Until you treasure the gospel it will never be the overflow of your heart. You may share out of duty, but you won't share out of joy. Evangelism will always be like flossing your teeth—and who wants that?

### WHAT DOES THE HEART HAVE TO DO WITH THE TONGUE?

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matthew 12:34). What's in your heart will be on your lips. Generations earlier, Solomon made a similar point, "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Proverbs 4:23). We must watch and keep and guard our hearts. Unless you do this most basic work, life giving, evangelistic, gospel-centered words will never flow from your lips.

To go back to Don Whitney, until our heart finds the gospel "exhilarating and intoxicating" we won't find telling others about Jesus exhilarating and intoxicating. When it comes to evangelism, it's your heart that matters most. Pastor Charles Bridges described the heart as a citadel, a fortress:

If the citadel be taken, the whole town must surrender. If the heart be seized, the whole man—the affections, desires, motives, pursuits—all will be yielded up .... [The heart is] the fountain of actions .... As is the fountain, so must be the streams. As is the heart, so must be the mouth.<sup>3</sup>

Christian, for the sake of the Great Commission, keep your heart. Guard your heart. How can you do this? There are many ways, all of them good. But consider putting the following three points into action:

- ✦ First, remind yourself of the gospel. The gospel is the biblical message of a crucified and risen Savior. Consider reading Greg Gilbert's excellent book, *What Is the Gospel?* Pick up John Stott's, *The Cross of Christ*. Carve out time to understand the gospel better so you will share it more.
- ✦ Second, explain why you find the gospel compelling. Everyone is different. There may be something about the gospel that is especially sweet to you. Perhaps it's God's mercy. Perhaps it's the fact that you have a new identity in Christ. The best teachers are excited about their subject matter. The best evangelists know why they are excited about the gospel. Identify what, exactly, it is about the gospel that you find compelling.
- ✦ Third, pray you'd treasure the gospel more. You need God's Spirit to help you cling tightly to the gospel of Jesus Christ. You need God's help to love him and his work more and more. Pray nothing would matter more to you than the biblical message of a crucified and risen Savior.

– Aaron Menikoff

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<sup>1</sup> Don Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines of the Christian Life* (Navpress, 2014), 119.

<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller, *Making Sense of God* (Penguin, 2018), 148.

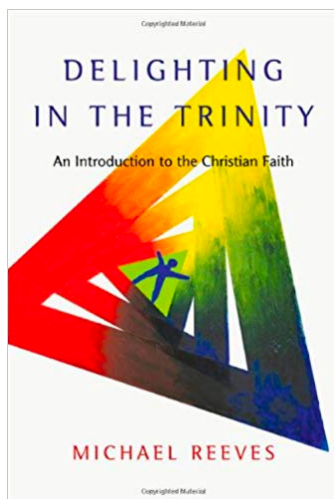
<sup>3</sup> Charles Bridges, *Proverbs* (Banner of Truth, 1968), 53–54. First published in 1846.



## Delighting in the Trinity

Written by Michael Reeves

Bookstall Price: \$12



Author Michael Reeves begins this book with a question: “What would we say is the article of faith that must be held before all others?” (14). Maybe you have to stop and think about that for a little bit. To single out one unique distinctive of the Christian faith is a challenging task. In *Delighting in the Trinity*, Reeves argues that it is the identity of the God in which we worship. As he puts it, “Which God we worship: *that* is the article of faith that stands before all others” (15). Reeves spends the rest of the book unpacking this wonderful, mysterious, and eternal Trinitarian relationship as it relates to

creation, salvation, and life in the Spirit. Much of Reeves’ efforts are spent grounding the eternal attributes of God’s character in the Trinity. For example, God can only truly be loving because he has eternally existed as a Father loving his Son. Reeves carefully helps the reader to see and understand that God the Father cannot be separated from God the Son or God the Holy Spirit.

Today, we live in an increasingly pluralistic society. Many believe there are many ways to salvation. Others think that this life is all there is and even believing in God at all is pure foolishness. Their concept of God is one of a nasty ruler who resembles a dictator more than a loving father. Of course, they want nothing to do with a god like that. As you seek to get to know your neighbors, you might encounter this mindset. Having a rich understanding of our triune God will help you explain God in a complete and beautiful way. As Reeves says, “If God is not Father, Son, and Spirit, then He is eminently rejectable: without love, radiance or beauty...But the triune, living God of the Bible is Beauty. Here is a God we can really want, and whose sovereignty we can wholeheartedly rejoice in.”

This book is an excellent read for anyone who has not given much thought to the importance of the Trinity. Reeves manages to take a very complex topic and write about it in a way that is approachable and easy to understand. This book has fundamentally impacted the way that I think about each of the roles in the Trinity, even the way that I think about evangelism. Our triune God is worthy of worship above all other gods. *Delighting in the Trinity* will lead you to a better understanding of and appreciation for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

– RECOMMENDED BY RICKY HUTCHINS

### Excerpts From the Book

## 1

“If we content ourselves with being mere monotheists and speak of God only in terms so vague they could apply to Allah as much as the Trinity, then we will never enjoy or share what is so fundamentally and delightfully different about Christianity.”

– Introduction, p.52

## 2

“Here, then, is a salvation no single-person God could offer even if they wanted to: the Father so delights in his eternal love for the Son that he desires to share it with all who will believe. Ultimately, the Father sent the Son because the Father so loved the Son—and wanted to share that love and fellowship. His love for the world is the overflow of his almighty love for his Son.”

– Salvation, p.69

## 3

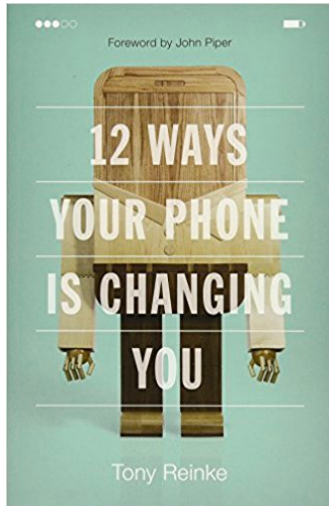
“If God is not Father, Son and Spirit, then he is eminently rejectable: without love, radiance or beauty. Who would want such a God to have any power, or even to exist? But the triune, living God of the Bible is Beauty. Here is a God we can really want, and whose sovereignty we can wholeheartedly rejoice in.”

– Who Among the Gods is Like You, O Lord?, p.111

## 12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You

Written by Tony Reinke

Bookstall Price: \$11



I'm going to lead out with a challenge. Don't look at your phone until you finish reading this (even if it dings!). In *12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You*, Tony Reinke carefully walks through how our smartphones are changing us and often undermine our spiritual health. Whether it is a distraction, a desire for others' approval, or an indulgence in visual vices; we all struggle with how we should use our phones. Thankfully Reinke doesn't leave us in the pit of conviction but shows that smartphone habits expose the heart. "Our greatest need in the digital age is to behold the glory of the unseen Christ in the faint blue glow of our pixelated Bibles, by faith" (210).

I was particularly convicted by his encouragement to push back your phone in the morning, to protect our solitude and time with God. Charles Spurgeon wisely advised Christians to "permit not your minds to be easily distracted, or you will often have your devotion destroyed." Intentionally or not, the silent gaps in our life have begun to fill with digital technology. Reinke reminds us that God will not abide by privacy policies, and every click, text, and tweet will be "broadcast in the court of the Creator" (138). With that sobering reminder, we long to "set [our] minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Col. 3:2).

Reinke concludes by encouraging us to set up the disciplines we need to preserve our spiritual health in a world of endless temptation. Reinke is not calling for a ban on smartphones but encourages us to seriously evaluate how we interact with them. "The essential question we must constantly ask ourselves in the quickly evolving age of digital technology is not what *can* I do with my phone, but what *should* I do with it?" (196)

If you find yourself discontent with the attachment you feel to the glowing rectangle in your pocket, take some time to evaluate your relationship with technology: "Does the way I use my phone move me toward God or away from him? Do my smartphone behaviors edify me and others, or do they build nothing of lasting value? Do my smartphone habits expose my freedom in Christ or my bondage to technology?" (194).

– RECOMMENDED BY LIZ FREEMON

### Excerpts From the Book

## 1

"In our vanity, we feed on digital junk food, and our palates are reprogrammed and our affections atrophy. [...] The more we take refuge in distraction, the more habituated we become to mere stimulation and the more desensitized to delight. We lose our capacity to stop and ponder something deeply, to admire something beautiful for its own sake, to lose ourselves in the passion for a game, a story, or a person."

– Ch. 4 – We Lose Our Literacy p.86

## 2

"The smartphone is causing a social reversal: the desire to be alone in public and never alone in seclusion. We can be shielded in public and surrounded in isolation, meaning we can escape the awkwardness of human interaction on the street and the boredom of solitude in our homes. Or so we think."

– Ch. 7 – We Get Lonely, p.124

## 3

"At worst, our phones are handheld wands of power that promise to protect our sinful isolation, showcase our self-aggrandizement, prop up our digital towers of self-praise, feed our materialism, lure us to so-called "anonymous" vices, and offer an "escape" from our creaturehood. [...] [But] when we use our smartphones rightly, their shining screens radiate with the treasure of God's glory in Christ, and in that glory-glow, we get a sneak peek into a greater age to come."

– Epilogue, p.208





THE  
CROWN  
OF  
LIFE

James 1:12

“Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”

– James 1:12 (ESV)

False teachers peddle false hope by promising that the gospel provides a “blessed,” trial-less life. It is sad to think of the number of hurting people striving to genuinely follow Jesus, who are sold the lie that suffering is a result of a lack of faith. If they would just “believe” God by “claiming his promises with their words and thoughts” then they can be free from suffering. Their hurts and pain are compounded by hopelessness when nothing changes and promises are unfulfilled. The only thing more painful than hurt from suffering and trials is hopelessness that nothing will change.

Thankfully the pages of Scripture have a different message. James, writing to a group of Christians who experienced “trials of various kinds,” told them to “count it all joy” (1:3). They didn’t experience just one trial but all sorts, and they were to be joyful in the face of every single one. Why? Because they knew that God uses trials to “produce steadfastness,” which would one day make them “perfect and complete” (1:3-4).

The Christian “who remains steadfast under trial” is considered “blessed” (1:12). He or she has the fortitude, a stick-to-itiveness, that says, “My God favors me and has sovereignly allowed this trial into my life to make me more

like Christ. Jesus was the most blessed and beloved Son of God, who knew suffering beyond all comparison. I am blessed to suffer with him.”

Yet for the Christian hope is not found in the experience of trials but God’s faithfulness to his promises. Consider the phrase “which God has promised.” The hope of God’s people has always been in this simple truth—God does what he says. God promises, and God fulfills his promises. James, the brother of Jesus, understood this and reassured these struggling Christians with that truth. Their hope was not in a change of circumstance but God’s unchanging character; he is steadfast in love and faithful to do what he says.

What does God promise? “The crown of life.” The image is of an athlete who completed a difficult competition and was crowned with the winner’s laurel wreath. Our crown is one of life, i.e., life eternally with God enjoying the fullness of blessings and joy found in Christ.

Christian, what trial are you facing, and how have you responded? Meditate on this passage by asking yourself these three questions: First, have I, at least for some portion, responded with joy and steadfastness? If not, pray that you would. Second, what are some of the big and small ways God has fulfilled his promises in my life? Maybe write down some of them. Third, how does the promise of eternal life motivate you to steadfastness?

– BRAD THAYER

# OCTOBER

*These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!*

|                   |                       |                   |                     |
|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| October 1         | Acts 4                | October 17        | Acts 7:35–8:3       |
| October 2         | Acts 5                | October 18        | Acts 9:1–19         |
| October 3         | Acts 6:1–7            | October 19        | Acts 9:20–31        |
| October 4         | Acts 6:8–15           | October 20        | Jonah 1:1–10        |
| October 5         | Acts 8:26–40          | <b>October 21</b> | <b>Acts 9:1–31</b>  |
| October 6         | Isaiah 53:1–12        | October 22        | Acts 8:4–25         |
| <b>October 7</b>  | <b>Acts 8:26–40</b>   | October 23        | Acts 8:26–40        |
| October 8         | Psalms 96:1–6         | October 24        | Acts 9:1–19         |
| October 9         | Psalms 96:7–13        | October 25        | Acts 9:20–31        |
| October 10        | Psalms 48             | October 26        | Acts 9:32–43        |
| October 11        | 1 Chronicles 16:1–22  | October 27        | Isaiah 35:1–10      |
| October 12        | 1 Chronicles 16:23–36 | <b>October 28</b> | <b>Acts 9:32–43</b> |
| October 13        | Jude 17–25            | October 29        | 1 Kings 3:1–15      |
| <b>October 14</b> | <b>Psalm 96</b>       | October 30        | 1 Kings 3:16–28     |
| October 15        | Acts 7:1–22           | October 31        | Psalm 1             |
| October 16        | Acts 7:23–34          |                   |                     |

\*Sermons in bold

# TAKE UP & READ



# NEW MEMBERS

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John Dyslin



Kimberlee Lucas



Kim Moore





*Mount Vernon*  
BAPTIST CHURCH