

Gospel centrality  
Theological Distinctives #2

1. Introduction to talk one...

a. Trends fascinate me...

i. Do you remember the swatch watch trend?

ii. How about the hacky sack trend?

iii. How about the kendama trend?

iv. Show shoe images

1. Stan Smiths

2. Air force ones

3. Nike blazers (from 1977)

v. How about Jeans, in my lifetime

1. Bell bottoms

2. Folded up and tapered

3. Boat cut

4. Holy jeans

5. Skinny jeans

6. Now it is really hip to roll your jeans up several inches above your shoes.

b. What about church trends?

i. Distressed wood on church stages was really trendy...

ii. The language of “being on mission” was very trendy a few years back...

iii. Church planting is really trendy...

iv. The biggest trend in the last decade has been Gospel...

1. If gospel was in the title, it would sell—Gospel centered parenting, gospel powered small groups, emotions, etc....

2. Everyone wants to get on the gospel centered band wagon...

3. Schools, ministries, mission agencies, and publishing houses are all now claiming to be gospel centered...

v. At GCF, we have always been passionately committed to gospel centrality.

1. But what does it actually mean to be gospel centered?

2. To help us understand gospel centrality we are going to look at four things...

*c. Gospel centrality is rarer than you think...*

*d. Gospel centrality is broader than you think...*

*e. Gospel centrality is truer than you think...*

*f. Gospel centrality is better than you think...*

**1. Gospel centrality is rarer than you think.**

a. There are many types of churches in America....

**b. There are gospel denying churches.**

- i. These are churches that deny the gospel...
- ii. Various Cults
- iii. LDS, Christian Science, JW
- iv. Liberal churches that deny penal substitution... (Branches)

**c. Gospel redefining churches.**

- i. These are churches that redefine the gospel...
- ii. Prosperity churches. The gospel is the good news that God wants to make you healthy, happy, and materially rich...
- iii. Churches that define the good news of the gospel as social action, building houses for the poor, feeding the hungry, helping orphans, etc...
- iv. Currently, the gospel is the good news of being woke!!!
- v. The gospel is the good news of social justice....

**d. Gospel assuming churches.**

- i. These churches are doctrinal orthodox
- ii. The gospel is left out of the sermons, since the pastors assume that people already know the gospel.
- iii. Instead, they address felt needs.
  - 1. Five steps to a better marriage
  - 2. Three steps to financial freedom...
  - 3. Practical teaching about life.
- iv. When Jesus is mentioned, he is a means to an end, he is there to help you meet your life goals and have your best life now!

**e. Gospel embarrassed churches...**

- i. Seeker
- ii. Afraid to scare away seekers with blood, wrath, repentance, and cross...

**f. Gospel committed churches.**

- i. These churches are committed to defending the gospel.
- ii. They can define it very carefully using all the right theological terms.
- iii. But...
- iv. Once the gospel is explained to unbelievers, the pastor moves on to other things...
- v. There were guys in my doctrinal program, who love the gospel, and who have been preaching for years, but they preach all the time without mentioning the person and work of Christ...
- vi. Making an alter call or evangelistic appeal at the end of a sermon does not make one gospel centered...
- vii. **Keller**
  - 1. "It is quite easy to assume that if we understand the gospel accurately and preach it faithfully, our ministry will necessarily be shaped by it—but this is not true. Many churches subscribe to gospel doctrines but do not have a ministry that is shaped by, centered on, and empowered through the gospel. Its implications have not yet worked their way into the fabric of how the church actually does ministry." (Keller, CT, 28)
- viii. This brings us to the last group of churches...

**g. Gospel centered churches.**

- i. Gospel centered churches assume....
  - 1. The unbeliever needs the gospel...
  - 2. The believer needs the gospel...
- ii. The gospel does not just get us right with God, but it shapes our entire life moving forward.

**h. Application...**

- i. The gospel is not just the ABCs of the Christian life it is the A to Z of the Christian life...
  - 1. We are saved by believing the gospel, AND we are transformed into Christ's image by further application of the gospel.
  - 2. As a Christian, you will never reach a stage in your life when you need to stop applying the implications of the gospel to your life.
- ii. The gospel is not just the introductory Freshmen course...
  - 1. It is the entire four year degree.
- iii. The gospel is not just the door into the mansion...
  - 1. The gospel is the entire mansion.
- iv. Unfortunately, gospel centered churches are very rare...
  - 1. Many churches that say they are gospel centered are really gospel committed, and we are thankful for that, but gospel centrality is something more...
  - 2. A very discerning friend visited roughly 15 churches in Spokane...
  - 3. Theologically sound and faithful sermons but no mention of the gospel...
- v. Please, Please, please,
  - 1. don't hear me saying that we have figured everything out... nor are we the only true church in Spokane... or that we are better than gospel committed churches. There are many faithful churches. But true Gospel centrality is very rare.
- vi. This raises a question... What exactly is the gospel??? This brings us to the next point....

*i. Gospel centrality is rarer than you think...*

**2. Gospel centrality is broader than you think....**

- a. Before I talk about the broader dimensions of the gospel it is critical to define the gospel very narrowly, as Paul does in 1 cor. 15.

**1 Corinthians 15:1-5 (ESV)** — **1** Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, **2** and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. **3** For I

delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

***b. What is the gospel narrowly defined?***

- i. The gospel is a message describing how we have been rescued.
- ii. The word gospel literally means good news. (it appears 133 times in the NT)
- iii. The word gospel was a secular word... King's sent messengers throughout their empires to proclaim/gospel their victories over their enemies.
- iv. The gospel is the good news that we are rescued from the wrath of God, the power of sin, and the clutches of the devil through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
  1. The gospel is good news, not good advice...
- v. In short, the gospel is the person and work of Jesus Christ...
  1. At the heart of the gospel is the incarnation, penal substitution, resurrection, Christ's ascension, and Christ's coming return...
  2. Great substitution illustration on page 35 of Keller... From Tale of Two Cities...
- vi. The gospel is not the good news of
  1. Caring for the poor,
  2. Working for social justice,
  3. Growing in humility,
  4. The indwelling of the holy spirit...
  5. The five points of Calvinism...
  6. Or the sovereignty of God...
- vii. These things must be distinguished from the gospel itself.

***c. What is Gospel centrality broadly defined?***

- i. Earlier I said that gospel centrality is broader than you think. What do I mean?
- ii. In one sense, the gospel is limited to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.
- iii. Yet, the life death and resurrection of Jesus has numerous implications that are not technically the person and work of Christ, but they flow out of the person and work of Christ and they are very good news...
- iv. This is why different NT writers highlight different aspects of the good news...

- v. To be a gospel centered church we need to be as diverse as the Bible in our descriptions of the good news...
- vi. Each aspect of the good news deals with an aspect of our brokenness.

***d. What are some of the broader aspects of the good news?***

- i. Matthew, Mark, and Luke emphasize the good news of the kingdom of God.
  - 1. Why is this good news? Because we are in the kingdom of darkness.
- ii. John emphasizes the good news of eternal life...
  - 1. Why is this good news? We deserve eternal judgment...
- iii. Paul emphasizes the good news of justification
  - 1. Why is this good news? Because we are guilty before a holy god.
  - 2. This is the aspect that many reformed protestants emphasize...
  - 3. Unfortunately, they only emphasize this one....
- iv. Some texts emphasize the good news of Christ defeating the evil powers (Col. 2:15, 1 John 3:8)
  - 1. Why is this good news?
- v. Other texts emphasize the good news of Reconciliation...
  - 1. Why is this good news? We are unreconciled to God and others before conversion...
- vi. Other texts emphasize the good news of divine wrath being assuaged (Matt. 27:45, Gal. 3:13)
  - 1. Why is this good news?
- vii. Other texts emphasize the good news of the power of sin being broken (Rom. 6)
  - 1. Why is this good news?
  - 2. This discourages antinomianism.
- viii. Other texts emphasize the good news of God's law being written on our hearts?
  - 1. Why is this good news?
- ix. Other texts emphasize the good news of being adopted by God.
  - 1. Why is this good news? (Romans 8)
- x. Other texts emphasize the good news of Redemption!
  - 1. We are no longer enslaved...
- xi. Other texts emphasize the good news of being new creatures!
  - 1. 2 Cor. 5:17, Col. 1:5-6, 1 Peter 1:23-25.
  - 2. We are genuinely new though not entirely new.
- xii. Other texts emphasize the good news of being indwelled by the spirit.
  - 1. This is a fruit of the gospel...
- xiii. Other texts emphasize the good news of the life to come.

- xiv. Then there are the great themes of BT
  1. There are several themes (at least 20 according to DA Carson) that run across the history of redemption that only find their fulfillment in the gospel.
  2. Home/exile (garden to Garden)
  3. Covenant (broken covenant to consummated covenant)
  4. Presence and sanctuary...
  5. Restoration...
  6. Sabbath rest...
  7. Trinity and community...

**e. Application:**

- i. There are many aspects of the gospel.
- ii. Stated another way...
  1. Although the gospel is narrowly defined as the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus...
  2. this incredibly good news has numerous implications... that in one sense are part of the gospel (or at least fruits of the gospel).
  3. To be gospel centered we must emphasize every aspect of the good news.
- iii. **Keller writes,**
  1. “The gospel is not a simple thing. We know this because its expression in the themes of the Bible is inexhaustibly deep and rich. But a second reason we know it is that humanity, in both its perfect design and fallen nature, is also complex and varied. The gospel has supernatural versatility to address the particular hopes, fears, and idols of every culture and every person.” (Keller, CT, 44)
- iv. The key question is this??? What particular aspect of the person and work of Christ do we need to hear?
  1. Someone who is experiencing spiritual warfare needs to hear about Christus victor not Justification...
  2. Someone who feels like they can't fit in anywhere needs to be reminded of adoption...
- v. We are reductionistic if we always focus on one aspect of the gospel...
  1. In the reformed tradition we tend to focus on sola fide.... And we should.
  2. But we can't neglect other glorious gospel themes...
- vi. Tools to help you understand the broad implications of the gospel
  1. Gospel transformation Study Bible
  2. Keller's books (The gospel shaped life)
  3. Etc...
- vii. Gospel centrality is life changing... but is Gospel centrality Biblical? This brings us to the next point....

*f. Gospel centrality is rarer than you think.*

*g. Gospel centrality is broader than you think...*

### 3. Gospel centrality is truer than you think.

a. How can you prove gospel centrality from the Bible???

b. Paul was gospel centered...

i. Paul continually reminds Christians of the gospel.

ii. **1 Corinthians 15:1–2 (ESV)** — 1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

iii. **2 Timothy 2:7–9 (ESV)** — 7 Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. 8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, 9 for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound!

iv. This “reminding theme” is very prominent in the NT...

v. Paul preaches the gospel to Christians.

1. **Romans 1:13–15 (ESV)** — 13 I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. 14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. 15 So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

vi. Paul taught gospel centered sanctification.

1. **Titus 2:11–12 (ESV)** — 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,

vii. The pattern of Paul’s letters...

1. Indicative/imperative structure

c. Jesus was gospel centered...

i. According to Jesus...

ii. On the road to Emmaus... (Luke 24) The entire OT is about Jesus. Remember that Jesus life, death, and resurrection are the gospel.

d. The Bible is gospel centered...

i. Biblical theology

ii. The while bible tells one story that finds its fulfillment in the life, death, resurrection, and return of King Jesus.

e. Transition...

i. I’m convinced that I should be gospel centered... but is it practical? Yes! This brings us to our last point...

f. *Gospel centrality is rarer than you think.*

g. *Gospel centrality is broader than you think.*

*h. Gospel centrality is truer than you think.*

#### 4. Gospel centrality is better than you think...

a. Gospel centrality is not just a slogan, it is incredibly practical...

b. Almost all of our sin is due to the fact that we are not believing something about the gospel...

c. Examples

i. Discouragement and Depression

1. Assuming the depression has no physiological basis...
2. People are often depressed because they can't have something they really, really want (new job, new spouse, different body, respect, etc...)
3. The gospel tells us that through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus we have the one thing that matters most... relationship and acceptance with God.
4. I know two people that were clinically depressed due to fear of man... it took them a while to figure this out...

ii. Anxiety

1. Anxiety is often rooted in doubting God's goodness.
2. It is often an inverted craving....
3. We are afraid to lose something (peace, health, joy, relationship, respect, etc...)
4. God has given us his own son... what good thing will he withhold from us...

iii. Giving

1. **2 Corinthians 8:7-9 (ESV)** — 7 But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also. 8 I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine. 9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.

iv. Marriage

1. Ephesians 5
2. "Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..."

v. Parenting

1. The cross shows us what our kids deserve. Which should motivate us to discipline them.
2. The cross also shows us how affectionate God has been towards us, so we should lavish our kids with affection.

vi. Evangelism

1. Gospel centered evangelism
2. We evangelize motivated by love
3. We can evangelize because we are not afraid of rejection...
4. We evangelize humbly because we are aware of what our sins deserve.



- vii. Racism
  - 1. Our race is not morally superior to any other race...
  - 2. We are all saved by grace alone...
  - 3. The cross is the great destroyer of racism.
  - 4. Romans 3:10, 23
  - 5. Gal 3:28
  
- viii. Motivation for holiness
  - 1. Titus 2:12
    - a. "The grace of God teaches us to say no to sin..."
  
- ix. Joy and humor
  - 1. Because of the gospel we can laugh at ourselves
  - 2. We often take our reputation way too seriously.
  - 3. When we are secure in God's acceptance through the gospel, we can laugh at the stupid things we do and say...
  - 4. Someone who can't laugh at themselves is not applying the gospel to their lives.
  
- x. Relating to Parents
  - 1. Some of you are still trying to meet your parents' expectations.
  - 2. This burden is hard to live with...
  - 3. Jesus Christ has made God your perfect heavenly father.
  - 4. This means that we don't have to be overly dependent on our parent's approval nor hostile to our parents...
  
- xi. Criticism
  - 1. The cross has already criticized me...
  - 2. It says that I'm so bad that the son of God had to be murdered for me to be forgiven..
  - 3. It also says that I'm so loved that Jesus died for me personally...
  - 4. No one can criticize us more than the cross.
  - 5. Therefore, we don't have to fear correction or criticism.
  
- xii. Sexual purity
  - 1. Our culture views sexuality as an appetite to be quenched...
  - 2. Religious people see sex as dirty...
  - 3. Christian Sexuality reflects the self-giving attitude of Jesus Christ. He died to secure the churches happiness.
  
- xiii. Friendships (feeling left out)
  - 1. We don't need people's approval...
  - 2. We don't ignore people, we love them, since God loved us...
  - 3. We don't use others and we don't let ourselves be used...
  
- xiv. The gospel is incredibly good news for every sanctification issue we face. And let's face it, most of our issues in life are sanctification issues.
  
- xv. The gospel is the one key that unlocks all of our sanctification issues.
  
- xvi. Illustration
  - 1. I used to work for a large church in Fairfax Virginia. The building was huge, new, beautiful and full of expensive things (sound gear, computers, etc...). When

I was hired, the administrator gave me a set of keys to the building and then he sat me down and looked me in the eye and got very serious. He was about to give me his famous “key speech.” He said something like this, “Dave I’m giving you this key. This key opens every door in this large building. This building is full of valuable things. By giving you this key, I’m giving you access to hundreds of thousands of dollars in equipment. I’m giving you a ton of responsibility. Never, under any circumstances, give this key away or let it be copied by someone else. Guard these keys with your life.” It was a little over the top. But he made his point well.

2. One key opened all the doors...
3. The gospel of Jesus Christ opens up all the doors that trap us and enslave us.

## 5. Conclusion

- a. We looked at four things...
  - i. *Gospel centrality is rarer than you think...*
  - ii. *Gospel centrality is broader than you think...*
  - iii. *Gospel centrality is truer than you think...*
  - iv. *Gospel centrality is better than you think...*
- b. Illustration
  - i. My discovery of gospel centrality at GLPC.
- c. GCF is imperfectly striving to be a gospel centered church.
- d. We need grace, strength, and wisdom to maintain our focus on the gospel. Please pray for us to this end...
- e. It is fitting for us to end by celebrating the Lord’s supper which points us once again to the gospel.