

GOSPEL DNA

LEADER'S GUIDE

Many would say that Jesus was the greatest man who ever lived, regardless of their religious affiliation. The word “Christian” means “little Christ,” as in, one who seeks to walk in the ways of Jesus. But anyone who wants to be more like him is undoubtedly confronted with a harsh reality: many changes need to occur if we are to resemble the amazing man Jesus Christ.

The concept of change is not foreign to us. Right now, there are probably several things about yourself you'd like to change. But change also raises many questions:
Why should I change? What needs to change? How do I go about changing? Why is change so difficult?

This tool was developed to help address those questions, and to help lead a small community of people toward lasting change.

WHY “GOSPEL DNA”?

Gospel transformation

The Apostle Paul said “The gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.” (Romans 1:16). Over the next few months, you are going to talk a lot about the gospel. The 21 weeks of discussions will lead you back to God’s character and his work over and over again. That’s because faith in the work of God on our behalf in and through Jesus is the only thing that will ultimately bring change. Our understanding of and belief in the gospel is central to who we are and to how we live.

Change most often happens in community

The term DNA group refers to a group that is recommended to consist of three people—men with men, women with women— who meet together weekly. They seek to be known and to bring the gospel to bear on each other’s lives so that they become more like Jesus. Lasting change most often happens in community by the power of the Holy Spirit. We need regular reminders from one another of the truth of the gospel, through the leading of the Holy Spirit in us. We need each other in order to be transformed. We are all called to be disciples of Jesus. A disciple of Jesus is someone who is learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life. Essentially, everything we do together in community is a part of discipleship.

A DNA group has three elements:

DISCOVER Growing together in your fluency of the Gospel and in your knowledge of where you each need Jesus in your life. This will involve:

- * reminding one another of our identity in Jesus Christ
- * speaking the truth in love as we see areas of sin; correcting and rebuking with God’s Word when necessary
- * growing in your understanding of what it looks like to obey Jesus’ commands (Matthew 28:18-20)
- * asking God to reveal to you the areas of your life where you are currently lacking the gospel

NURTURE Care sincerely for one another. This will include:

- * getting to know one another’s stories, listening closely to each other and to the Holy Spirit so we can carefully and empathetically direct each other to truth
- * checking one another’s heart and passions by asking questions like: How are you doing? Who are you loving well? Not so well? Where are you living in fear? What can we celebrate with you? What are you struggling through?
- * praying with and for each other

ACTION Living out the Gospel together in your daily lives. It involves:

- * encouraging each other to live out what we believe through making goals and helping each other fulfill them
- * reviewing the past week and how faithful we have been in keeping our word
- * training one another to serve in tangible ways
- * intentionally checking in with one another in regards to areas where we are struggling
- * teaching one another how to work through finding the root of your sin

As you grow together, confidentiality will be a key component of the relationship. You are encouraged to take whatever you learn about yourself through this process and share it with as many people as possible. What you learn about others, however, is private information. While anyone can give permission for their info to be shared at any time, the general rule of thumb is to honor the confidentiality of the group as you

learn more about each other. The exception to this is if an issue arises that requires a more trained perspective (serious sin, addiction issues, abuse, etc.). In that case, please consult your Gospel Community Leader, Expression Leader, or local elder for more assistance.

The mission: make disciples who make disciples

Among the last things Jesus said to his followers were these words:

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

(Matthew 28:18-20 NLT)

Those who follow Jesus as his disciples don't live merely for their own comfort. Jesus' disciples seek to make disciples who make disciples. There is an expectation of multiplication in Jesus' parting instruction.

Therefore, the hope for every DNA group is that each participant would one day lead another group. The timeline will vary from group to group, but Gospel DNA was developed with this goal clearly in mind. Begin praying even now about who God might have you lead in the future.

HOW DO WE USE GOSPEL DNA?

Each week when you meet, Gospel DNA will help set a basic pattern for your time together. The leader of the group will walk you through the discussion. There is some variation, but roughly the same elements are involved each week:

SETUP A key thought that helps initiate your discussion of the week's material.

BIG PICTURE This is a place for you to summarize in a few lines what you learned each week.

THE BIBLE SAYS... A short passage of scripture to read and discuss

PRAY TOGETHER DNA groups should always be praying together, but occasionally this element will appear calling you to a specific prayer focus.

ARTICLE These articles are taken from a variety of authors. Read them out loud together each week. The leader will guide a discussion of the material.

EXERCISE This element helps solidify the week's truth by giving you something specific to do together.

LATER THIS WEEK... To ensure that discipleship gets lived out day to day, you'll leave with something to think about or do before your next meeting.

WRAP IT UP... Reviewing the big idea that stood out in this week's study.

LEADERS NOTE: The Leader’s Guide contains time markers for each element, as well as a few additional elements not found in the participant’s guide. Each week, you’ll get some extra guidance with headings like Opening, Discuss (following the Article), and the Big Picture. This last one helps you know the most important points to highlight each week. It will help keep the discussion focused.

Other practical thoughts

Here are some things to keep in mind each time you meet:

- * Be wise about your meeting place. A coffee shop can work for some groups, but it may not give you the privacy you’ll need for honest conversation. Meeting in a home or the quiet corner of a larger public space may be better options.
- * You’re going to be doing some writing throughout this process. You can use your own journal or the participant’s guide that’s provided for you. Make sure you have a Bible with you, too.
- * You’ll be scheduling additional times together, so bring some sort of calendar to each meeting (phone, laptop, paper, a pen for writing on your hand, etc.).

LEADERS NOTE: *There are some expectations that are unique to the leader of the DNA group.*

- * Pray consistently for the people in your group. Come with a sense of where the Spirit wants you to go.
- * Prepare by reading through the material before your meeting. Come with a sense of where the discussion needs to go. Keep the discussion focused. The Big Picture will help you discern this.
- * The Leader’s Guide is not top secret. You may want to have the people in your group take turns leading towards the end of the process.
- * Emphasize the goal of multiplication over and over. It will be a critical part of the growth and discipleship for people to think and pray about leading others.

Thanks to Tim Chester...

We owe a tremendous amount to Tim Chester, our brother across the pond in Sheffield, England. He introduced Soma Communities to several concepts that rapidly became part of the fabric of how we understand and speak about the gospel as a family. For many of us, Tim’s ideas have become inextricably woven into what we teach others to help them become more like Jesus and how we live out the gospel in the everyday. Tim later published these thoughts in his book, *You Can Change*—apart from the Bible, the best book any of the Soma Tacoma elders have read on the gospel and becoming more like Jesus. With Tim and the publisher’s permission, we have borrowed from *You Can Change* to create Gospel DNA. The overall flow of the weeks, and several portions of the text come from Tim’s book. We’ve used endnotes with page references to credit him. We highly recommend purchasing the book to dive deeper into discipleship in community. You can find the American version on Amazon.

WEEK 1: OVERVIEW

LEADER'S NOTE: *It's important to note that this is an overview snapshot of the whole study. Spend time going through the verses on each page. Communicate clearly the concept of head, heart and hands... meaning everything begins with our unbelief/belief which is our head, continues to idolatry which is what we worship in our hearts, and moves to sin which is in our hands or actions.*

Big Picture

This is where we're going... the big ideas to understand more deeply this week.

- * The root of sin
- * Tracing sin back to our unbelief
- * How to change, starting with repentance
- * Understanding that change comes from God

Opening [10 minutes]

Take a few minutes to see how each of you is doing and encourage each other. Be careful, this time can easily get away from you. Highlight something that you remember from last week's conversations about backgrounds.

Setup [5 minutes]

Ask the questions:

Are people inherently good or are they inherently bad?

LEADER'S NOTES: We are bad from birth.

Right now in your life, is God majestic and distant or is He personal and a friend?

LEADER'S NOTES: Both are bad in themselves.

The Bible Says... [15 minutes]

The Lord God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. But the Lord God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

(Genesis 2:15-17 NLT)

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"

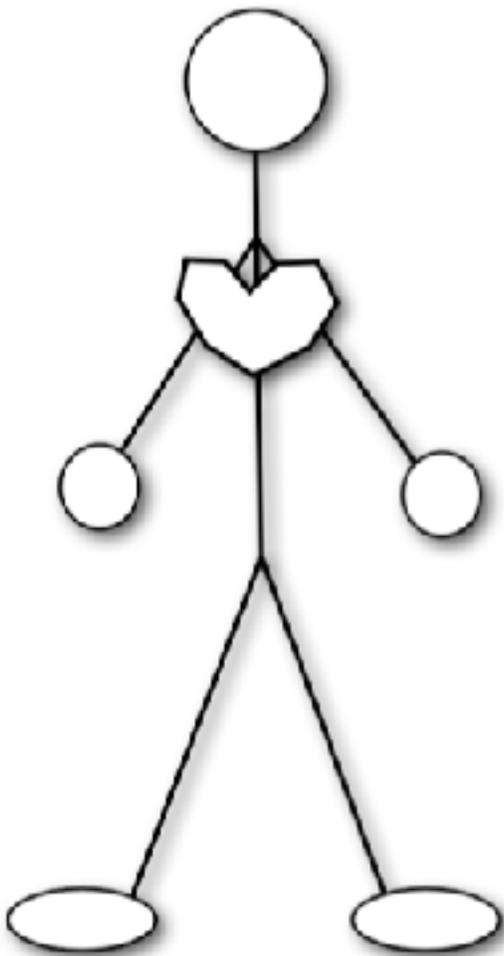
"Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'"

"You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil."

The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. (Genesis 3:1-7 NLT)

They traded the truth about God for a lie. So they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator himself, who is worthy of eternal praise! Amen. (Romans 1:25 NLT)

The Pattern for Sin and Sanctification



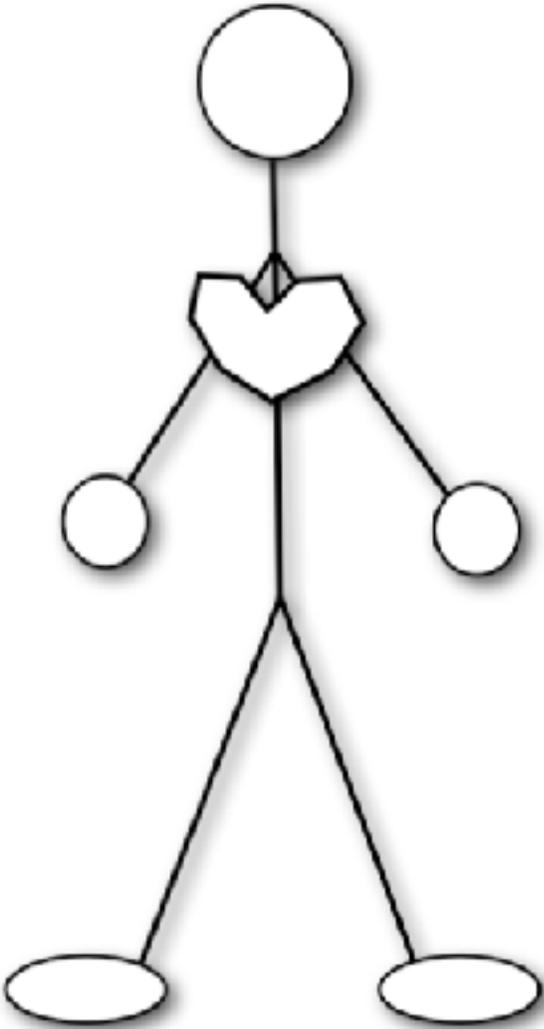
The process of sin begins with . . .

Unbelief

Idolatry

Sin

How to Change



What we **believe** with our

determines what we **worship** with our

and what we **do** with our

The Bible Says... [15 minutes]

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

(Romans 12:2 NLT)

Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

(Ephesians 4:21-24 NLT)

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

"But we are descendants of Abraham," they said. "We have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean, 'You will be set free'?"

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin.

(John 8:31-34 NLT)

Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.

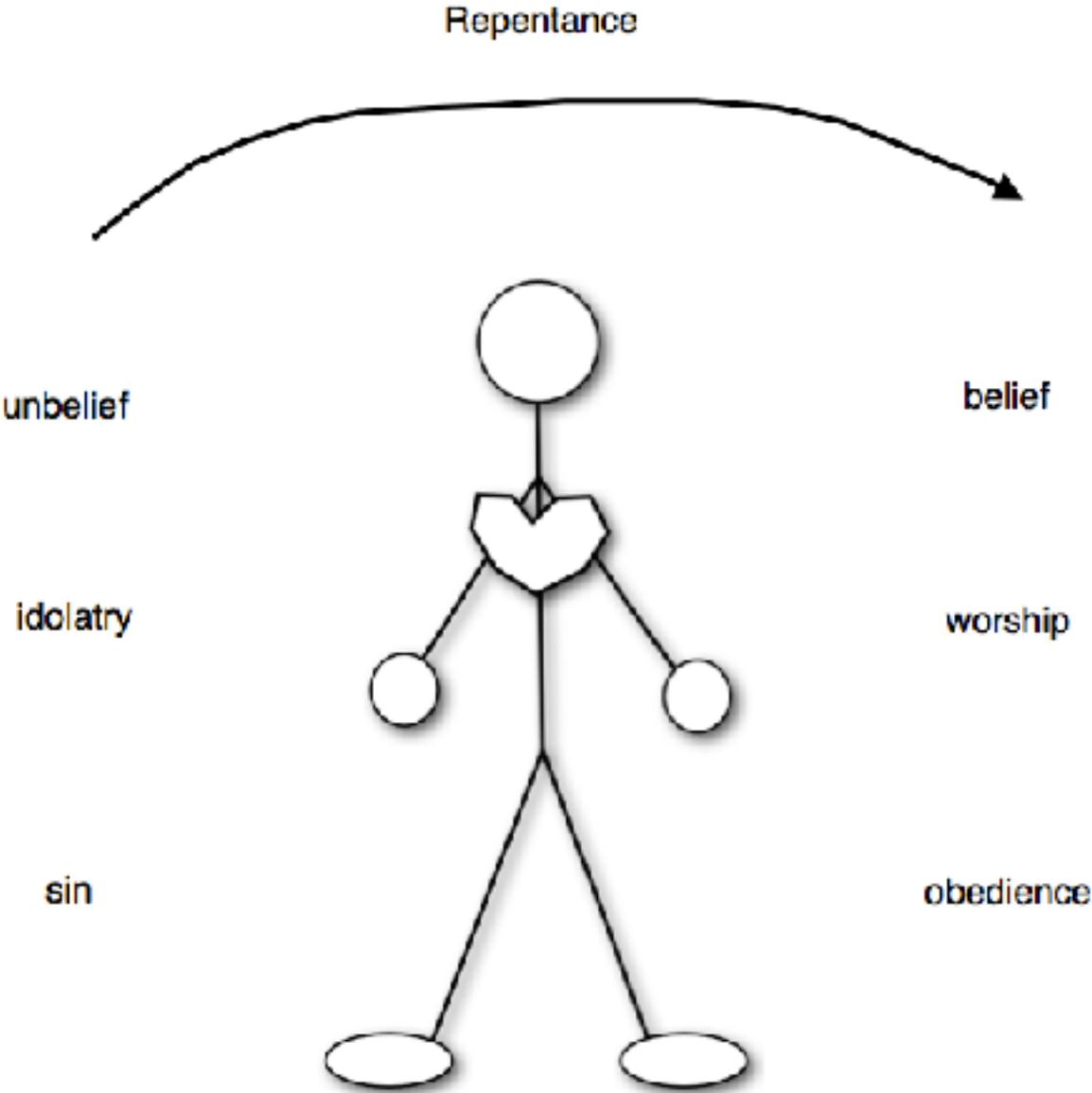
(Ephesians 4:15 NLT)

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

(John 14:6 NLT)

Continual Repentance: The Key to Change

Repentance: to change your mind/to turn



Think of the last time you have repented and worked through the process of unbelief, idolatry and sin. What was the unbelief? What was the idolatry? What was the sin?

WEEK 2: Religion vs. Gospel

LEADER'S NOTE: Try to communicate the stark difference between religion and Gospel; it would be good to point out the difference on the last page between religion and gospel - mainly where the power/weight/responsibility comes from... God or us.

Big Picture

This is where we're going... the big ideas to understand more deeply this week.

- * Clarify the natural tendency to prove and to pretend.
- * Highlight the fact that our new identity is based on what God has done for us in Jesus.

Opening [10 minutes]

Take a few minutes to see how each of you is doing and encourage each other. Be careful, this time can easily get away from you. Make sure you save time to discuss the upcoming **Later this week** that is at the end of today's session.

Setup [1 minute]

A religious life is often communicated as the way to live but Jesus clearly spoke against the religious leaders of his day. Notice the differences when looking at both religious, and Gospel lives. Some key differences are in our heart motivation and where we place our identity. There are many occasions Jesus confronted the religious. One story that captures the heart of the religious and those compelled by the gospel is found in Luke 18. Let's take a look at it together.

The Bible Says... [15 minutes]

"Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: 'Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: "I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don't cheat, I don't sin, and I don't commit adultery. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income."

But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, "O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner." I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

(Luke 18:9-14 NLT)

What stands out to you in this passage?

Article [10 minutes]

Good News for Everyday Life

Many of us have an internal drive to prove ourselves to ourselves, to others, and even to God. We approach tasks like a test that will either build our resume or lengthen our rap sheet. We approach encounters like we would a job interview, trying to make ourselves appear better than we actually are. The author Donald Miller said we live our lives like we are in a life raft that holds 15 people, but 16 are in the raft. Someone has to go, and so we are bound and determined to prove that we deserve to stay. This drive to prove ourselves leads to all kinds of problems: stress, anger, jealousy, lying, debt, fear...to name just a few.

But the message of the gospel is that we have nothing to prove and no need to pretend. We have nothing to prove because we will pass the greatest job interview--the one with God--with flying colors because of Jesus. We have no need to pretend because God has loved us at our very worst and all of our sin is forgiven sin. Nothing to prove. No need to pretend. That is good news right now!

RELIGION	GOSPEL
My identity is based on what I do for God	My identity is based on what God has done for me in Jesus
I feel the need to prove myself to God and others because my acceptance is based on my good performance. I am constantly under pressure.	I don't have to prove myself to God or others because my acceptance is based on Jesus' good performance. The pressure is off.
I have to pretend that I am better than I really am. I try to hide my faults and failures because every sin condemns me.	I am free to be myself with all of my faults and failures. I don't have to hide because all of my sin is forgiven sin.

NOTHING TO PROVE

Read through the list below and identify the ways that you try to prove yourself in order to earn the acceptance of others, God, or even yourself.

Work

I work harder than others so I am better than they are. I talk about how busy I am so that others will realize that I am important. When work is slow, I am laid off, or even when I have a day off, I look down on myself. The pressure I feel to achieve in this area is costing me in the area of relationships.

Parenting

I do everything I can to give my kids an edge. I get them the best academic support and have them in all the right sports and extracurricular activities. When they don't succeed or when they misbehave I am embarrassed. I suspect that they feel an unhealthy amount of pressure from me.

Intelligence

In conversation I try to demonstrate my knowledge on a broad array topics and drop hints about how well read I am. If possible I reference my academic record. I like to be right when there is a disagreement about the facts. As a result others perceive me as arrogant.

Appearance

I am often tempted to buy brand name fashion because it makes me feel more valuable and is noticed by others. I don't exercise and eat well just to be healthy but to be admired by others. I catch myself looking in the mirror a lot. I live with a sense of never being beautiful or handsome enough.

Wealth

I subtly show off my latest purchase and feel pride when I have a new luxury item. I feel the need to be perceived as financially secure, even wealthy. As a result, I am not nearly as generous as I could be. And when we are struggling financially I try to hide it.

Behavior

I don't drink, cuss, chew, or go with girls who do. On the one hand, I judge others when they don't measure up. On the other hand, I condemn myself when I slip up. It is a constant comparison game that hurts me and others.

Talent

I try to excel in as many activities as possible because I feel the need to show others and myself that I am gifted and talented. I hate losing and consider second-best to be failure. It is hard for me to have fun because I am so concerned with performing.

¹ Adapted from *Gospel Transformation, World Harvest Mission and Soma Basics - week two*

Discuss... [5 minutes]

What are some of the negative consequences that you have experienced by feeling the need to prove yourself?

What difference would it make in your life if you were absolutely convinced that God accepted you just as you are? How would it impact your ability to love others?

somabasics week two

NO NEED TO PRETEND (Six Ways we try to Minimize Sin)

Pretending is really the flip side of proving ourselves. Life feels like a job interview and we need to hide our weaknesses. Read through the list below and identify ways that you sometimes pretend in order to make your “resume” appear better than it actually is.

Defending

I am defensive when I feel criticized. I find it difficult to receive feedback about weaknesses or sin. When confronted, my tendency is to explain things away or justify my actions or decisions. As a result, people are hesitant to approach me with concerns, I rarely have conversations about difficult things in my life, and it is hard for me to change.

Faking

I try to keep up appearances so people think the best of me, and I maintain a respectable image with those around me. My behavior, to some degree, is driven by what I perceive others think of me. Being with others can often be exhausting because I am working so hard to say and to do the right things. I do not like to think reflectively about my life. As a result, few people know the real me. (I may not even know the real me.)

Hiding

I do my best to hide anything that would make others think less of me. I conceal as much as I can about my life, especially the bad stuff. This is different from faking because faking is all about impressing others. Hiding is more about shame. I am afraid that if people knew the real me, they wouldn't love or accept me.

Exaggerating

I tend to exaggerate both good and bad events in order to draw attention to myself. If there is something good that I have done, I highlight it for others and stretch the truth. As a result, things often get more attention than they deserve and have a way of making me stressed or anxious.

Blaming

I am quick to blame others for sin or circumstances. I have a difficult time owning my contribution to sin or conflict. My pride leads me to assume I am not at fault, and my fear leads me to cover up my fault. I fear rejection if something truly is my fault.

Downplaying

I tend to downplay the significance of my sin and mistakes. I dismiss them as insignificant, normal or “not that bad”. As a result, things don’t get the attention they deserve. They have a way of mounting up to the point of being overwhelming. Rather than seeking forgiveness from God and others, my sin builds up and ends up causing more damage.

Discuss... [10 minutes]

1. *Which area of pretending do you struggle with the most? How does it negatively affect your life and relationships?*
2. *How could this area of struggle be altered if you believed that you were unconditionally accepted by God--if you believed the gospel: that through faith, you have been set free from the penalty of sin through the life and death of Jesus?*

Later This Week... [10 minutes]

This week look for a moment when you are responding by Proving yourself or Pretending.

In that moment, turn to the truth of the gospel that you studied today--that your identity is based on how perfect Jesus is, not on how perfect you are. Thank God for loving you and being gracious to you. Ask him to help you respond differently in that moment. Report back to your group about your struggle in that moment and if turning to the truth of God's grace made a difference for you.

Wrap it Up [5 minutes]

Briefly review what you learned today. Jot down the **Big Picture** ideas in your own words. Discuss any final questions. **Pray** together.

Religious Change vs. Gospel Change

	Religion	Gospel
Focus	Behavior	Belief
Motivation	Fear & Guilt	Love & Gratitude
Power	Human Effort	Holy Spirit

WEEK 3: STORIES

LEADER'S NOTE: Set aside at least 2 hours for this first session. You'll need extra time for the guided part and time to get to know each other and begin building trust and rapport with one another, especially if everyone isn't already friends.

Please read the **Appendix** : *Tips for Sharing Your Story in 10 Minutes*, and come prepared to model a healthy, self-revealing 10 minute story. If you run out of time on this first week, have the leader share his/her story, then hand out the **Appendix** to the other DNA partners so they can come prepared to share the next time you meet.

Big Picture

This is where we're going... the big ideas to understand more deeply this week.

- * The Bible is made up of one big, overarching story.
- * Humans were created in God's image to be like him, but everyone has rebelled against God.
- * God has a plan for restoring everyone and everything to the way he originally created it to be. It is all God's work to do this restoration.

Opening [10 minutes]

Take a few minutes to see how each of you is doing and encourage each other. Be careful, this time can easily get away from you.

Setup [2 minutes]

All of our lives are made up of a series of stories. Some of them are true (or seem true to us) and some parts of our stories are caught up in false realities. But there is a big Story that actually helps us make sense of our lives and why things work the way they do in the world. It's called the Story of God. It's a story found throughout the Bible, and it tells of an amazing God who created a perfect world full of beauty, love and amazing possibilities. The story we're about to read is not a direct quote; it is a summary of the narrative arc of the whole Bible. It will quickly give us the big picture on what God is up to and what life is all about...

The Bible Says... [15 minutes]

The Story of God Summary

This is a story found in the Bible, about God, a being who has always existed and is the creator of EVERYTHING. God is the only one in this story who always does what is good, right and perfect—the Bible calls him Holy. While God created the foundations of the earth, angels (his first creation) were there watching. They sang together and worshiped God... but some of these angels rebelled against God and his ways. The Bible teaches that all rebellion against God is called sin. And because of God's holiness he will not allow sin to remain in his presence, so he sent the rebellious angels, now known as demons, down into darkness on the earth.

Then God decided to create another being, called humans, in his own image. God said, “Let us make man in our image to be like us.” He then prepared the earth as a place for the humans to live—filling the earth with plants, birds, fish and animals of all kinds. God created the first humans, Adam and Eve, and placed them in a beautiful garden and trusted them to care for and rule over all of his creation on earth.

God lived closely with these first humans, spending time with them daily, showing them how to live life in the best possible way. They lived their life close to God and under his protection—a life that was full and complete and eternal.

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve chose to rebel against God and his authority, choosing to live in their own ways instead of his. Since God will not allow evil and rebellion to remain in his presence, Adam and Eve were sent out of the garden, away from God. Separated from God and no longer following his ways, Adam and Eve were now subject to sickness, pain, and death. God told them, “The way you have chosen to live will bring you great struggles and pain, and then you will return to the ground from which you came.” Not only were these humans now separated from God because of their sin, but they would also suffer death as they were separated from the giver of life.

After leaving the garden the number of humans on earth grew rapidly. Not only did sin spread from Adam and Eve to their sons—it spread from generation to generation.

Even though humans were created in God’s image, everyone chose to disobey God. They all constantly acted out in violence against each other. This went on for thousands of years.

Then God established a special relationship and a covenant promise—representing the deepest of all agreements—with a man named Abraham. God told Abraham, “I’ll make you the father of a great nation and famous throughout history. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. The entire earth will be blessed through your descendants. I will always be your God and you will always be my people.”

Abraham’s family, called the Israelites, were to be a new kind of people who would show the world what it means to once again live in God’s ways. God gave them a vast amount of land where they enjoyed his blessings as they grew into a large nation.

But as time went by the Israelites began doing what was right in their own eyes and rebelled against God and his laws. They stopped trusting in God and worshiped idols—people, things, wealth and power—over God. In their rebellion, the Israelites faced great struggles and ended up a defeated nation of slaves. But God continued to love his people and promised that one day a descendant of theirs would come to rescue and restore humanity, and all of creation, back to the way God originally created it.

Then there was 400 years of silence between God and his people. The Israelites, called Jews, had been under the control of other nations for hundred of years. They were now ruled by Rome, the most powerful empire that the world had ever known.

Finally, God sent an angel to a young woman named Mary in the town of Nazareth. The angel appeared to her and said, “*You will become pregnant and have a son and you are to name him Jesus. He will become a king whose kingdom will never end! This will happen supernaturally by God’s Spirit, so this baby will be called God’s Son.*”

God revealed to Mary and her soon-to-be-husband Joseph that this boy was the long awaited Messiah king, the one whom God promised he’d send to rescue his people! Sure enough the next year, Mary gave birth to a son whom she named Jesus, which means “the God who saves”. Jesus grew up in both height

and wisdom, and was loved by God and everyone who knew him. He lived a remarkable life, always choosing to live in God's ways and do what was good, right and perfect. As a man, Jesus called people to follow him, inviting them to be a part of what he called the Kingdom of God. Calling people to once again live under God's rule and reign. He said, *"God blesses those who realize their need for him; the humble and poor, the gentle and merciful—the Kingdom of God belongs to them. God blesses the pure in heart and those who hunger and thirst to be with Him."* He taught people that the Kingdom of God is within our hearts.

He said, *"God showed his great love for people by sending me—his only son—to this world. Anyone who believes in me and lives in my ways will find life that is complete and eternal! He sent me here to save people—not to judge them. Those who want to live in sin and darkness will reject me and bring God's judgment on themselves. But those who want to live in God's ways will trust me and live forever!"* As God had promised, he sent Jesus to rescue humanity from sin and the penalty of death. God accepted Jesus' perfect life in place of our own. Jesus was brutally beaten and died painfully on a wooden cross, taking the punishment that all of rebellious humanity deserved! Three days later Jesus conquered death when God raised him back to life and he was seen by over 500 eyewitnesses.

Soon afterward, Jesus went to be with his Father in heaven, rising up into the clouds right before his followers' eyes! He promised that he would send his own Holy Spirit to come and dwell within them. The Spirit would remind them of all Jesus taught, transform their hearts to be like Jesus and give them power to walk in the ways of God like Jesus did. Jesus also sent his followers to go out and tell others about him—his life and his sacrifice for their sins— and lead them to trust him and walk in his ways.

This was the beginning of what the Bible calls the Church—a community of people all over the world who, because of Jesus, once again enjoy a life that is full and complete—living in the ways of God.

We can join this amazing story... the story continues with us!

The Bible also tells us the end of this story... Jesus promised to come back one day to destroy all evil, sin and rebellion. Then there will be no more sickness, pain, or death. God's Kingdom will come in fullness, and everyone and everything will live under his rule. Until then, we get to live in God's ways, giving people a foretaste of what life is like in Jesus' Kingdom.

LEADER'S NOTE: *Read the story out loud a second time. It may seem odd to read it again, but it helps tremendously in our understanding and retention. After all, it is the story of the whole Bible in just a couple pages—it's packed with good stuff!*

Discuss... [20 minutes]

1. **What are some of the indicators that God is the hero and the main character of this story?**
2. This Story of God really includes all of our stories too...
Where do you see yourself in this Story? Can you see how our stories are really about God?
3. As we have seen in this story, regardless of our rebellion, God's plans cannot be thwarted.
Where in your life have you experienced God rescue you from a self-inflicted bad situation?
4. God created us in his image to be like him and to live a life close to him.
From what you saw in the Story, what would have to change for your life to line up with God's intent for you? Have you ever tried making those changes on your own? How did that go?

Did you know that God wants to change those things in you? He wants to make you like Jesus. That is what discipleship is all about—letting God bring about change in our lives from the inside out so we look more like Jesus.

Exercise [30 minutes]

Now let's share our own life stories with each other (about 10 minutes each) and see where our lives really do (or don't) line up with God's story.

LEADER'S NOTE: remember, **The Appendix: Tips for Sharing Your Story in 10 Minutes**

Later This Week... [10 minutes]

Make plans to do something fun together in the next two weeks. Get together outside of this weekly meeting to do pretty much anything you enjoy that will allow you to interact a lot and have fun together.

Wrap it Up [5 minutes]

Briefly review what you learned today. Jot down the **Big Picture** ideas in your own words. Discuss any final questions. **Pray** together.

WEEK 4: GOSPEL

LEADER'S NOTE: Try to do this in one week, but if your DNA group really digs into the discussion of the prodigal son parable and you feel you need the extra time to clarify the gospel with them, you can stop there and take two weeks on this session.

Opening [10 minutes]

Take a few minutes to see how each of you is doing and encourage each other. Be careful, this time can easily get away from you. Make sure you talk about the **Later this week** from the last time you got together —either talk about the fun you had on your outing or confirm plans for this week.

Setup [1 minute]

The gospel has been compared to a pool shallow enough for a toddler to wade but deep enough for an elephant to swim. It's both simple and profound, affecting those with young faith or mature faith. The Story of God we read last week is the grand redemptive story of the gospel. One of the stories Jesus told that most vividly captures the heart of the gospel is found in Luke 15. Let's take a look at it together.

The Bible Says... [20 minutes]

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"

" 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' " (Luke 15:11-32 NIV)

At the beginning of the story, the younger son demands his inheritance, which is like saying to his dad, "I wish you were dead!"

What do you think the younger son really wants in life?

Think about the older son's conversation with the father—he says, "I've been slaving for you all these years... where's my party?!"

If he considered his work to be like slavery, why do you think he kept at it? What do you think he wanted in life?

Do you think either son truly loved the father and wanted to be with him?

Their actions look very different, but explain how both sons' hearts are very similar.

LEADERS NOTE: *Both sons wanted the father's stuff and not the father. And the older brother tried to earn his father's favor through hard work.*

Why doesn't the father punish the younger son? What does the father say to the older brother at the end of the story?

This parable of the Lost Sons is a picture of what is called the gospel.

After hearing this story, how would you explain the gospel?

Article [10 minutes]

What is the gospel?

The gospel is called the "good news" and it is particularly good news about our sin problem. In a nutshell, we can sum it up this way:

The gospel is that God himself has come to rescue and restore creation in and through the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. Why does creation (which includes me) need rescuing? Because of sin.

Sin is living for my fame and glory instead of God's. Sin is living life my way, for me, instead of living life, God's way, for God. We have all sinned and really need the gospel—we desperately need Jesus to rescue us from the penalty and effects of sin, which the Bible teaches is ultimate and eternal separation from God. When we repent (change our mind about who is really God in our lives) and by faith we believe that Jesus' life, death and resurrection has secured our rescue and restored us to a right relationship with God the Father, then this good news is true for us! And we have been sent out to proclaim this same gospel of restoration to the entire world.

UNDERSTANDING TWO GOSPEL PERSPECTIVES

We can read the Bible across the grain (thematically) and we can read it with the grain (as a story). Both are necessary and each one leads to a different way of seeing the gospel. It takes both perspectives to fully understand and engage the gospel.

1. Thematically

The Gospel Power. We understand the means of salvation.

God —eternal, all powerful, creator of everything

Sin —humanity has all chosen self-rule over submission, in relationship, to God; the penalty for sin is death

Jesus —God incarnate came to die as a substitute for the penalty of humanity's sins

Faith —by faith in what Jesus did, not by any effort of our own, we are saved from our sins

In this case, the good news is that God is completely aware of our sin problem, and in and through the work of Jesus Christ, accepts us AND changes us by the power of his Spirit. We have been saved from the penalty of sin (justification), we are being saved from the power of sin (sanctification) and we will be saved from the presence of sin. This means the same power that saved us from the penalty for sin also helps us obey God now.

This results in my understanding that...

I am more broken and sinful than I ever dared believe, and at the same time I am more loved and accepted than I ever dared hope, because of Jesus.

2. As a Story

The Gospel Purpose. Here we come to know the reason for salvation.

We can look at the gospel through the lens of a story...

Creation → Fall → Redemption → Restoration

In this case, the good news is that God sent his Son to redeem the world from the effects of sin and create a new humanity. Eventually the whole world will be renewed to the way God originally created it. Rebellion, death, decay, injustice, and suffering will all be removed. When everything is restored, God will be seen by all for who he truly is—he will be glorified.

How does this happen? Jesus helped clarify how we accomplish the purpose of the gospel by giving us his mission: "Go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). A disciple of Jesus is someone who is learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life. As the arts, industry, politics, families—all areas of culture—are being filled with Jesus' disciples bringing about his gospel restoration, the earth is being filled with his glory! That is the point of the restoration of all things—that God would be glorified!

The gospel is not just about my individual happiness or God's plan for my life. *The gospel is about God's plan for the world.*

Good news!

When we repent of our sin (view it like God does) and receive the forgiveness and new life that Jesus has offered us, we begin a journey of restoration inside and out as disciples of Jesus. Being a disciple is not primarily learning a bunch of information or maintaining certain spiritual disciplines. Discipleship is not a class or a program you go through. Becoming like Jesus is all about the gospel. **A disciple of Jesus is someone who is learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life.** The life of a disciple requires allowing the truth of the gospel to sink deep into our hearts, transforming our passions and motivations which in turn radically rearranges how we live. Although we have a role to play, the Holy Spirit is the one who does this transforming work.

This gospel restoration happens in us in the context of a community on Jesus' mission, and it's not just for us—*but for the entire world!*

Discuss... [15 minutes]

Explain in your own words the two perspectives on the gospel.

How do you understand HOW we are saved? How do you understand WHY we are saved?

How does Jesus' command to make disciples help us be a preview of the complete restoration Jesus will one day usher in?

As you are led through this Gospel DNA process, begin praying and thinking even now about who you will lead through it when you are done.

Who might those people be?

We often tend to think of the gospel in individualistic terms.

How is community or family important to the purpose of the gospel?

What simple steps can you commit to taking to live more like family with the others in this DNA group?

Exercise [10 minutes]

Think of a specific friend or neighbor who does not know Jesus. Imagine he/she asked you, "I've heard you and your friends use the word 'gospel' a lot. Can you tell me what you mean by that?" In light of what you've learned last week and today, how would you explain the gospel to this person if you only had 2 minutes for this first conversation?

Later This Week... [5 minutes]

Think about this for next time:

We defined a disciple as "someone who is learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life." What is one specific area of your life where you are not yet applying the gospel fully? Where is there a need for restoration in your life? If you had to pick one thing to start with, trusting God to make the change in your life, what would that be? Do whatever you need to do to remind yourself to think about this question this week. Put it in your calendar, write a note and put it where you'll see it often, etc.

Wrap it Up [5 minutes]

Briefly review what you learned today. Jot down the **Big Picture** ideas in your own words. Discuss any final questions. Pray together.

WEEK 5: GOSPEL CHANGE

Big Picture

This is where we're going... the big ideas to understand more deeply this week.

- * God's singular purpose for us is that we become like Jesus
- * Prayer is crucial to discipleship
- * Identify a specific area of life where we will bring the gospel to bear for the next few months.

Opening [5 minutes]

Take a few minutes to see how each of you is doing and encourage each other. Be careful, this time can easily get away from you. *At the beginning, you normally talk about the **Later this week** from the last time you got together, but today you'll have a lot of time for that at the end.*

Setup [10 minutes]

What is success to you? Don't discuss the definitions from your culture, society or friends, but your personal definition of success in life.

LEADER'S NOTE: *Lead your DNA partners toward a definition like "Finding what God wants me to do and doing it" or "glorifying God" or "becoming more like Jesus." God should be the one who determines what success is for us. You may want to ask a follow-up question like, "Where does God fit into all this?" or "How do you think the Bible might define success?"*

The Bible Says... [5 minutes]

But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. "When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this:

*Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
May your kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one. (Matthew 6:6-13 NLT)*

Prayer is a vital part of the life of a disciple. Spend some time praying together as a group before you continue. Ask the Spirit to give you wisdom as you discuss becoming like Jesus today. And remember—prayer is simply a conversation between the Father and his kids. There's no need to sound impressive or

rehearsed. We're invited to come boldly, so say what's on your heart. And you can use Jesus' prayer to guide you if you'd like.

Article [10 minutes]

What Would You Like to Change?

We learned from the Story of God that humans were made in God's image. We reflected his image or his glory like a mirror. But when we rebelled against God, that image was broken. The Bible tells us, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) The mirror has been shattered. We reflect a distorted image. The Bible calls this our "old self," or our flesh.

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; (Ephesians 4:22)

We can't be the people we want to be, let alone the people we were made to be.

We also learned in the Story that Jesus reflected God's image perfectly. Colossians 1:15 says, "He is the image of the invisible God." Hebrews 1:3 says he is "the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." (John 14:9)

Just as humans were designed to do in the beginning, Jesus shows the world what God is like. But he does it perfectly.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Jesus is the glory of the Father. He makes God known in the world. He is God in human form. He shows us what it means to be the image of God and to reflect God's glory. That's why the New Testament sometimes says we should be like God and sometimes says we should be like Christ. It's because Christ is the true image of God.

Jesus shows us God's agenda for change. God isn't interested in making us religious. Think of Jesus, who was hated by religious people. God isn't interested in making us "spiritual" if by spiritual we mean detached: Jesus was God getting involved in human relationships. God isn't interested in making us self-absorbed: Jesus was self-giving personified. God isn't interested in serenity: Jesus was passionate for God, angry at sin, wept for the city. The word "holy" means set apart from or different from, our sinful ways. It didn't mean being set apart *from* the world, but being consecrated to God *in* the world. He was God's glory *in* and *for* the world.

The word "glory" means "weight," as in "a person of importance, a weighty person." So Jesus shows us the full weight, the full significance of the character and nature of God. Jesus shows us God as he really is. God, in all of his majesty, splendor, wisdom, beauty, power, compassion, grace, patience and love, was put on display in the person of Jesus Christ. Through Jesus' life, he demonstrated power over death and demons. His compassionate heart led him to preach the good news to the poor and to heal the sick. But through Jesus' death and resurrection, we see God's glory even more clearly. Jesus willingly took all of the sins of humanity and piled them on his shoulders, becoming sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He endured the wrath of God against the sin of humanity, and prayed, "Father, forgive them." But death couldn't hold him, and he

overcame the sentence that all humanity had faced since the garden. Jesus is the image of the invisible God!

Because of our connection to Jesus, we are now being restored to our original Image, the Image of Christ. Colossians 3:9-10 says, “Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self [...there’s that same idea again...] with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. “

Our original identity as image bearers of God has been completely restored through the work of Jesus on our behalf. We reflect his image with greater and greater clarity as we live the life Jesus modeled for us and produces in us through his Spirit. It’s as if the broken mirror is being healed, and is slowly reflecting an accurate image again.

This process—us becoming more like Jesus so we reflect more accurately what God is like—is the number one thing God is always up to in our lives.

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness (or image) of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29)

What this means is that God had a plan before time began to mold and shape you into the image of his Son Jesus. He uses both blessings and trials to do that shaping work. Therefore, we should submit to his perfect work in us. The Story is about him!

From God’s perspective, becoming like Jesus is the goal of the entire Christian life. The purpose of our lives is to bring glory to God, to show the world what he’s like as his image bearers. In order to do that, we must be conformed into the image of His Son...which brings Him glory! As we become like Christ, we will bring glory to God.

Again, a disciple is someone who is learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life. Discipleship is all about letting God bring about change in our lives from the inside out so we look more like Jesus.

Discuss... [10 minutes]

In your own words, describe how Jesus reflects the glory of God.

In Romans 8:28, what is the "good" God works all things together for?

What do you think it means that God “predestined us to be conformed to the likeness of his Son?”

2 Corinthians 5:17 says we are a new creation. How are you a “new creation”?

Do you want to be like Jesus? Why or why not?

Exercise: Gospel Change Project [20 minutes]

Remember that a disciple is someone learning to apply the gospel to absolutely every part of life. So over the next several weeks, you will get to allow the gospel to change you in a specific area, making you more like Jesus one degree at a time. Many discussions with your DNA partners will be about bringing the gospel to bear on this specific area, which we'll call your gospel change project. The next time around you can easily use this same guide, and focus on a different gospel change project as you lead others.

What specific area of your life, actions, attitudes would you like to change?

Take some time right now to pray and ask God to reveal to you what area he wants each of us to work on.

Here's some help...

Think of an area of your life that you would like to change. It might be a behavior (like lying or getting drunk or inappropriate relationships) or it might be an emotion (like getting depressed or bitter or angry).

Is your gospel change project about changing your behavior or emotions?

It is no good choosing change in someone else. For example, you cannot choose 'having better behaved children' or 'having a better marriage'. You must choose something about you. For example, you might choose 'not shouting at my children' or 'not getting irritated by my spouse'.

Is your gospel change project about something specific?

Try not to choose something too general like 'being a better parent'. Choose a specific behavior or a specific emotion. It should be specific enough for you to be able to remember the last time you did it or felt it.

Is there something in your life that you're kind of embarrassed to bring up right now?

It's not making you happy and you know it's not making God happy. That's probably the thing the Spirit's bringing to mind for you to work on to be more conformed to the likeness of Jesus.

Share with each other the area of life the Spirit is bringing to mind, and **write it down**.

LEADER'S NOTE: *Don't move on through this guide without everyone identifying a specific area of life for the gospel change project.*

Later this week... [2 minutes]

Notice how often this thing you want to change comes up in your life. (You may want to jot down some notes.) How does it affect you? How does it affect others? More importantly, how does this thing you want to change make you look less like Jesus? Remember the point of gospel change is that we look more and more like Jesus and show the world what he is like. Who and what are people seeing in those moments?

Put in place whatever reminders you need to answer these questions this week.

Wrap it Up [5 minutes]

Briefly review what you learned today. Jot down the **Big Picture** ideas in your own words. Discuss any **final questions**. **Pray** together.

WEEK 6: HEART & MOTIVATION

Big Picture

This is where we're going... the big ideas to understand more deeply this week.

- * Becoming like Jesus has more to do with our motivation and affections than merely our behavior. It's about the heart.
- * We all tend to be motivated wrongly, thinking we can justify ourselves.
- * The gospel transforms our motivations, we grow to understand it's not about us—it's about Jesus.

Opening [10 minutes]

Take a few minutes to see how each of you is doing and encourage each other. Be careful, this time can easily get away from you. Make sure you talk about the **Later this week** from the last time you got together.

Setup [1 minute]

Bring to mind whatever you decided on for your gospel change project. What do you think is behind that sin in your life? Today we will begin to look at why we often do the very things we don't want to do.

The Bible Says... [2 minutes]

Teaching his disciples, Jesus said...

"A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. A tree is identified by its fruit. Figs are never gathered from thorn bushes, and grapes are not picked from bramble bushes. A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart."

(Luke 6:43-45 NLT)

Pray together... [15 minutes]

Pray together through this passage. You may talk with the Father about some of these questions:

Where have you seen good fruit in your life? Bad fruit?

What does this reveal about your heart? What's the real problem?

Article [10 minutes]

Why Would You Like To Change? Part I

Why do you want to change? Think about it for a minute. Why do you want to be more like Jesus? Most people want to improve on some character issue in their life, change some behavior. What's motivating you to want to be a more patient or loving person? To be a better wife or father?

While our motives are complex and hard to discern, they can often be boiled down into one of three categories:

1. To prove ourselves to God

I don't want God to have to work too hard to accept me. I want to help him out. I want to be acceptable to God on the basis of my own merit. I want to put him in a place of obligation, where he must bless me for my hard work.

Deep down, we all want to change so we can justify ourselves, to prove our worth. We are all natural born legalists, laboring and toiling under the weight of guilt and insecurity. This instinct comes from our pride-filled flesh (also called our sinful nature).

And God's grace is an insult to our flesh. We want to be seen by God and others as successful and worthy. We want to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. We want to take credit. But the reality is that there is nothing we can do to earn or lose God's love.

And all the time God is saying, "In my love I gave my Son for you. He's done everything needed to secure my blessing. I love you as you are and I accept you in him." God cannot love a Christian more than he does now – no matter how much we change our lives. And God will not love a Christian less than he does now – no matter what mess we make of our lives.

*"But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."
(Romans 5:8 NLT)*

2. To prove ourselves to other people

This is often the reason why I want to change: I want other people to be impressed by me. We may want to fit in or get other people's approval. We certainly don't want other people finding out what we're like inside. We wear masks to hide our real selves from people. Wearing the mask can be a great strain: it's like acting a role all the time. But we dare not let other people see us as we really are.

One of the problems with trying to prove yourself to other people is that it means they set the standard. Their standards may be ungodly, but you adopt their behavior to fit in. Their standards may be godly, but you're living in obedience to other people rather than obedience to God. Often what happens is that you settle for living like other people even when that falls short of living like Jesus. Or you measure yourself against other people and decide you are more righteous. Indeed often we point the finger at other people's faults so we can feel better about ourselves. Instead we should be comparing ourselves to Jesus, finding we fall a long way short of God's standards and discovering that we desperately need a Savior. Here's the bottom line: I want other people to be impressed by me. For my entire marriage, I have wanted the approval of my wife. Her opinion has been more weighty in my life than God's. When I know I've hurt her and I know that I've not measured up in her eyes as a husband, it's a struggle.

But this doesn't just affect marriage. This desire to prove ourselves to other people affects our work relationships, our friendships, the people we're serving, our parenting, even our relationships with total strangers ("I want these people whom I've never met to think well of me.")

And so we perform in order to hide our real selves from people. Another way to think about performing is that it's like wearing a mask. We can often be like actors, putting on a false front to impress people or vigorously defending ourselves so that we're not seen for who we really are. Many of us know how draining it can be to feel like we're putting on an act all day long! This is a huge cause of stress in our lives.

This desire to prove ourselves to others hinders our growth as disciples because our primary objective is to be like other people—whatever will gain their approval—instead of being like Jesus.

3. To prove yourself to yourself

When we mess up, we might hear things like "idiot" or "stupid" or "failure" go through our minds. In the past, I realized that one of my biggest fears in life was letting *myself* down, failing to live up to my own expectations for myself. I couldn't bear the thought of being labeled, even in my own mind, as a failure.

My ego still takes a serious hit when I mess up. Often the biggest sense of let down is having to face myself in the mirror. This means that I am viewing my sin as primarily an offense against me.

Justified by grace

What's wrong with wanting to change so we can prove ourselves to God or other people or ourselves?

It does not work. We might fool other people for a while. We might even fool ourselves. But we can never change enough to impress God. And here is the reason. Trying to impress God, others or ourselves puts us at the center of the change project. It makes change all about me. It's all about making me look good. It is done for my glory. And that is sin. In fact that's pretty much the definition of sin. Sin is living for my glory instead of God's glory. Sin is living life my way for me instead of living life God's way for God. Much of the time that means rejecting God as Lord and wanting to be our own lord, but it can also involve rejecting God as Savior and wanting to be our own savior. Pharisees do good works and repent of bad works. But gospel repentance includes repenting of good works done for wrong reasons. John Gerstner says: "The thing that really separates us from God is not so much our sin, but our damnable good works."

Another word for 'proving' ourselves is 'justify'. We want to justify ourselves to God – to show him we are good enough. We want to justify ourselves to other people or ourselves – to show we are respectable. But we are justified through faith in what Christ has done. When you feel the desire to prove yourself, remember that you are justified by Christ. You are accepted by God already because of what Christ has done. You cannot do anything to make yourself more acceptable to God than you already are. You do not need to worry whether other people are impressed by you because you are justified by God. And what makes you feel good is not what you have done, but what Christ has done for you. Your identity is not dependent on your change. You are a child of the heavenly king.

Deep down in all of us there is a tendency to base our acceptance and worth on what we do. In theological terms this is basing justification on sanctification. Religious people do this, but so do most non-religious people. They do a secular version in which their identity is based on their performance. Christians, too, constantly slip back into a religious motivation. We are all trying to be our own savior. We want to make a contribution to our salvation so that we can claim at least a little credit for it. But justification is not based on sanctification. We are made right with God entirely at God's initiative and entirely through his grace.

The truth is that it is the other way around: our sanctification is based on our justification. If we do not grasp the reality of grace, our good works will be done for wrong reasons. Without grace, we view life as a contract between us and God: we do good works, and in return he blesses us. When things go well we are filled with pride. When things go badly we either blame ourselves (which leads to crushing guilt) or we blame God (which leads to anger and bitterness). Only when we grasp God's great love displayed on the cross are we free to serve him for his own sake.

Here is the real problem with changing to impress. God has given his Son for us so that we can be justified. Jesus died on the cross, separated from his Father, bearing the full weight of God's wrath so that we can be accepted by God. When we try to impress by our good works we are saying, in effect, that the cross wasn't enough. "What Jesus did on the cross was all well and good, but I need to finish the job. Jesus didn't quite do enough for me to be accepted by God. I need to do a bit more. I need to atone for myself." "It is finished," Jesus cried. "Not quite" we answer back. "I still need to do this to get God's blessing." Imagine you owed a huge debt that left you languishing in poverty. Then a relative pays off your debt and sets you free. They have given you thousands of dollars – everything that was needed. But then you try to give them some loose change in your pocket as repayment. You want everyone to know that you helped pay off the debt; that it was joint effort. It would be pointless and insulting.

You will cleanse no sin from your life that you have not first recognized to be pardoned through the cross. If you fail to realize that Jesus has completely paid the penalty for the sin, then you will still work hard on your own to atone for it. You will never be free of the sin if you think it's up to you to pay for it. If you do not see your sin completely pardoned then your affections, desires and motives will be wrong. You will aim to prove yourself. Your focus will be the consequences of your sin rather than hating the sin itself and desiring God in its place.

Discuss... [15 minutes]

Why do you want to change?

Do you think you will miss the sin you give up? Do you think of giving up your sin as an unpleasant duty you need to do to be accepted by God?

Do you want to change for the wrong reasons?

What evidence is there that you might be trying to prove yourself to **God**?

LEADER'S NOTE: Listen for bitterness towards God, entitlement, sense of God's blessing being connected to their obedience, guilt, shame

What evidence is there that you might be trying to prove yourself to **others**?

LEADER'S NOTE: Listen for fear of man, insecurity, comparison, need for approval, jealousy, dishonesty

What evidence is there that you might be trying to prove yourself to **yourself**?

LEADER'S NOTE: Listen for fear of failure, unwillingness to admit mistakes, pride

Exercise [15 minutes]

Take a look at the following paragraphs. We have taken some verses from the Bible and made them say the opposite of what they actually say. Let's see if we can turn them back into what they really say.

When we prove ourselves by living a good life, we have peace with God through what we do. It is what we do that gives us access to God's blessing and a good standing in people's eyes. This means we can worry a bit less about whether we will share God's glory in heaven.

It is by changing that your problems will be sorted out, through working hard. It's up to us. This is what we can do for God. We are saved by what we do, so we can prove ourselves. If we do the good works that God plans for us then we can become God's masterpiece, new people in Christ Jesus.

You can check by looking at Romans 5:1-2 and Ephesians 2:8-10.¹

If what we talked about today is true, how should it affect my thoughts?

How should it affect my passions and motivations?

How should it affect my actions?

How will we encourage and hold each other accountable to these things?

Later This Week... [3 minutes]

Discuss what you are learning with at least one other person outside of this DNA group. Who might that be? Tell them why you most often want to change (to prove yourself to God, others or yourself). Hold each other accountable to this. Maybe check in with each other during the week with a quick phone call to encourage each other to be faithful.

LEADERS NOTE: *Heads up... next week, you'll need to make some time to hang together as family, hopefully you're doing that often anyway. Plan ahead if you need to.*

Wrap it Up [5 minutes]

Briefly review what you learned today. Jot down the **Big Picture** Ideas in your own words. Discuss any final questions. **Pray** together.

WEEK 7: IDENTITY

Big Picture

This is where we're going... the big ideas to understand more deeply this week.

- * We are given a new identity as children of God
- * We are called to "be who we are"
- * To live out our new identity is to experience joy and delight in God

Opening [10 minutes]

Take a few minutes to see how each of you is doing and encourage each other. Be careful, this time can easily get away from you. Make sure you talk about the **Later this week** from the last time you got together.

Setup [1 minute]

Have you ever asked yourself the questions, "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" In a sense, we all live each day out of our answers to those questions. The New Testament teaches over and over that we have a new identity because of Jesus. And again and again it calls us to "be who we are." Change is not about achieving something so that we can impress. It's about living out the new identity that God gives us in Jesus. So who are we?

The Bible Says... [15 minutes]

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir... It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery... You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. (Galatians 4:4-7; 5:1; 5:13 NIV)

Sons in the Greco-Roman world had legal standing, privilege and authority that daughters did not. So in one sense, whether we are male or female, we are made "sons" of the Father.

Whether your dad was amazing, average, absent or abusive, think back to the father in the parable of the lost sons as a picture of God who is the perfect father.

What might be some implications of being a "son" in God's family?

For you personally... For a group of people who are all in this Family... For everyone you know that isn't part of this Family...

Article [10 minutes]

Why Would You Like To Change? Part II

We used to be slaves to sin, says Paul. We were trapped by it. We all know this if we stop to think about it. Think about the times you have tried to change, but have failed. We cannot be the people we want to be, let alone become people who are like Jesus.

We are also slaves to the law. In Galatians Paul is talking about the law of God given through Moses. But what he says is true of any attempt to change using a set of rules. Instead of setting us free from sin, law crushes us.

But God sent his Son to buy our freedom. We are no longer slaves with a slave master. Now we are children with a Father. We do not have to worry about proving ourselves because God says, "You are my child." We do not have to worry about being accepted by God because God has sent his Spirit so that with confidence we can call him 'Abba, Father'. (In Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, Abba is a respectful and intimate name for a father.) Our identity as sons of God the Father is so central and so pervasive in the gospel that J.I Packer wrote, "You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator... 'Father' is the Christian name for God."³

We were slaves of sin and now we are children of God. It would be crazy to go on living as slaves and not to live as children. Freedom does not mean we can sin. That is not freedom. That is going back into slavery. Imagine an alcoholic whose addiction has wrecked his life. Someone kindly puts him through rehab and after several months he leaves, free from his addiction. He is not going to say, "I'm free at last so I'm going to get plastered." That is not freedom. That is returning to his old slavery.

When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:20-23 NLT)

It was Sophie's first day with her adoptive parents. She stalked nervously around her new home, fearing one of the beatings she used to get if something was broken. The toys in her room went untouched. She could not quite believe they were hers. At dinner she secretly stuffed food in her pocket: you never knew where your next meal would come from when you were on the streets. That night she felt so alone in her big room. She would have cried if she had not long since learned to suppress emotion. Now listen to her new mother one year later: "She crawled into bed with me last night, because she was having a bad dream. She curled up next to me, put her head on my chest, told me that she loved me, smiled, and went to sleep. I nearly cried with contentment."

Sophie had a new identity on day one. She had become a child in a new family. But she still lived like a child of the street. Her actions and attitudes were shaped by her old identity. Christians too have been adopted into a new family and given a new identity. We are to live out our new identity—to be who we are. So do not live like a slave when you can live like a child of the King of heaven.

Our identity as God's children is the foundation of who we are now because of Jesus. As God's children, we bear his name everywhere we go. We are his family, his church. Church then is not a place or event. It's who we are. Some implications of being family are that we care for one another and live like God is our Father—we are like him, do what he says, love him and know he loves us.

As God's children, we, like Jesus, are sent to the world so that others may experience what God is like. We are ministers of reconciliation bearing God's message of reconciliation. As we obey Jesus' command to make disciples, God is using us to reconcile people to himself. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21 NIV). We are missionaries.

So what's the motivation to change and live in this new identity? The reason Christians should want to change is to enjoy the freedom from sin and delight in what God gives to us through Jesus. I want to highlight four things from this definition.

First, growing in holiness is not a sad, dutiful drudge. It is about joy. It is discovering true joy – the joy of knowing and serving God. There is self-denial—sometimes hard and painful self-denial—but true self-denial leads to gaining your life (Mark 8:34-37).

Second, gospel change is about living in freedom. We stop living as slaves to sin. We refuse to go back to our chains and to our filth. We live in the wonderful freedom that God gave us. We are free to be the people we should be.

Third, gospel change is about discovering the delight of knowing and serving God. We give up on our sin and in return we get God himself! Our job is to stop grubbing around in the dirt and instead to enjoy knowing God. We give up our cheap imitations and enjoy the real thing. We often think of holiness as a means to an end – the end being the approval of God or the admiration of others. But holiness is the end and the means is God's grace giving Christ for us and the Spirit in us. Our problem is we think of holiness as giving up the pleasures that sin offers for some worthy, but drab life. But holiness is recognizing that the pleasures of sin are empty and temporary while all the time God is inviting us to magnificent, true, full and rich pleasures that last forever.

Fourth, becoming like Jesus is something that God gives to us. It is not an achievement that we offer to God. It is enjoying the new identity he has given us in Christ. It begins with his work for us. He has set us free from sin and offers a relationship with himself.

It is as if there are two feasts. There is the feast of God and there is the feast of sin. We are invited to both. God invites us to find satisfaction in him. Sin entices us with its lies to look for satisfaction in sin. So we are double booked. And all the time we have to choose which feast we attend. We cannot attend both: we cannot feast with God and feast with sin at the same time. This is God's invitation to us:

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. (Isaiah 55:1-2)

Sin promises so much. But it doesn't satisfy and it charges a high price. That price is broken lives, broken relationships, broken hopes. Ultimately the wages of sin is death. But God offers us a feast that satisfies. He offers us delight for our souls. The motivation for change and holiness is this: God's feast is so much better! And the price tag reads 'No cost'. There's no charge. It's his gift. Whose feast are you going to attend today? How can you strengthen your resolve?⁴

Discuss... [10 minutes]

Imagine two homes side by side. In one God is hosting his feast. In the other sin is hosting its feast. Compare the two feasts. What satisfaction do they offer? How lasting and real is that satisfaction? What price must you pay? Do you suspect that you don't really want to change? If so, what do you think might increase your desire?

Exercise [15 minutes]

Let's meditate on what it means to be a child of the Father. Compare slavery to sin to being a child in God's family.

On the cross Jesus cried out: "It is finished." Imagine yourself answering back: "Not quite, there is still some things I need to do to finish the job." Think about how ridiculous and insulting this is.

Write a summary of why you would like to change, putting it in your own words in a way that resonates for you. Add some ideas of how you could strengthen your desire to change.

Later This Week... [5 minutes]

Make plans to do something together this week just to be family together. Maybe you help do yard work at one of your homes and share lunch afterward.... or maybe get all of your families together for dinner one night... or go for a hike... or play a game... or visit a museum... maybe you just go grocery shopping together.

Wrap it Up [5 minutes]

Briefly review what you learned today. Jot down the **Big Picture** ideas in your own words. Discuss any final questions. **Pray** together.

EPILOGUE

The process of becoming more like Jesus will not end until we see him face to face. Here's some parting thoughts as you move forward in your journey as a disciple.

Gospel transformation

We began with Paul's words, "The gospel is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). Stay rooted in the fact that you are not what you do—you are what's been done for you by Jesus.

Continue to walk in the habit of repentance and faith! Use your deepened understanding of the gospel to root out sin in your life. Keep asking, "What does repentance sound like?" and "What does right worship sound like?" Turn from sin and worship God from the heart over and over again.

Change happens in community

We desperately need each other. Speak the truth in love to one another in community. Remind each other of your gospel identity. Let the gospel shape all of your relationships and all of your interactions. Submit the big decisions of your life to a community centered around the gospel.

The mission: make disciples who make disciples

There are only a few things we can do on earth that we can't do in heaven—a couple of them are sin, and make disciples. Jesus has left us here to make disciples. Don't delay in beginning a new DNA relationship. Pursue gospel change with a friend, a neighbor, or someone from your gospel community. Imagine the thrill of leading others to the point of being able to lead someone else towards greater dependence on the Spirit of Christ! There's nothing else like it on earth.