

GOSPEL SHAPED
MERCY

Leader's Guide



GOSPEL SHAPED **MERCY**

Stephen Um



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PRODUCTION TEAM:

AUTHOR:

Stephen Um

SERIES EDITOR FOR THE GOSPEL COALITION:

Collin Hansen

SERIES EDITOR FOR THE GOOD BOOK COMPANY:

Tim Thornborough

MAIN TEACHING SESSION DISCUSSIONS:

Alison Mitchell

DAILY DEVOTIONALS:

Tim Thornborough

BIBLE STUDIES:

Tim Thornborough

EDITORIAL ASSISTANTS:

Jeff Robinson (TGC),
Rachel Jones, Carl Laferton (TGBC)

VIDEO EDITOR:

Phil Grout

PROJECT ADMINISTRATOR:

Jackie Moralee

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER:

Brad Byrd

DESIGN:

André Parker



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PREFACE

GROWING A GOSPEL SHAPED CHURCH

The Gospel Coalition is a group of pastors and churches in the Reformed heritage who delight in the truth and power of the gospel, and who want the gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected to lie at the center of all we cherish, preach and teach.

We want churches called into existence by the gospel to be shaped by the gospel in their everyday life.

Through our fellowship, conferences, and online and printed media, we have sought to encourage pastors and church leaders to calibrate their lives around what is of first importance—the gospel of Christ. In these resources, we want to provide those same pastors with the tools to excite and equip church members with this mindset.

In our foundation documents, we identified five areas that should mark the lives of believers in a local fellowship:

1. Empowered corporate worship
2. Evangelistic effectiveness
3. Counter-cultural community
4. The integration of faith and work
5. The doing of justice and mercy

We believe that a church utterly committed to winsome and theologically substantial expository preaching, and that lives out the gospel in these areas, will display its commitment to dynamic evangelism, apologetics, and church planting. These gospel-shaped churches will emphasize repentance, personal renewal, holiness, and the wonderful life of the church as the body of Christ. At the same time, there will be engagement with the social structures of ordinary people, and cultural engagement with art, business, scholarship and government. The church will be characterized by firm devotion to the truth on the one hand, and by transparent compassion on the other.

The Gospel Coalition believes in the priority of the local church, and that the local church is the best place to discuss these five ministry drivers and decide how to integrate them into life and mission. So, while being clear on the biblical principles, these resources give space to consider what a genuine expression of a gospel-shaped church looks like for you in the place where God has put you, and with the people he has gathered into fellowship with you.

Through formal teaching sessions, daily Bible devotionals, group Bible studies and the regular preaching ministry, it is our hope and prayer that congregations will grow into maturity, and so honor and glorify our great God and Savior.



Don Carson
President

A handwritten signature of Don Carson in black ink.

Tim Keller
Vice President

A handwritten signature of Tim Keller in black ink.



INTRODUCTION

We live in a broken, fractured world that is hungry for the love and grace of Christ.

Many churches are committed to worship, evangelism and Bible ministry—but when it comes to getting involved in works of mercy and compassion, we’re a little more hesitant. Will it somehow take us away from the Bible’s call to make disciples?

But the gospel calls us to works of mercy and compassion. It’s an integral part of our witness to the wider world.

The Christian gospel is wonderful good news for the poor, marginalized and oppressed: God has a plan to restore our troubled world into one of flourishing, beauty, justice and fullness. And the thrilling news for us is that Christ wants his church to be an active part of that plan too.

The Gospel Coalition has included this statement in their Theological Vision for Ministry, entitled, “The doing of justice and mercy.” It begins:

God created both soul and body, and the resurrection of Jesus shows that he is going to redeem both the spiritual and the material. Therefore God is concerned not only for the salvation of souls but also for the relief of poverty, hunger, and injustice.

And it concludes that, both as individual Christians and as whole churches, we have a divine calling to practically demonstrate God’s love for the world:

We must work for the eternal and common good and show our neighbors we love them sacrificially whether they believe as we do or not. Indifference to the poor and disadvantaged means there has not been a true grasp of our salvation by sheer grace.¹

Historically, the Christian church has been in the forefront of showing concern for

¹ You can read the full text of the statement on page 158 of the Handbook

the poor and needy. From the earliest times, they cared for widows. They took in and cared for abandoned orphans. They founded hospitals and cared for the sick, they visited those in prison and they brought relief to the poor. And in more recent times, they have championed social reform to improve life in prisons, to end slavery and to bring in laws that outlaw the exploitation of the poor and helpless.

But more recently, there has been a growing suspicion among evangelical churches about the place of justice and mercy in their everyday congregational lives. They have seen that some churches, and even whole denominations, have eagerly embraced the call to do mercy, but seem to have lost their passion for sharing the gospel of forgiveness of sins through Jesus. They have concluded that this area of Christian life and witness is something to be wary of.

True, there are dangers. But, as we will see in this series, God's call to show his love, justice and mercy to our needy world is both clear and uncompromising.

You might be unsettled as you work through this material and see significant areas where you and your church are holding back from the clear commands of Scripture. Don't give up or try to avoid what the Lord needs to reveal within you and your church. Instead, prayerfully work through these sessions with the happy and humble confidence that God wants to use you in bringing the light of the gospel to our world.

Over the seven sessions of *Gospel Shaped Mercy*, we'll explore God's breathtaking vision for a world put right. And we'll get practical too, as we discuss how your church community can better show the justice, love and mercy of Christ to those around you.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large 'S' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Stephen Um





**MAKING THE MOST OF
GOSPEL SHAPED
CHURCH**



WHAT GOSPEL SHAPED CHURCH WILL DO FOR YOU

God is in the business of changing people and changing churches. He always does that through his gospel.

Through the gospel he changed us from his enemies to his friends, and through the gospel he brought us into a new family to care for each other and to do his will in the world. The gospel brings life and creates churches.

But the gospel of Jesus, God's Son, our Savior and Lord, isn't merely what begins our Christian life and forms new churches. It is the pattern, and provides the impetus, for all that follows. So Paul wrote to the Colossian church:

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving (Colossians 2:6-7).

"As you received ... so walk..." In other words, the secret of growing as a Christian is to continue to reflect upon and build your life on the gospel of the lordship of Jesus Christ. And the secret of growing as a church is to let the gospel inform and energize every single aspect of a church's life, both in what you do and how you do it, from your sermons to young mothers' groups; from your budget decisions and your pastoral care to your buildings maintenance and church bulletins.

Letting the gospel shape a church requires the whole church to be shaped by the gospel. To be, and become, gospel shaped is not a task merely for the senior pastor, or the staff team, or the board of elders. It is something that happens as every member considers the way in which the gospel should continue to shape their walk, and the life of their church.

That is the conviction that lies behind this series of five resources from The Gospel

Coalition. It will invite your church members to be part of the way in which you shape your church according to the unchanging gospel, in your particular culture and circumstances. It will excite and equip your whole church to be gospel shaped. It will envision you together, from senior church staff to your newest believer. It will enable you all to own the vision of a gospel-shaped church, striving to teach that gospel to one another and to reach your community with that gospel. As you continue to work out together the implications of the gospel that has saved us, you will be guided into Christian maturity in all areas of your lives, both personal and corporate.

This resource is for all kinds of churches: large and small; urban and rural; new plants and long-established congregations; all denominations and none. It is for any congregation that has been given life by the gospel and wants to put the gospel at the center of its life.

You can use the five tracks in any order you like—and you can use as many or as few of them as you wish. If you think your church is lacking in one particular area, it will always be helpful to focus on that for a season. But it is our hope that you will plan to run all five parts of the curriculum with your church—perhaps over a 3- or 4-year time frame. Some tracks may be more like revision and confirmation that you are working well in those areas. Others will open up new areas of service and change that you need to reflect upon. But together they will help you grow into an organic maturity as you reflect on the implications of the gospel in every area of life.



HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS CURRICULUM

Because the gospel, as it is articulated in the pages of the Bible, should be the foundation of everything we do, this resource is designed to work best if a congregation gives itself over to exploring the themes together as a whole. That means shaping the whole of church life for a season around the theme. The overall aim is to get the DNA of the gospel into the DNA of your church life, structures, practices and people.

So it is vitally important that you involve as many people in your congregation as possible in the process, so that there is a sense that this is a journey that the whole church has embarked upon together. The more you immerse yourselves in this material, the more you will get from it. But equally, all churches are different, and so this material is flexible enough to fit any and every church program and structure—see page 24 for more details.

Here are some other suggestions for how to make the most of this material.

PREPARE

Work through the material in outline with your leadership team and decide which elements best fit where. Will you use the sermon suggestions, or develop a series of your own? Will you teach through the main sessions in Sunday School, or in midweek groups? Will you use the teaching DVD, or give your own talks?

Think about some of the likely pressure points this discussion will create in your congregation. How will you handle in a constructive way any differences of opinion that come out of this? Decide together how you will handle feedback. There will be many opportunities for congregation members to express their ideas and thoughts, and as you invite them to think about your church's life, they will have many suggestions. It will be overwhelming to have everyone emailing or calling the Senior Pastor; but it will be very frustrating if church members feel they are not truly being listened to, and that nothing will really change. So organize a

system of feedback from group-discussion leaders and Bible-study leaders; make clear which member of senior staff will collect that feedback; and schedule time as a staff team to listen to your members' thoughts, and pray about and consider them.

There is an online feedback form that could be distributed and used to round off the whole track with your congregation.

PROMOTE

Encourage your congregation to buy into the process by promoting it regularly and building anticipation. Show the trailer at all your church meetings and distribute your own customized version of the bulletin insert (download from www.gospelshapedchurch.org).

Embarking on this course together should be a big deal. Make sure your congregation knows what it might mean for them, and what an opportunity it represents in the life of your whole church; and make sure it sounds like an exciting adventure in faith.

Do involve the whole church. Younger children may not be able to grasp the implications of some things, but certainly those who teach and encourage children of 11 and upwards will be able to adapt the material and outlines here to something that is age appropriate.

PRAY

Pray as a leadership team that the Lord would lead you all into new, exciting ways of serving him.

Encourage the congregation to pray. There are plenty of prompts in the material for this to happen, but do pray at your regular meetings for the Lord's help and guidance as you study, think and discuss together. Building in regular prayer times will help your congregation move together as a fellowship. Prayer connects us to God, but it also connects us to each other, as we address our Father together. And our God "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" (Ephesians 3:20) as his people ask him to enable them to grasp, and be shaped by, the love of Christ that is shown to us in his gospel.



FOUR WAYS TO MAKE (OR BREAK) THIS PROCESS

1. BE OPEN TO CHANGE AS A CHURCH

As churches that love the gospel, we should always be reforming to live more and more in line with that gospel. Change isn't always easy, and is often sacrificial; but it is exciting, and part of the way in which we obey our Lord. Approach this exploration of *Gospel Shaped Mercy* by encouraging your church to be willing to change where needed.

2. BE OPEN TO CHANGE YOURSELF

This curriculum will lead every member to think hard about how the gospel should shape, and in some ways re-shape, your church. You are giving them permission to suggest making changes. As a leader, giving such permission is both exciting and intimidating. It will *make* your course if you enter it as a leadership excited to see how your church may change and how you may be challenged. It will *break* it if you approach it hoping or expecting that your members will simply agree in every way with what you have already decided.

3. DISCUSS GRACIOUSLY

Keep talking about grace and community. Church is about serving others and giving up "my" own wants, not about meeting "my" own social preferences and musical tastes. Encourage your membership to pursue discussions that are positive, open and non-judgmental, and to be able to disagree lovingly and consider others' feelings before their own, rather than seeking always to "win." Model gospel grace in the way you talk about the gospel of grace.

4. REMEMBER WHO IS IN CHARGE

Jesus Christ is Lord of your church—not the leadership, the elders or the membership. So this whole process needs to be bathed in a prayerful sense of commitment to follow him, and to depend on his strength and guidance for any change his Spirit is prompting. Keep reminding your church that this process is not about becoming the church they want, but the one your Lord wants.



HOW TO USE
GOSPEL SHAPED
MERCY



HOW TO USE GOSPEL SHAPED MERCY

Gospel Shaped Mercy is designed to be a flexible resource to fit a wide variety of church settings. The **Main Teaching Session** is the core of the curriculum—the other components grow out of this. The more elements you use, the greater the benefit will be to your church.

The elements of this course are:

- **MAIN TEACHING SESSION** with DVD or talk, and discussion (core)
- **PERSONAL DEVOTIONALS** (recommended)
- **GROUP BIBLE STUDY** (recommended)
- **PERSONAL JOURNAL** (optional)
- **SERMON SERIES** (suggested passages given)

Each church member will need a copy of the *Gospel Shaped Mercy Handbook*. This contains everything they need to take part in the course, including the discussion questions for the **Main Teaching Session**, **Personal Devotionals**, and the **Group Bible Study**. There's also space to make notes during the sermon, and a **Personal Journal** to keep a record of the things they have been learning.

Each person who will be leading a group discussion, either in the **Main Teaching Session** or the **Group Bible Study**, will need a copy of the *Gospel Shaped Mercy Leader's Guide*. This includes leader's notes to help them guide a small group through the discussion or Bible-study questions, and other resources to give more background and detail. In the Leader's Guide, all the instructions, questions, comments, prayer points etc. that also appear in the Handbook are in **bold text**.



Further copies of the *Handbook* and *Leader's Guide* are available from **WWW.GOSPELSHAPEDCHURCH.ORG/MERCY**

A FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM

Gospel Shaped Mercy is designed to be a flexible resource. You may be able to give your whole church over to working through it. If so, a typical week might look like this:

SUNDAY

- Adult Sunday school: **Main Teaching Session** using DVD or live talk (talk outline given in *Leader's Guide*)
- Morning service: **Sermon** based on main theme (suggested Bible passages given in the *Leader's Guide*)

MIDWEEK

- Small groups work through the **Group Bible Study**

CHURCH MEMBERS

- Use the **Personal Devotionals** from Monday to Saturday
- Use the **Personal Journal** to record their thoughts, questions and ideas about things they've been learning throughout the week

Or, if you choose to use the curriculum on a midweek basis, it may be like this:

MIDWEEK

- Small groups work through the **Main Teaching Session** using the DVD

CHURCH MEMBERS

- Use the **Personal Devotionals** from Monday to Saturday
- Use the **Personal Journal** to record their thoughts, questions and ideas about things they've been learning throughout the week

Or you can use the components in any other way that suits your church practice.

HOW TO USE EACH ELEMENT

These sample pages from the *Gospel Shaped Mercy Handbook* show the different elements of the curriculum.

All of the material in this curriculum quotes from and is based on the ESV Bible.



MAIN TEACHING SESSION

- 60 minutes
- Choose between DVD or live talk
- Discussion questions to help group members discuss the DVD/talk and apply it to their own lives and their church
- Guidance for answering the questions is given in the *Leader's Guide*
- Suggestions for praying together

This is the core of the curriculum. It can be run using the *Gospel Shaped Mercy DVD*, or by giving a live talk. A summary of the talk is included in the *Leader's Guide* (see page 34 for an example). A full editable script can also be downloaded from www.gospelshapedchurch.org/mercy/talks.

In each session, the DVD/talk is split into either two or three sections, each followed by some discussion questions. At the end of the session there are suggestions to help the group pray specifically for each other.

The discussion questions are designed to help church members unpack the teaching they have heard and apply it to their own lives and to the church as a whole. There are not necessarily right and wrong answers to some of the questions, as this will often depend on the context of your own church. Let group members discuss these openly, and apply them to their own situation.

Keep the discussion groups the same each week if possible, with the same leader (who will need a copy of this *Leader's Guide*) for each group, so that relationships are deepened and the discussions can build on those of previous sessions.



PERSONAL DEVOTIONALS

- Six devotionals with each session
- Designed to be started the day after the main teaching session
- Linked with the theme for each teaching session, but based on different Bible passages
- Help church members dig more deeply into the theme on a daily basis

Each session is followed by six personal devotionals that build on the main theme. They are ideal for church members to use between sessions. For example, if you have the main teaching session on a Sunday, church members can then use the devotionals from Monday to Saturday.

These short devotionals can be used in addition to any regular personal Bible study being done by church members. They would also form a useful introduction for anyone trying out personal Bible reading for the first time.

As well as being in the group member's **Handbook**, the personal devotionals are available for a small fee on the Explore Bible Devotional app. This can be downloaded from the iTunes App Store or Google Play (search for "Explore Bible Devotional"). Select "Gospel Shaped Mercy" from the app's download menu.



PERSONAL JOURNAL

- A useful place for church members to note down what they have been learning throughout the week, and any questions they may have



SERMON NOTES

- If the Sunday sermon series is running as part of **Gospel Shaped Mercy**, this is a helpful place to make notes



GROUP BIBLE STUDY

- 40 – 50 minutes
- An ideal way for small groups to build on what they have been learning in the main teaching
- Uses a different Bible passage from the DVD/talk
- Suggested answers to the questions are given in the **Leader's Guide**

This study is ideal for a home group or other group to work through together. It builds on the theme covered by the main teaching session, but is based on a different Bible passage. You can see the passages and themes listed in the grid on pages 28-29.

If possible, give 40 – 50 minutes for the Bible study. However, it can be covered in 30 minutes if necessary, and if you keep a close eye on time. If your church is not using the Bible studies as part of a regular group, they would also be suitable for individuals to do on their own or in a pair if they want to do some further study on the themes being looked at in the course.

SERMON SUGGESTIONS

The **Leader's Guide** gives a choice of three sermon suggestions to tie in with each session:

- A passage that is used in the main teaching session (DVD or live talk)
- The Bible reading that is being studied in the Group Bible Study that week
- A third passage that is not being used elsewhere, but that picks up on the same themes. This is the passage that is listed in the overview grid on pages 28-29.

FURTHER READING

At the end of each session in the **Leader's Guide** you will find a page of suggestions for further reading. This gives ideas for books, articles, blog posts, videos, etc. that relate to the session, together with some quotes that you might use in sermons, discussion groups and conversations. Some of these may be helpful in your preparation, as well as helping any group members who want to think more deeply about the topic they've been discussing.

CURRICULUM OUTLINE AT A GLANCE

SESSION	MAIN TEACHING (DVD/TALK)	PERSONAL DEVOTIONS	GROUP BIBLE STUDY	SERMON*
1 Shalom: The World Made Beautiful	God designed and desires <i>shalom</i> —wholeness, flourishing and fullness. Based on Genesis 1 – 3 and Romans 8:23 .	How sin has led to <i>shalom</i> breaking down in all areas: spiritually, relationally, in creation, in our institutions, and in ourselves personally. (Various passages)	A look at what <i>shalom</i> will look like in the future, and how this changes our present, from Revelation 21:1-8 and 22:1-5 .	MARK 5:21-43
2 Justice: Wrongs Made Right	We do justice because God does justice. He wants his people to act on behalf of the oppressed and the outsiders. Amos 5:21-24 and Psalms 146:5-9 .	Snapshots of God's justice to train our hearts to love justice as our Father does. (Various passages)	A closer look at Amos 5 shows that when God's people do not care for the needs of the poor and oppressed, this is false religion.	JOHN 8:1-11
3 Love: The Heart of Compassion	God calls his people to a life of love: self-sacrifice, empathy and compassion. We can't do this on our own; we need the Lord of love to transform us. Based on 1 John 3:11-24 .	What is love? A walk through Paul's famous description of love in 1 Corinthians 13 .	1 John 4 shows us what the expression of genuine Christian love looks like.	DEUT 10:12-19
4 Mercy: Hearts Made Soft	Mercy is love in action on behalf of those in need, in response to our Shepherd's mercy to us. Based on Matthew 25:31-46 and 2 Corinthians 8:9 .	A careful look at Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 .	Acts 6 shows us how the early church balanced the gospel call to provide for the needy with maintaining a focus on the work of gospel outreach.	MICAH 6:8

SESSION	MAIN TEACHING (DVD/TALK)	PERSONAL DEVOTIONS	GROUP BIBLE STUDY	SERMON*
5 Generosity: Stewarding God's Money	What does the unjust use of money look like? How does the gospel enable generosity? Based on James 2:1-10; 5:2-6 .	Key things Jesus said about money in six Gospel passages.	Checking our attitude toward giving against Paul's description of gospel generosity in 1 Corinthians 8:1-15 .	LUKE 12:16-21
6 Reconcilia- tion: Relation- ships Healed	Reconciliation is something we receive from God, and something we must pursue urgently with others. Based on Matthew 5:21-26 and Colossians 1:19-20 .	Readings to help us see the challenge and opportunity of our calling to be peacemakers. (Various passages)	We see from Philippians 4:2-7 how to help bring reconciliation to others in our church community and beyond.	MATTHEW 18:15
7 Diversity: Community Enriched	God's intention for eternity is to bring about beautiful unity-in-diversity through his Son. Based on Luke 10:25-37 and Revelation 7:9-17 .	Trace the story of unity and diversity through the Bible, starting in Genesis 11 and ending in Revelation 7 .	Acts 11:1-26 shows us that struggling with racial division and suspicion in the church is nothing new, and encourages us to persevere in the pursuit of diversity.	MICAH 6:6-8

* **NOTE:** The *Leader's Guide* gives three sermon suggestions to tie in with each session. The first picks up a passage from the Main Teaching Session; the second uses the passage from the Group Bible Study; and the third is a new passage, linked with the theme but not used elsewhere in the session. This third passage is the one listed here.



DOWNLOADS

In addition to the material in this *Leader's Guide*, there are a number of extra downloadable resources and enhancements. You will find all of them listed under the Mercy track at www.gospelshapedchurch.org and on The Good Book Company's website: www.thegoodbook.com/gsc.

- **DIGITAL DOWNLOAD OF DVD MATERIAL.** If you have already bought a DVD as part of the *Leader's Kit*, you will have access to a single HD download of the material using the code on the download card. If you want to download additional digital copies, in SD or HD, these can be purchased from The Good Book Company website: www.thegoodbook.com/gsc.
- **DVD TRAILERS.** Trailers and promotional pieces for the series as a whole and for the individual tracks can be downloaded for free. Use these trailers to excite your church about being involved in *Gospel Shaped Church*.
- **TALK TRANSCRIPTS.** We're conscious that for some churches and situations, it may be better to deliver your own talk for the main session so that it can be tailored specifically to your people and context. You can download the talk transcript as both a PDF and as an editable Word document.
- **FEEDBACK FORMS.** Because *Gospel Shaped Church* is designed as a whole-church exploration, it's important that you think through carefully how you will handle suggestions and feedback. There's some guidance for that on pages 17-18. We've provided a downloadable feedback form that you can use as part of the way in which you end your time using the resource. Simply print it and distribute it to your church membership to gather their thoughts and ideas, and to get a sense of the issues you may want to focus on for the future. In addition, there are also fully editable versions of this feedback form so that you can create your own customized sheet that works effectively for the way in which you have used this material, and which suits your church membership. Alternatively, you could use the questions to create your own online feedback form with Google Forms or some other software, to make collecting and collating information easier.

- **RESOURCE LIST.** For each session in this *Leader's Guide* we have included a list of resources that will help you in your preparation for sermons, discussions, Bible studies and other conversations. On the *Gospel Shaped Church* website, you will find an up-to-date list of resources, plus a shorter downloadable list that you might consider giving to church members to supplement their own reading and thinking.
- **BULLETIN TEMPLATES.** Enclosed with the *Leader's Kit* is a sample of a bulletin-insert design to promote the Mercy track to your church. You can download a printable PDF of the design from the *Gospel Shaped Church* website to add your own details, and to print and distribute to your congregation.
- **OTHER PROMOTIONAL MATERIAL.** Editable powerpoint slides and other promotional material to use.



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