

# GOSPEL FLUENCY

## WHY DO I NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL?

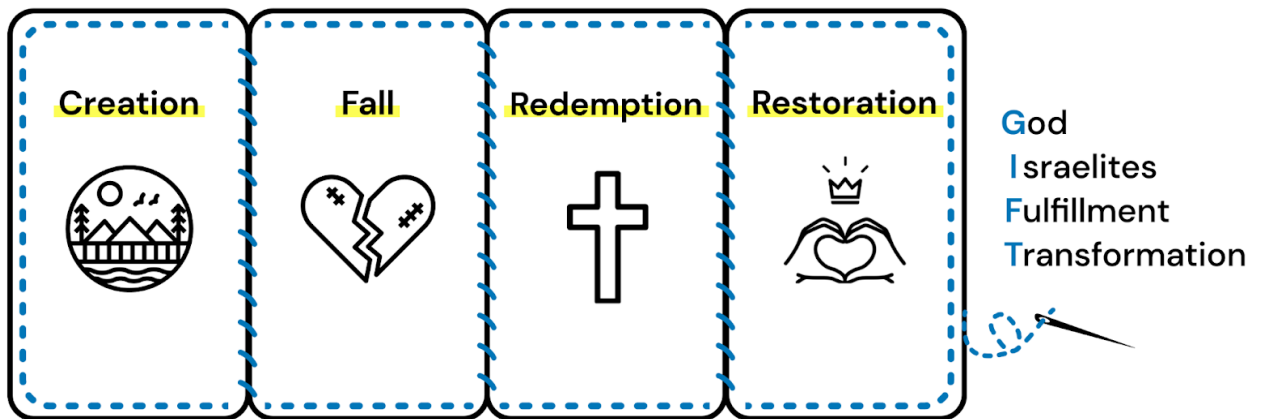
What sets a Christian apart from a good-willed atheist when both are described to be compassionate, willing to love and help those around them selflessly? What if they both uphold high moral standards appearing to have a grateful and positive outlook on life? In the eyes of the world, Christians are often labeled as 'nice' or upholding certain 'morals' in speech and conduct. But beyond performing good deeds in order to gain approval from society or preservation of one's own image, Christians are called to act differently because of the Gospel story that radically transforms our view of ourselves, others and the world.

Without the Gospel, one can still justify themselves as a good person by adhering to certain moral standards through superficial behavior modification. However, the Gospel reveals that sin is inherent to human nature, therefore, we are morally inadequate before the perfect and just God. Without the Gospel, our good deeds or philosophy of life may spring from a deep insecurity and desire for external approval. But the good news is that God has lavished His love upon us and sent His son to die on the cross so that we can be called His children (1 John 3:1). Understanding the gospel is so crucial because it gives us the humble awareness of our inability to measure up through works, yet giving us the glorious confidence in Jesus Christ who has not left us condemned for our sins but instead justified us (Romans 8:1). Though our Christian life may not be free of insecurities and self-righteousness, we can continue to seek God and re-align ourselves to the Gospel truth time and time again.

In our daily lives understanding the Gospel and delving into the word of God spiritually feeds us and we put on the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). As a result we are prepared for the things life sends our way; financial hardships, struggles with family or friends and battling mental health issues. We do not face these hardships alone but have the word of God as our sword and shield. As you would revise for an exam in order to be prepared we must take time to get to know God's word to be ready to fight the struggles a sinful world will present. By turning to the gospel God will also begin a bigger and lifelong process to reshape our behavior from the inside out. Consequently, Gospel fluency does not just prepare us for daily struggles but changes the way we look at the world, the choices we will make, our future families we may start and so on. Ultimately we are multiplying his kingdom as we become more oriented to God's Mission and pursue the things that have eternal significance (Colossians 3:2).

## THE GOSPEL PARADIGM

The foundations of the Gospel story can be summarized into 4 main parts: Creation - Fall - Redemption - Restoration, involving 4 factors: **God - Israelites - Fulfillment - Transformation**. depicted in the diagram below:



### **Creation**

The Gospel story starts with creation where **God graciously chose to create a beautiful world and gifted it to us to steward**. He also reached out to have a relationship with us by establishing a covenant with mankind. This is told in the book of Genesis, where God the creator of all things — the heavens and the earth — made everything on earth 'good'. However, when it comes to mankind, male and female (Adam and Eve) — He described them to be 'very good' and called them to 'bear His image and likeness'. We were created distinctively with a purpose and mandate in mind and everything was sinless (Genesis 1-2).

### **Fall**

However, in Genesis 3, we start to see the downfall of mankind as Adam and Eve decided to rebel against God the creator by sinning against Him. Ever since then, man has been born bearing sin, including us. **The nature of sin is pervasive and damaging sin. Through the Israelites, we see that our tendency is to keep falling into sin over and over again. They could be in one moment deciding to obey and trust in God, but another moment it completely shifted to complaining and taking God for granted.** We are now alienated from God, alienated from each other, and alienated from the rest of creation. We no longer respond in the way we were created, with peace and unity. As a result, we are incapable of having a pure view of the world and living according to God's original design. Instead, we are governed by our own rules and develop a human paradigm that is corrupted by sin which results in suffering and pain.

### **Redemption**

Nevertheless, God chose to keep His covenant and did not abandon the humans He created. After the downfall of man in Eden, He promised that He will one day crush the source of sin under his feet (Genesis 3:15). Then later on this is reiterated with Noah as He re-established His covenant with us and His creations, using a rainbow as a symbol of this promise after the great flood (Genesis 9). For the rest of the Old Testament, through the Israelites the chosen nation, God's covenant remained in display through His relentless pursuit of Israel, even after humanity kept falling short and decided to sin against Him. Yet, the entire account also entails a greater thing: no matter how much God gives us a chance, we are insufficient to redeem ourselves and we need something greater. The only way we can be fully restored is by the Salvation that Jesus Christ brought through His birth, death, and resurrection. He needed to come down to the world to live the perfect life that we could not live, to become a perfect sacrifice for our redemption. **Through Jesus Christ, God's redemptive plan is finally fulfilled.**

## **Restoration**

Through Christ dying on the cross, we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). We are saved from the punishment that we deserve out of our sinfulness. We are also enabled to live out our original design, where our brokenness is restored and our relationships with God, others, the rest of creations are all reconciled. Not only that, we are now invited to participate in God's covenant and to help establish his Kingdom on earth – bringing justice and healing to the world, sharing the hope of Salvation that is readily available to all mankind. Christ's redemption demolishes the human paradigm and helps us to view everything with the Gospel paradigm in mind — “who is God?”, “what has God done?”, “how has God been good to me?”, “how can I respond in light of who He is and what He has done?”. The Gospel paradigm revolves around who Jesus is and what Jesus has done. This Gospel is “the power of God for salvation to all who believe” (Romans 1:16).

**For us, as we understand the Gospel deeper, we can experience the transformative power of what Jesus has done for us.** Even if we continue in the cycle of sin, there is hope that God will restore us to be more and more like Christ on this earth until we ultimately meet Him face to face in heaven.

## **GOD'S HEART THROUGH THE GOSPEL**

The Gospel story captures God's redemptive plan that progressively unfolds throughout the Bible, in both Old and New Testament, from Genesis to Revelation. Not only that it reveals His grand plan, it also communicates His characters and His heart.

### **Creation**

The Gospel story is a story of a **generous** God. As the story begins with creation, God presents Himself as the **uncreated, independent, self-sufficient** God. He does not need anything or anyone to sustain His existence. In His ability to create and rule, He shows that He alone is **powerful** and **sovereign**. Yet, out of His generosity, He shares existence with all of His creation. Not only that, He goes out of His way to share His image with us (mankind) and allows us to participate in His story. This depicts His **relational** nature.

Highlighted God's characters:

generous; relational; omnipresence (uncreated, independent, self-sufficient); omnipotence (powerful, sovereign)

### **Fall**

The fall of mankind into sin is significant, pervasive, and damaging because it is a sign of our rebellion against a **holy** God. As Adam and Eve who disobeyed God's commands and sought power for themselves (Genesis 3), they defiled the God who is in creation and broke the covenant that God has made with them. Therefore, God, who cannot tolerate wrong, must act with holy **justice** in response to this rebellion. Yet, God is **merciful** and **forgiving**. He did not leave us to battle sin alone for the rest of our lives. He could have used anger to not only curse Adam and Eve but to leave them to burn in hell for eternity due to their sinfulness. Instead, He chooses to let mankind live and continually shows mercy even when the Israelites or us now fall into sin over and over again. Our sinful nature will never allow us to have a close relationship with God, but He still pursues us.

Highlighted God's characters:

holy; just; merciful; forgiving

### **Redemption**

God loves us so much that He sent His only Son to be the atonement for our sins (John 3:16). This shows God's *redemptive* power and that He is **unconditionally loving** and **faithful**. His promise of salvation and redemption was completed when Jesus died and resurrected from the cross, fulfilling the prophecy God has promised hundreds of years before (Numbers 24:17). His work is **absolute** and **indisputable**, it is once and finished. He is still the same God who will judge our sin at the end of days but he does not doom us to this fate, each of us has a chance to declare faith in Him and be saved (Romans 10:9-10).

Highlighted God's characters:

unconditional; loving; faithful; absolute; indisputable; powerful

### **Restoration**

What Jesus did is a source of **hope** and **joy** that ought to move us in faith to live a life that is pleasing to God (Romans 12:1). Though His work on the Cross has finished, He has not stopped working. As we look forward to eternal life where we will never be separated from His love again (Romans 8:31), He will continue the work that has begun in us (Philippians 1:6). He is still **actively pursuing** us and **transforming** us to be more like Him, in His image and likeness like what we were meant to be (Philippians 1:6). The hope that we have in Christ is never meant to be kept to ourselves but provided to all men (John 12:32). The Good News invites us to think beyond ourselves, to look out for each other and fulfill the great commission. It also moves us even more to proclaim about Christ to those who have not heard.

His characters which have been mentioned are few and His goodness and power cannot be explained in a few paragraphs. So as you continue to be more Gospel fluent, it will become evident that God's Characters are **constant** and **consistent**, endlessly highlighted throughout the Gospel. We have a whole lifetime to read His word and discover more about him. Do not wait, start now for there will always be more to learn.

Highlighted God's characters:

bringing hope and joy; actively pursuing and transforming; constant; consistent; just; merciful

## THE DANGER OF 'TRUNCATED' GOSPEL

Knowing the Gospel as a whole helps us to constantly go deeper in understanding God's love and what Jesus has done on the cross for us. However, we may view our relationship with God as a transactional relationship, expecting Him to bless us if we read the Bible everyday or pray to Him every so often. Or perhaps you find it hard to fully surrender and trust in how God has created you. Oftentimes this is because people fall into the danger of a truncated Gospel. Truncated means 'shortened' or 'without its top or end section'. Thus, a truncated Gospel means partial, incomplete, broken understanding of the Gospel. When we only focus on a truncated Gospel, our view of God will be distorted as we are not understanding His Word in its whole perfection (Timothy 3:16-17).

One example is a 'Vertical' Truncated Gospel. If we only focus on the Fall and Redemptive part of the Gospel and fail to see any connection with Creation and Restoration, we will forget the real purpose of God's heart for us. This truth is that He had an amazing and perfect plan for us and the world, and continues to fulfill that until all on earth can know Him and see His invisible qualities (Romans 1:20). In our sinfulness we can mistakenly view the Gospel as a 'salvation-only' solution. Either we will constantly feel we are unworthy and can not measure up or we will take salvation for granted thinking we are redeemed and forgiven no matter what we continue to do. This understanding of the Gospel only focuses on our vertical relationship with God, how we sinned and how he saved us, end of story, which is not the case.

Few examples of how '**Vertical**' **Truncated Gospel** plays out:

**Scenario 1:**

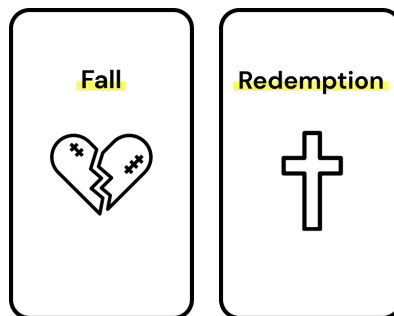
A accepted Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior 3 years ago. Since accepting Christ, A has grown to be comfortable in their own Christian bubble and becomes very cautious to befriend pre-Christians, because A thinks that they are not good enough and hence they are not saved. A also sees them as a bad influence and potential threat for personal holiness.

**Scenario 2:**

B is really diligent in doing SOAP. B never misses a day. B likes to make comments about how other people's SOAPS look, and also easily gets triggered when people miss doing SOAP for a couple days. However, when other people bring up B's issue, B gets really offended.

**Scenario 3:**

C is serving faithfully in church but is just going through the motions with things. C also falls into the mindset that if they do not serve, they are not 'right' with God. C does not think what Jesus has done on the cross is enough to make them feel worthy and loved.



*Vertical Truncated Gospel – focuses on the 'Fall' and 'Redemption'*

Another example is a 'Horizontal' Truncated Gospel. This is where we only focus on the Creation and Restoration part of the Gospel and fail to see any connection with Fall and Redemption. Thus, we will overlook the reality that we cannot save ourselves and try to work things out in our own strength. As a result, we become more focused on altruistic characters such as goodness, justice, equality, do a lot of good deeds to be all those qualities, yet, fail to see that there is a God who loves us and only He has the power to redeem and give our suffering world eternal hope. Therefore, we must understand God's heart in wanting to redeem us despite our sins as this will encourage us to witness to others so that they can experience the same (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Few examples of how '**Horizontal**' **Truncated Gospel** plays out:

**Scenario 1:**

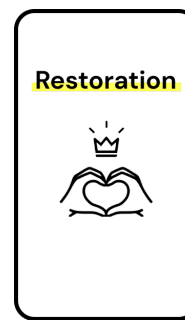
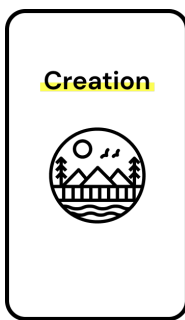
X is very passionate about domestic issues, especially when it comes to topics that touch upon women empowerment. X is active and engaged in the social movements related to women empowerment. However, X gets really defensive and judgmental when people do not agree with the same views or challenges them in any way.

**Scenario 2:**

Y grew up in a stable Christian family, except that Y's parents were very demanding, which made Y an overachiever. Whenever Y did not get good grades, it was very much expected that Y would hear a lot of criticism. Y is now working in a multinational company, in a good career on track to being a top performer. However, Y is constantly anxious and fearful, especially when someone makes a comment about Y's work. Y is never satisfied and constantly seeks for affirmation by trying to work harder and achieve more.

**Scenario 3:**

Z thinks being a Sunday Christian is enough, as long as Z is being kind and doing good things in several context of his life, for example in family, friendships and workplace. Z only holds on to the idea that he is sinful and Jesus died for his sins, but do not see Christianity beyond that. Z cannot explain the Gospel to people or see the need to invite people to get to know Jesus.



*Horizontal Truncated Gospel – focuses on the 'Creation' and 'Restoration'*

As displayed above, when our view of God is distorted due to holding on to a truncated Gospel, we will not fully understand the power of the Gospel and how it can impact not only our lives but others. Thus, we must view scripture in the light of Creation, Fall, Redemption and Restoration for all these stages are highlighted in his word. For because He created us and loves us, He sought to redeem us and restore us to His original plan and what separated us from Him was the fall. Therefore, as we understand His will to see us have a relationship with Him we align ourselves to His heart and also want to bring others into His kingdom, fulfilling the great commission He calls all of us to (Matthew 28:16-20).