

GOSPEL SHAPED
MERCY

Handbook



GOSPEL SHAPED MERCY

Stephen Um



TGC THE GOSPEL
COALITION

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Gospel Shaped Mercy Handbook
© The Gospel Coalition / The Good Book Company 2017

Published by:
The Good Book Company
Tel (US): 866 244 2165
Tel (UK): 0333 123 0880
Email (US): info@thegoodbook.com
Email (UK): info@thegoodbook.co.uk

Websites:
North America: www.thegoodbook.com
UK: www.thegoodbook.co.uk
Australia: www.thegoodbook.com.au
New Zealand: www.thegoodbook.co.nz

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ISBN: 9781909919532 Printed in India



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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 in black ink that reads "Don Carson".

Tim Keller
Vice President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy J. Keller".



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 the poor and needy. From the earliest times, Christians 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

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

and end slavery, and have fought for 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 life. 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.



Stephen Um





HOW TO USE GOSPEL SHAPED MERCY



MAIN TEACHING SESSION This session combines watching short talks on a DVD or listening to “live” talks with times for discussion. These prompt you to think about what you have heard and how it might apply to your church and cultural context. Bear in mind that there is not necessarily a “right answer” to every question!



DEVOTIONALS Each session comes with six daily personal devotionals. These look at passages that are linked to the theme of the Main Teaching Session, and are for you to read and meditate on at home through the week after the session. You may like to do them in addition to or instead of your usual daily devotionals, or use them to begin such a practice.



JOURNAL As you reflect on what you have learned as a group and in your personal devotionals, use this page to record the main truths that have struck you, things you need to pray about, and issues you’d like to discuss further or questions you’d like to ask.



BIBLE STUDY As part of this curriculum, your church may be running weekly Bible Studies as well as the Main Teaching Sessions. These look more closely at a passage and help you focus on an aspect of the Main Teaching Session. If your church is not using this part of the curriculum, you could work through it on your own or with another church member.



SERMON NOTES Your church’s preaching program may be following this curriculum; space has been provided for you to make notes on these sermons in your Handbook.



SESSION 1:

SHALOM: THE WORLD MADE BEAUTIFUL

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE BIBLE, WE GET A BREATHTAKING VISION OF THE WAY THE WORLD IS MEANT TO BE. IT'S A PLACE OF WHOLENESS, FLOURISHING AND FULLNESS – IN OTHER WORDS, SHALOM. BUT AS WE LOOK AT THE WORLD AROUND US TODAY, WE SEE BROKENNESS, HURT AND EXPLOITATION. WHY? AND WHAT IS GOD DOING ABOUT IT? IN THIS SESSION WE'LL SEE WHAT GOD HAS DONE, AND IS DOING, TO RESTORE SHALOM TO HIS CREATION.



SHALOM: THE WORLD MADE BEAUTIFUL

Discuss

What comes into your mind when you hear the word *shalom*?

WATCH DVD 1.1 OR LISTEN TO TALK 1.1

Discuss

"Shalom is both the absence of conflict and the presence of wholeness."
Which part of this definition do you find most appealing, and why?



**GENESIS 1:26-28**

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. ²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Discuss

"Humans are the only creatures created in the image of God. That means we have an inherent dignity that is different from everything else. This is the grounding principle for everything we are going to consider about social justice, mercy and compassion."

Why do you think our role as image-bearers is so important for how we think about social justice, mercy and compassion?

As God's image-bearers, Adam and Eve were meant to be royal caretakers of the world (Genesis 1:28). How did they fail at this task? (See Genesis 2:15-17 and 3:6.)

Jesus was the Royal Caretaker of the world. How did he succeed at this task?
(See Genesis 3:15 and Colossians 1:19-20.)

"Sin vandalizes shalom and destroys it." Can you think of some examples of this in your home, your neighborhood, and your country?

 **WATCH DVD 1.3 OR LISTEN TO TALK 1.3**

Discuss

“The Christian experience of shalom is held in an ‘already/not yet’ tension.”
Complete the table below to see some examples of this.

ALREADY	NOT YET
Jesus has already made peace by his blood	
Jesus has already defeated death by his own death and resurrection	
	Jesus is coming back to finally establish <i>shalom</i>
Christians are already adopted by God	
	In the new creation all things will be made new

While we wait for Jesus to return, we live in a fallen world. We don’t fully experience *shalom*. What difference does it make to our daily lives that we can be confident that one day we will experience full, lasting *shalom*?

Pray



REVELATION 21:1-5

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ⁵ And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."

LOOK FORWARD to the coming of the new creation, when there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain. Thank God that you have such perfect *shalom* to look forward to.

LOOK BACK to the death and resurrection of Jesus, which makes this perfect *shalom* possible. Thank God for sending his own Son, Jesus, to do this for us.

LOOK AROUND at your group, your church and your neighborhood. Ask God to help your church family to live in a way that honors him and brings *shalom* as far as you are able to.



DAILY BIBLE DEVOTIONALS

The world was created good, but the fall has stripped *shalom* from every area of life: spiritually, relationally, in creation, in our institutions, and in ourselves personally.

Day 1

GENESIS 3:8-24

"What is this that you have done?"

After the man and woman ate the fruit from the forbidden tree:

Q: *What details point to the separation that now exists between man and God?*

Q: *What details point to God's continuing love for them and future plans?*

The man and woman hid from God, but were then cursed and expelled from Eden as the inevitable consequence of grasping at being like God. But woven throughout are indications of his love: he made clothes for them; he promised the crushing of the serpent; and even the expulsion from Eden can be seen as protecting them from a more damaging act of rebellion.

Our problem is not so much that we *break* rules; it is that we feel free to *make* rules—as though we know better than God. Every one of us is born into Adam's sinful mindset, and experiences separation from God as a result.

PRAY: *Almighty God, thank you that you love and care for me, even though I have rebelled against you. Help me to face up to my sin and to rejoice in your love for sinners like me. Amen.*

Day 2

EPHESIANS 2:1-3

"You were dead..."

Not just separated from God in the way we might be apart from a friend for a while. The consequences of sin are much, much greater.

Q: *What "trinity of evil" is at work in our lives in these verses?*

Q: *What is the ultimate consequence (v 3)?*

The world, the flesh and the devil all work together to confirm our sinful status. The world squeezes us into its mold, and the devil whispers temptations in our ears. We complain, "It's not my fault!" but we are wrong. The world and the devil are just encouraging us to do *what we want*. Our bodily desires and corrupt minds (v 3) are happy to listen to temptation, and to go along with the way the world works. The tragic consequence for all mankind is that we are subject to the wrath of God.

This grim picture should leave us lost and depressed, but before you pray, take a look at verses 4 and 5 for some hope...

PRAY: *Lord, I am lost without you. I listen to the devil's lies; I give in to the pressure of the world; I have a corrupt mind and heart. But thank you that you have not left me there.*

Day 3

**GENESIS 3:17-18;
ROMANS 8:18-23**

"Cursed is the ground because of you..."

It's easy to detect how sin has vandalized the *shalom* of creation. Anyone with a garden knows about weeds. But it runs so much deeper...

Q: Read Romans 8:18-23. How does creation "feel"? Why?

Q: What is the ultimate destiny of creation? How does it share this with Christians?

There is nothing more glorious and awe-inspiring than an amazing sunset, a dramatic cliff-top view or a star-filled sky. And yet this is creation *frustrated*! It does not work as it should (earthquakes, tsunamis, storms); it is not as beautiful as it should be. And when it is pillaged by humankind, it can be downright ugly.

But that is not its end. This passage promises a more glorious future. Just as creation has been caught up in the fall with men and women, so it will be caught up in redemption and fulfillment with those who belong to Jesus. Imagine the Grand Canyon—but better! But for now, the experience is one of frustration and eager waiting. For now we must care for creation—the land, the air, the animal world—and steward it as a resource; but we know that though it shares in our ruin, it will be part of our more glorious future.

PRAY: Thank God for the joy and beauty of creation, and ask for his help to be a responsible steward of our frustrated world.

Day 4

DANIEL 3:1-18; ROMANS 13:1

"Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold..."

It is in the nature of governments to outstrip their authority, because governments are made up of sinful, fallen people, whose instinct is, like Nebuchadnezzar, to play God. And yet the Bible is consistent in urging us to be subject to authorities—even when they are bad, wrong and oppressive.

Q: Read Romans 13:1. Why are we to be subject to authorities?

Q: Where have you seen the fall evidenced at all levels of government?

It's not just the high-profile scandals of corrupt leaders, or the power-hungry dictators that show the institutional effects of sin. We see it in the minor official who denies a request just because they can, or the poor administration of a local school, or the lax performance of refuse collectors. But how do Christians live in a world like this—filled with minor frustrations?

We live in the "in-between times"—after Christ has won redemption on the cross, but before that redemption is fully revealed when he returns. Christians are called to be obedient to government and to pray for our leaders. We both understand the fallenness of *all* human institutions and also have a deep trust in the sovereignty of God over all things.

PRAY: Pray you would honor your government, and work to encourage and improve it.

*Day 5***GENESIS 4; PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11**

"Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him."

Murder is perhaps the ultimate expression of the breakdown of a relationship, and it's right there in the chapter following the description of the fall. Subsequently, we repeatedly read about disastrous marriages, ruined relationships and failed families. A family is where the fruitful flourishing of *shalom* should be most evident; but we could list countless examples of failure from Cain and Abel, Noah and Abraham through to David and Solomon, and their successors. We are the same today.

Q: *Why are the commands of Philippians 2:3-4 so difficult for us to keep?*

Q: *Where do Christians look for our example for good relationships?*

While we live in the "in-between times," there will be a constant need for forgiveness, humility and self-sacrifice, if we are to work against our sinful instinct to fall out with people and divide. While Adam and all who follow him grasp for God-like power to make the rules and get the glory, Jesus was willing to let go of it all, in order to love us, serve us, and ultimately rescue us. We must expect sin-riddled relationships to be difficult. But in Christ we have both his example and the Spirit's power to live differently.

PRAY: *Thank you, Lord, for my friends and family. Help me to follow Jesus as I seek to live in peace and love with them. Amen.*

*Day 6***PSALM 34:15-22**

In this world broken things are just thrown away; damaged goods are rejected. Our world is full of people with broken hearts, broken spirits and broken relationships.

Q: *What bitter truths does this psalm acknowledge are a real part of our lives?*

Q: *What encouragements are there for us as we wrestle with this reality?*

Brokenness shows itself in a thousand small ways every day. How we think; how we talk; the decisions we make; the things we ignore; the things we get obsessed with. Brokenness is easy to spot at the extremes, with mental breakdowns, an inability to form or keep relationships, or in drug or alcohol abuse. But it is a subtle ever-present reality in all of us, which we do well to acknowledge before the Lord and each other.

The wonderful promise is that the Lord is close to us when we are at our most downcast and most defeated. When we reach our lowest point, he is there waiting for us, assuring us of his love and understanding, and the security of our status with him.

Q: *How can you show the Lord's mercy and grace to people you know who are brokenhearted or spirit-crushed (v 18)?*

PRAY: *Thank you, Father, that you are close to me in Christ—especially when I am at my weakest. Please give me opportunities today to share your loving concern and support with those I meet and spend time with. Amen.*



JOURNAL

What I've learned or been particularly struck by this week...

What I want to change in my perspectives or actions as a result of this week...

Things I would like to think about more or discuss with others at my church...



BIBLE STUDY

Discuss

If you asked people in the street to describe the world they would love to live in, what kind of answers would they give? What does this show about people in general?



READ REVELATION 21:1-8; 22:1-5

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more...

1. What surprises you about this new world (21:1-2)?

2. What will this new world be like? How is it like the picture of Eden in Genesis 2?

Why are these qualities of eternal life so attractive to us?

3. Who is at the center of this new world?

4. In the death of Jesus, we have been shown justice, mercy, compassion and inclusion. Christians have always worked to model these qualities in their personal lives, in the lives of their churches, and in the wider world. Where have Christians gone wrong when thinking about working for these qualities in these three areas? How does Revelation help us with this issue?

5. How will the sure promise of the new creation help us when:

- we are tempted to give up our faith because of opposition?

- we want to give up working for justice, inclusion and mercy in a world that is unfair?

- we are overwhelmed by the needs we see in our world?

6. How can this understanding of where we have come from and where we are going help us share the gospel with others?

Apply

FOR YOURSELF: Which aspect of our fallenness do you feel most keenly? Which aspect of the new creation are you most looking forward to? Do you think you are involved too much or too little in working in your family, neighborhood or world to pursue *shalom*?

FOR YOUR CHURCH: Do you think this area of our gospel response is too small or too great as a congregation? What are you hoping to get out of this series as you study, think, discuss and pray together?

Pray

FOR YOUR GROUP: Ask God to fill you with a sense of assurance and joy about his promise that all things will be made new in the new creation.

FOR YOUR CHURCH: Pray that, both as individuals and as a church, you would find ways to express the justice, mercy, inclusion and compassion you have experienced in the gospel, both to each other, and to the wider world.



SERMON NOTES

Bible passage:

Date:

Lined area for sermon notes.

