

**GOSPEL SHAPED**  
**LIVING**

*Leader's Guide*





**GOSPEL SHAPED**  
**LIVING**

*Vernon Pierre*



**TGC** THE GOSPEL  
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# CONTENTS

<b>SERIES PREFACE</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>MAKING THE MOST OF GOSPEL SHAPED CHURCH</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>HOW TO USE GOSPEL SHAPED LIVING</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>DOWNLOADS</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>SESSIONS</b>	
<b>SESSION 1: YOUR CHURCH:</b>	
<b>A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>SESSION 2: A UNITED CHURCH</b>	
<b>IN A DIVIDED WORLD</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>SESSION 3: A SERVING CHURCH</b>	
<b>IN A SELFISH WORLD</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>SESSION 4: A GENEROUS CHURCH</b>	
<b>IN A STINGY WORLD</b>	<b>89</b>
<b>SESSION 5: A TRUTHFUL CHURCH</b>	
<b>IN A CONFUSED WORLD</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>SESSION 6: A JOYFUL CHURCH</b>	
<b>IN A SUFFERING WORLD</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>SESSION 7: HOW TO BE THE CHURCH</b>	
<b>IN THE WORLD</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>THE COMPLETE SERIES</b>	<b>165</b>







# 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 have become used to a lot of things today—things we have come to accept as a normal part of living in our world.

We accept that conflict is just a part of daily life; and we accept that conflict between people will inevitably lead to division and dysfunction. We accept that people will be motivated by selfishness, and make choices based on their needs before considering the needs of others. We accept that people will tell lies and distort the truth to their own advantage. We accept that life will be a struggle, and will end in suffering and death. We have accepted that nasty is normal.

Yet at the same time, everyone instinctively senses that this is *just not right*. That life doesn't have to be this way; that things ought to be different. This may be normal life, but it isn't optimal life.

Christians are people who have discovered that something incredible has happened—something that broke through the walls built up around what we're used to and what our world accepts as normal. This "something" is that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And because he rose, everything is different. Change, forgiveness and new life are now possible. A crack of light has broken into the darkness of the world. Division, dysfunction, selfishness and death do not have to be the final answer. Rather, by faith in Christ, we can now live the life of Christ.

And when Christians who are gathered together as the church live out this life within the world, they become a truly "counter-cultural community"—a community that still lives within the culture, but now shines with the light of a new culture, one shaped by and grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel Coalition has included this statement in their Theological Vision for Ministry, entitled "Counter-cultural community." It begins:

*Because the gospel removes both fear and pride, people should get along inside the church who could never get along outside. Because it points us to a man who died for his enemies, the gospel creates relationships of service rather*

*than of selfishness. Because the gospel calls us to holiness, the people of God live in loving bonds of mutual accountability and discipline. Thus the gospel creates a human community radically different from any society around it.<sup>1</sup>*

In this curriculum we will think through what it means for a church to be a counter-cultural community within the world. We won't do that by thinking primarily about culture, style or gimmicks—but about the gospel. We will see some of the principal ways in which a church that is being shaped by the gospel will live in stark contrast to the world around us; and how this will set it both at odds with its society, and yet also be strangely attractive to those in that society.

For example, what does it mean for the church to show unity in contrast to worldly divisions? What impact will it have when a self-centered world sees a church community that is full of sacrificial love and generosity? How can Christians hold to and speak out about truth in a way that is loving?

You might be unsettled as you work through this material and see significant areas where you and your church are still too much like the world, or too distant from the world. 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 fill you even more with "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:4). Trust that as this happens, many of the people you know and interact with day by day will begin to walk away from the darkness of sin and be drawn toward the light of the gospel.



**Vernon Pierre**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Vernon Pierre". The signature is stylized with a large, looping 'V' and 'P'.

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<sup>1</sup> You can read the full text of the statement on page 158 of the Handbook.







**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 every area 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](http://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 Living* 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**  
**LIVING**







# HOW TO USE GOSPEL SHAPED LIVING

*Gospel Shaped Living* 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 Living 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 Living 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/LIVING](http://WWW.GOSPELSHAPEDCHURCH.ORG/LIVING)**

## A FLEXIBLE CURRICULUM

*Gospel Shaped Living* 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 Living 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 Living 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/living/talks](http://www.gospelshapedchurch.org/living/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 Living" from the app's download menu.



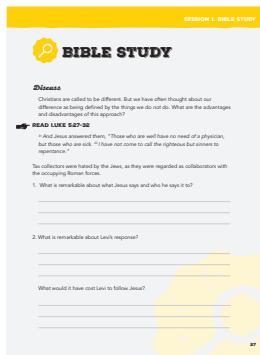
## PERSONAL JOURNAL

- 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 Living**, 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*
<p><b>1</b> Your church: a light in the darkness</p>	<p>God’s church is to be a light <i>in</i> the darkness and a light <i>for</i> the darkness. Based on <b>Matthew 5:14-16</b> and <b>1 Peter 2:9-10</b>.</p>	<p><b>1 Peter 2:9-10</b>, looking back to the Old Testament to see a breathtaking description of who your church is.</p>	<p><b>Luke 5:27-32</b> The Lord Jesus models for us what it is to be a light in and for the darkness.</p>	<p>REV 1:9-20</p>
<p><b>2</b> A united church in a divided world</p>	<p>God’s people are called to be united. How can we achieve this when we are a collection of selfish sinners? Based on <b>Ephesians 2:11-18</b>.</p>	<p>How can we, as individual church members, positively foster unity in our churches? <b>Romans 12:9-21</b>.</p>	<p><b>Genesis 11:1-9</b> and <b>Acts 2:1-13</b> Looking at how unity is part of the whole Bible story, and the implications for our unity as a local church.</p>	<p>1 COR 12:12-31</p>
<p><b>3</b> A serving church in a selfish world</p>	<p>The way to be great in the kingdom of God is to be a servant of all. Based on <b>Matthew 20:20-28</b>.</p>	<p>Six Gospel passages that reveal how Jesus spent his time on earth. <b>Luke 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 21 and 22</b>.</p>	<p><b>Philippians 2</b> Looking at some practical examples of sacrificial service in action.</p>	<p>JOHN 13:1-17</p>
<p><b>4</b> A generous church in a stingy world</p>	<p>How does and how should the gospel shape our finances? How can the church stand out as “an island of generosity” in a stingy world? Based on <b>2 Corinthians 8:1-9</b>.</p>	<p>Focusing on our wallets as we work through <b>2 Corinthians 8 – 9</b>.</p>	<p><b>Luke 19:1-10</b> Reinforcing the challenge to be people characterized by generous grace.</p>	<p>PROV 19:17; 21:13; 30:7-9</p>

SESSION	MAIN TEACHING (DVD/TALK)	PERSONAL DEVOTIONS	GROUP BIBLE STUDY	SERMON*
<p><b>5</b> A truthful church in a confused world</p>	<p>This session calls us back to a robust trust in God’s truth, revealed in his Son. Various passages including <b>John 1, John 14</b> and <b>Ephesians 4</b>.</p>	<p>Taking a close look at Paul’s teaching on love, obedience, sex and relationships in <b>1 Thessalonians 4:1-12</b>.</p>	<p><b>1 Thessalonians 2:1-12</b> Considering the hostility we will face when we speak the truth, and how we can model the love and grace of Christ as we maintain a faithful witness.</p>	<p><b>JOHN 4:1-30</b></p>
<p><b>6</b> A joyful church in a suffering world</p>	<p>How is it possible to have joy in the midst of suffering? Based on the book of <b>Habakkuk</b>.</p>	<p><b>Romans 8:1-39</b>, looking at six great truths we can cling onto when suffering.</p>	<p><b>Hebrews 11 and 12</b> Suffering is “normal” for Christians. So what will help us maintain our trust in God?</p>	<p><b>1 PETER 1:3-9</b></p>
<p><b>7</b> How to be the church in the world</p>	<p>We are not left alone to be a light in a dark world. God’s Spirit works in, through and around us to make it possible. Based on <b>Galatians 5 – 6</b>.</p>	<p>Studying the church in <b>Acts</b> to see how we can shine brightly in the world.</p>	<p><b>Galatians 5:25 – 6:10</b> What will it mean for us to grow in Christ-likeness, as we seek to burn brighter as a light in the world?</p>	<p><b>MATTHEW 5:14-16</b></p>

\* **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 Living track at [www.gospelshapedchurch.org](http://www.gospelshapedchurch.org) and on The Good Book Company's website: [www.thegoodbook.com/gsc](http://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](http://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 Living 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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