

The Gospel Way

Romans 8:16-17

The Gospel Way Video: <https://youtu.be/hSR3Zsp1KaQ>

There are two ways people tend to live today - *doing their own thing* and *“doing their best.”* If you imagine a person on the left over here, and God far away on the right - you can see how people relate to God.

Some people ignore God or overtly rebel against Him and **do their own thing** - they go their own way. You can tell that this path is a dead end and won't get anyone into heaven or a right relationship with God.

But the other path of **“doing your best”** doesn't work either, even though at first you might think that it would. This is the “straight line” of doing good things and maybe even following God's rules in the Bible with strictness and discipline. This is what RELIGIOUS people do...

The problem with the first way is that you are ***focused on yourself*** instead of God. But by taking the straight path to God you are ***relying on yourself*** instead of on God. So in both cases, **it's about YOU** - chasing your desires or trusting in your own efforts.

The gospel of Jesus Christ invites us to **a third way** - a different path. It rejects a self-focus and ***focuses instead on Jesus***. It also rejects self-reliance and ***trusts completely in Jesus***.

The Bible says, ***“Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.”*** James 4:10

It is only when we humbly turn from our selfishness and pride and come to Jesus to to forgive us and change us - only when we **follow this downward path** to the foot of the cross - that Jesus will change us from the inside out and **begin to lift us up** into the joy of a living relationship with God.

Self-focused rebellion and self-reliant religion are both dead ends. But ***there is a third way*** that leads us down to the cross so that Jesus can lift us up into heaven. That is **the Gospel way**.

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Romans 8 has made it clear that there are **two ways people can live**, two paths we can follow - the way of the flesh or the way of the Spirit. As the video illustrated, both self-focused rebellion - doing your own thing - and self-reliant religion - doing your best - are following the way of the flesh. They may look very different on the surface, but under the surface both are all about the SELF.

Both kinds of people are lost. Some are lost in their selfishness. Others are lost in their morality and pride. **Both Self-Focused Rebellion and Self-Reliant Religion are dead ends.**

The rebellious person will indulge the self and follow his heart into all kinds of sin, like the prodigal son. ***The religious person*** will deny some of his desires and work hard but will indulge his pride above all, like the older brother in that parable. We call the prodigal son the parable of the lost son, but it's really **the parable of the lost SONS**. Both boys were lost.

The tragic reality is that only one of those boys came home. The older brother, angry that dad let the little rebel come home, never came into the party. So that parable not only teaches us the good news that God forgives rebels who repent, it also warns us that some people are more lost in their morality than sinners are in their sin. Sometimes a person's goodness can be the very thing that keeps them out of heaven, because their proud self-reliance blinds them to their need for a Savior.

I've shared this visual before and have to give credit to Pastor Tim Keller and his Prodigal God material for helping me see this Gospel Way more clearly. I have drawn some version of this down-up pattern on dozens of scrap pieces of paper - helping people understand their **need to repent of both their self-focus AND their self-reliance**.

I've found that many people when they first come to church are well aware of their selfishness and sin. But they think Christianity is calling them to forsake their rebellion and replace it with a rule-following religion. They trade selfishness for pride, and the devil laughs. They have simply traded one form of slavery to the flesh for another.

One of the coolest God stories of our 20 years of ministry so far started on an Easter Sunday at our church in Kentucky. A young couple came in with several members of their extended family. Their names were **Jameson and Erin** - and they were super friendly. They chose our church because it was right next door to their apartment and they were surprised to learn it was the same denomination that Jameson's parents had been married in - EFCA.

They enjoyed the service and came back for the next few weeks before Jameson was deployed to Afghanistan with the US Army. Erin stayed behind and we continued to get to know her, and we prayed regularly for Jameson during his deployment. And boy did God answer those prayers!

Jameson had grown up going to a good Bible teaching church, but midway through high school, as a lot of teenagers do, he stopped caring about God and church and started caring more about girls and football. This led him to attend West Point where he played football and eventually met a beautiful girl named Erin.

Erin grew up in New York City as a good girl, even attending church somewhat regularly. But her church did not preach the gospel clearly, instead teaching her the religion of moralism, based on the assumption that good people go to heaven. When she met Jameson, he was still in his wild stage and she told him if they were going to be serious he had to settle down. This invitation was plenty motivating to Jameson, so he toned down the partying and fell wildly in love with Erin, who happily loved him back.

After they finished school the Army sent Jameson to Fort Knox near Louisville and he invited Erin to come with him before he deployed. Then on Easter Sunday, his family came in and said, "Let's go to church!" So they showed up at our church. It was the first time Jameson had been to church in six years and the first time Erin had been to church in a very long time.

I still remember the response they sent me to one of my church welcome emails. "We really like the church and are excited about this journey we have started." How millennial is that?

Like I said, God answered our prayers for Jameson in a powerful way. Soon after he reached his assigned area, a Special Forces officer passed through his base and was led by the Lord to ask about his faith.

Jameson shared how he was coming back to his childhood faith in Jesus and the officer told him to look up Francis Chan on youtube. Jameson found reasons to put this off. Three weeks later the same officer came through again and asked what he thought of the videos. Jameson admitted he hadn't watched any yet and the officer sat him down in front of a computer and watched him load a Francis Chan video right then.

It wasn't long before Jameson recommitted his life to Christ and started to devour Scripture and Francis Chan youtube videos as well as several books I suggested for him. But after a few months trying to give everything to Jesus, Jameson felt strangely exhausted and disillusioned. He later realized that he had been trying to be the best Christian on the planet - but in his own strength. He had traded his selfishness for pride and had started living for his new reputation as a sold out follower of Jesus rather than simply loving Jesus and living for Him.

Once this light came on for Jameson, he experienced a new freedom, joy and life in all that it meant to know, love and follow Jesus.

It took a while longer for the light to come on for Erin. She was a good girl, after all. She was the one who helped Jameson turn his life around from partying to become a civilized human being. She was very disciplined and had prepared to teach special education. She really was (and is) a wonderful human being. So it took her a long time to realize that she needed Jesus to save her from her sin. She could see Jameson's sins easily enough, but her own seemed insignificant by comparison.

The ladies at our church walked with her through this slow journey of self-discovery and Jesus-discovery. And we were so blessed to watch her give more of herself to Jesus as she came to understand more of His love and grace for her.

Jameson and Erin both followed the Gospel Way. Jameson swung from self-focused rebellion over to self-reliant religion but then the Lord led him to come humbly to the foot of the cross so the Spirit could change Him from the inside and give him the power to live for Jesus. Erin was pretty lost in her own goodness, but the more she learned about the perfect goodness and glory of God the more she came to see her need for His grace, and eventually God's kindness led her to admit her proud independence and come humbly to the cross to be forgiven, set free and filled with the Spirit.

Now the happy Christian couple is living in Nashville with their baby boy, Micah James. And they love to share their story with anyone who will listen - boldly and lovingly inviting people into the journey of discovering the life-changing love of Christ and experiencing the power of the gospel.

That is the Gospel Way. It is not permission to live a life of self-focused rebellion. Nor is it a call to self-reliant religion or moral effort. The Gospel shows us a third way - down to the foot of the cross where you can beg Jesus to forgive you and you'll find he does so much more than that. He changes you, gives you a new heart, fills you with His Spirit and empowers you to live for Him.

As we finish this series, Keep Moving Forward, I want to tie this section of Romans 8 together for us with this down-up Gospel pathway. This connects directly with the Momentum Bible Study we are also completing - so we will see 8 steps to move forward in your faith. They are the same 8 steps whether you are brand new to following Jesus or if you have been following him for decades.

How does a person start moving forward in their faith? What is the first step on that journey? It is a downward step the Bible calls being "poor in Spirit" - it's the humility of admitting that you bring nothing of merit to the Lord.

How to Move Forward:

1. Humility - admit you bring nothing

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:3

You don't deserve God's love. What you actually deserve is His judgment and condemnation. Romans 8:1 is where we started a few weeks ago - in Christ there is no condemnation. But that means that apart from Christ there is condemnation.

So the first step requires turning from whatever way you were going - whether you have been doing your own thing or doing your best - to start moving toward Jesus. It means admitting that your way was a dead end that was leading you to slavery, suffering, death and condemnation.

This is humility: acknowledging that you don't have all the answers and God knows better than you. This is ***the fear of the Lord*** and it is the beginning of wisdom: acknowledging that God is God and you are not. This is the crucial first step that sets the direction for all the other ones - it is a downward step.

The second step is repentance - turning away from specific sins.

How to Move Forward:

1. Humility - admit you bring nothing
2. **Repentance** - turn away from specific sins

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4

The blessing for those who mourn is not for those who are just generally sad but for those who are ***grieved by the cost of their sin*** - to God, to them and to others. This is called **godly sorrow** and it leads to repentance. Worldly sorrow is unresolved guilt and shame that a person wallows in and it can lead to depression and despair. The gospel is a lifeline that offers hope and rescue to any who are trapped in feelings of guilt and grief over their sins and failings.

"The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." (Rom. 8:2). The law that governs non-believers is the law of sin and death. Sin reigns over everyone who does not belong to Jesus. Once you come to Jesus to forgive you and save you, he breaks the chains of sin, he throws open the doors of your dungeon of despair and he sets you free. There is a new law at work in the hearts of believers - the law of the Spirit of life!

Sin no longer reigns over the believer, though it does still remain in our lives until we die or Christ comes back. Repentance is how we turn away from our sins at that first moment of salvation and every single day of our Christian lives. If you want to move forward in your faith you must live a life of repentance - knowing the remaining sin in your heart, stalking it so that you can keep on killing it every day.

Humility prepares you to repent and repentance prepares you for faith. The third step is to surrender - to submit your heart and life to Jesus Christ in personal faith.

How to Move Forward:

2. Repentance - turn away from specific sins
3. **Surrender** - submit your life to Christ in personal faith

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5

To be meek is to ***be tamed by your master***, like a horse that has been broken and has become familiar with the hand of its rider. To be meek is to be “under God’s hand,” surrendered to Him. Only the humble will enter the kingdom. Only the meek will inherit the earth. Both mean salvation. Both show downward movement.

This step of surrender is the doorway to salvation the first time, and it is a low door you must enter on your knees. Do you know why God often called the people of Israel “stiff-necked”? Because they would not bow - they would not bend. They would not submit to God’s hand. They were like wild, untamed horses - or donkeys even.

Humility and conviction of sin will bring you to the cross of Jesus, but ***you are not saved until you bow before Christ as King*** - until you surrender your life to Him and He becomes your Master, your Lord. Jesus is the doorway to salvation, but a proud person cannot enter through this door - he will crack his proud forehead right on the lintel. It is a narrow road that leads to life and few find it. It is a small door that leads to salvation and you must crawl through it on your knees, crying out to Jesus to forgive you and save you.

Romans 8:4-8 show us the two ways people live - those who walk, live and think in the flesh and those who walk, live and think in the Spirit. ***“Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”*** (Rom. 6:8). They cannot. All they can do is fall down before God and call on Jesus to change them - to wash away their sins in His blood, to give them a new heart where His Spirit can live and to help them start to live for Him. That is the moment of surrender.

That is how a person crosses the line from life in the flesh to life in Christ, empowered and directed by the Holy Spirit - by submitting to Christ as Lord. But that is also how we keep growing in Christ every single day - by living in daily submission to Christ and walking in step with His Spirit.

Do you see the downward trend here and how it leads to the foot of the cross? That is where Jesus can do business in us. That is where the Holy Spirit can change us. Listen to this quote from British preacher Roy Hession.

Revival is just the life of the Lord Jesus poured into human hearts. Jesus is always victorious... And we, on our part, have only to get into a right relationship with Him and we shall see His power being demonstrated in our hearts and lives and service, and His victorious life will fill us and overflow through us to others. And that is revival in its essence.

The Calvary Road, Roy Hession

The first thing we must learn is that our wills must be broken to His will. To be broken is the beginning of revival. It is painful, it is humiliating, but it is the only way... The Lord Jesus cannot live in us fully and reveal Himself through us until the proud self within us is broken.

This simply means that the hard unyielding self, which justifies itself, wants its own way, stands up for its rights, and seeks its own glory, at last bows its head to God's will, admits its wrong, gives up its own way to Jesus, surrenders its rights and discards its own glory – that the Lord Jesus might have all and be all...

The Calvary Road, Roy Hession

And this can be very costly, when we see all the yielding of rights and selfish interests that this will involve, and the confessions and restitutions that may be sometimes necessary. For this reason, we are not likely to be broken except at the cross of Jesus. The willingness of Jesus to be broken for us is the all-compelling motive in our being broken too.

The Calvary Road, Roy Hession

Surrender is the doorway to salvation and also the doorway to revival.

Humility leads to repentance which leads to surrender. And this downward path connects us with the cross of Jesus and the life of the Holy Spirit. The fourth step involves hunger - cultivating godly appetites.

How to Move Forward:

3. Surrender - submit your life to Christ in personal faith
4. **Hunger** - cultivate godly appetites

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Matthew 5:6

Just as an appetite for healthy foods can be trained, so ***an appetite for godly thinking and living can be trained***. It will not be easy at first - just as a new diet or exercise program is never easy at first. But gradually you begin to grow familiar with the new way of doing things and after a few weeks you wonder how you ever started your day without spending time in the Word of God and prayer.

Time is short, so we press on to step 5 - Mercy - love as you have been loved.

How to Move Forward:

4. Hunger - cultivate Godly appetites
5. **Mercy** - love as you have been loved

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Matthew 5:7

God is love. Those who know and love God become increasingly loving, like Him. We are compassionate to those around us because we are learning to be increasingly humble rather than

increasingly judgmental. We remember how we used to be and sympathize with those around us who are blind to their sin and enslaved to their fleshly desires. To those who have harmed us, we pray them and we don't repay evil for evil but we love our enemies and do good to those who oppose us.

The sixth step is Purity - to focus on Jesus as your One Thing.

How to Move Forward:

5. Mercy - love as you have been loved.

6. **Purity** - focus on Jesus as your One Thing

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Matthew 5:8

Heart, mind and life are all interconnected. You are either walking, living and thinking in the flesh - trapped in that ***whirlpool of death*** - or you are increasingly walking, living and thinking in the Spirit - being caught up in that ***spiral of life***.

The flesh will pull you either toward a selfish focus or to self-reliance. This is why the downward way of the gospel is so important every single day. **We must fight the tendencies of both selfishness and pride**, coming humbly to Jesus every day, surrendering to His guidance and focusing on Him as our One Thing.

This is what it means to **be pure in heart** - to have an undivided heart that is increasingly free from the love of self and the love of the world. The younger brothers among us love the pleasures of this world. The older brothers among us love the feeling of being righteous or its uglier cousin - the appearance of being righteous. The gospel calls us to forsake both forms of idolatry and hypocrisy - to put to death the deeds of the body by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If you missed John's sermon two weeks ago, please watch it on our youtube page or listen to it on our website. We need to ***know our sin***. Ignoring your tendencies and hoping they go away will not help you move forward and make progress in your faith. We need to ***stalk our sin*** - to follow its signs and patterns and trace the sin beneath the sin down to its tangled roots so that we can ***kill our sin***. The price for our sin has been paid, and our old sinful self was crucified with Christ, but that sucker wants to keep coming back to life so we have to nail it back to the cross moment by moment every single day.

That's what it means to be pure in heart - to be active in the fight against your sin. Don't focus on your sin - focus on Jesus. Robert Murray M'Cheyne says, ***"For every one look at your sin take ten looks at Jesus."***

We pursue purity of heart by filling our minds with Scripture, cultivating an appetite for the things of God and living a life of joyful worship that makes Jesus our One Thing - our One desire, our One great love.

The seventh step toward growth is Peace - to forgive as you have been forgiven.

How to Move Forward:

6. Purity - Focus on Jesus as your One Thing
7. **Peace** - Forgive as you have been forgiven

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." Matthew 5:9

If we are children of God we are becoming more and more like our heavenly Father. Our God is merciful and gracious. He has forgiven us the unpayable debt we owed. Since we have been forgiven so much, we should be forgiving people. More than that, ***we should be ambassadors of peace***, helping those trapped in conflict to understand and be reconciled with one another. And we should be ambassadors for the gospel - inviting people to find peace with God by coming to the cross of Jesus Christ.

Finally, the eighth step is Perseverance - to endure the cost of discipleship to receive its reward.

How to Move Forward:

7. Peace - Forgive as you have been forgiven
8. **Perseverance** - Endure the cost to receive the reward

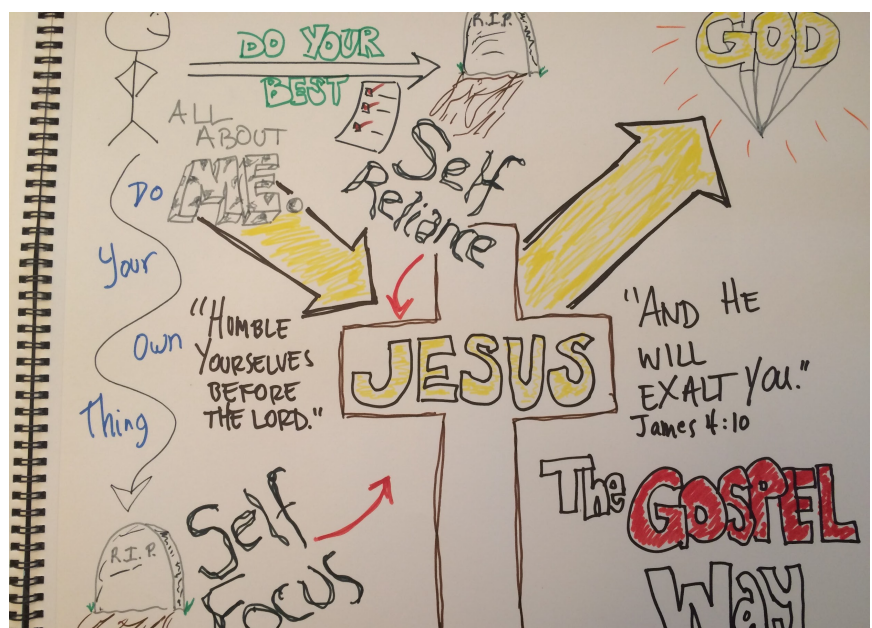
"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:10

The kingdom Jesus invites us into is **upside down** according to the standards of this world. Jesus says, "If you try to save your life, you will lose it." He says, "Those who are last will be first." He says, "If you want to be great, become the servant of everyone." And in Matthew 5:10 he says that you are BLESSED when you are persecuted.

This is the downward way of the Gospel. ***"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled. But whoever humbles himself will be exalted."*** Matthew 23:12

Gospel Way Image:

It is only when you come humbly down to the foot of the cross that Jesus can lift you up into a relationship with God.



Is this the direction of your life? Do you live by this pattern? Do you walk these steps every day and every week? Are you humble, admitting your sins and turning from them, surrendering your will to that of Jesus? Are you hungering to be more righteous? Are you striving to be merciful to others as God has been merciful to you? Are you focusing your heart and mind and life on Jesus as your One Thing? Are you a peacemaker?

And in this journey with Jesus are you an endurance runner? Are you persevering through trials and temptations by the power of the Holy Spirit?

Hear these words from Romans 8 as we close today and wrap up this series:

“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.” Romans 8:16-17

You don’t have to wonder if you belong to Jesus. The Holy Spirit will make that clear in your heart. He bears witness in your spirit and gives you the gift of assurance that you are a child of God. If you don’t have that assurance, then come humbly to the cross and ask Jesus to forgive you for your lack of faith and make a fresh commitment to Him as your Savior and Lord. Then commit to walking this way of the Gospel so you can grow in Christ.

For if we are children of God, then we are heirs of His Kingdom. The blessing for the poor in spirit is that theirs is the kingdom of heaven! Those who mourn will be comforted. The meek will inherit the earth. Those who long for righteousness will be satisfied! Those who are merciful will experience the depths of the mercies of God. Those who are pure in heart will SEE GOD! Those who are peacemakers will be called sons of God - for they are reflecting the nature of their Papa. And those who are persecuted are blessed, for though they have nothing in this world they have everything because they are heirs of the kingdom!

We are heirs of the kingdom - ***“provided we suffer with Christ in order that we may also be glorified with him.”*** Here again is the downward way of the gospel and the promise of the upward glory that will follow.

Whatever you are going through, trust in the Lord. Humble yourself before Him. Turn away from your selfishness and pride and surrender to Jesus in faith. Ask the Spirit to make you hunger and thirst for His righteousness. Be merciful and forgiving as God was merciful and forgiving to you. Focus on Jesus - make Him your One Thing. And endure to the end.

If we suffer with Him, we will also be glorified with Him! ***When we come down to the foot of the cross, Jesus will lift us up into the glories of heaven!*** Let’s pray!

8 Steps to Keep Moving Forward in your Faith

1. Humility - admit you bring nothing	
"Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:3	"There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1
2. Repentance - turn away from specific sins	
"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." Matthew 5:4	"The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death." Romans 8:2
3. Surrender - submit your life to Christ in personal faith	
"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Matthew 5:5	"That the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk... according to the Spirit." Romans 8:4-5
4. Hunger - cultivate godly appetites	
"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." Matthew 5:6	"Those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires." Romans 8:6
5. Mercy - love as you have been loved	
"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" Matthew 5:7	"If Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness." Romans 8:10
6. Purity - focus on Jesus as your one thing	
"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Matthew 5:8	"If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." Romans 8:13
7. Peace - forgive as you have been forgiven	
"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" Matthew 5:9	"You have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry 'Abba! Father!'" Romans 8:15
8. Perseverance - endure the cost to receive the reward	
"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom	"We are... heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ - provided we suffer with him in order

of heaven.” Matthew 5:10

that we also be glorified with him.” Romans
8:17