

CITIZENS LA · LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Foundations

WHY THIS MATTERS

Questions to sit with

- 1 We say we want to be a gospel-centered church. How many of us could explain the gospel in our own words?
 - 2 We use words like 'sin,' 'grace' and 'salvation' every Sunday. If ten of our leaders defined them, would we get the same answer?
 - 3 If someone asked you what it means to be a Christian, what would you say?
 - 4 Our theology ultimately becomes our leadership. If people only knew God through how you lead them, what would they think he's like?
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OBJECTIVES

Three things we want to walk away with

01

A shared theological vocabulary

The same words, with the same meanings, in every ministry we lead.

02

A clear understanding of the gospel

What the good news actually is and what it changes.

03

A reframed view of God

Seeing God, ourselves, and all of life through the lens of grace.

OVERVIEW

Where we're going

01 What is sin?

02 What is God like?

03 What is the Gospel?

04 What is grace?

05 How then do we live?

THE BIG IDEA

Everything comes back to
what we believe God is like.

*"What comes into our minds when we think about
God is the most important thing about us."*

A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*

01

PART ONE

What is sin?

*If we don't know what we're saved from,
we won't understand what we're saved for.*

DEFINING SIN

Sin is not mainly bad behavior or broken rules. Sin is *distrust of God*.

SIN = DISTRUST

and everything we do that expresses that distrust.

GENESIS 3

How distrust unfolds in the garden

1 • Genesis 3:1

Doubt his word

"Did God actually say...?"

2 • Genesis 3:5

Doubt his heart

"God knows...you will be like God."

3 • Genesis 3:6

Take control

"She took of its fruit and ate."

4 • Genesis 3:10

Hide in fear

"I was afraid...and I hid myself."

The fruit was the symptom. The sin was believing God was holding out on them.

ROOT AND FRUIT

Hand sins and heart sins

HAND SINS · THE FRUIT

What we do

Visible behaviors: the lie, the outburst, the habit we hide. Easy to spot, easy to police.

HEART SINS · THE ROOT

What we believe about God

"God isn't good." "God isn't for me." "I'd better take care of myself."

Hand sins are heart sins made visible. Fix only the hands and you get well-behaved people who still don't trust God.



LUKE 15

A father and his two sons

TWO KINDS OF LOSTNESS

Two ways to distrust the Father

THE YOUNGER SON

Distrust through *disobedience*

He runs from the father to get what he wants.

THE OLDER SON

Distrust through *obedience*

He stays and works to get what he wants.

Both sons want the father's things, not the father.

THE OLDER-BROTHER PROBLEM

It is often not our unrighteousness that keeps us from God, but our self-righteousness.

The younger son knew he was broken. The older son thought he was fine.

WHEN GOOD THINGS REPLACE GOD

The most dangerous sins are the ones that look godly. Even godliness can become a substitute for God.

WHO GETS THE GOSPEL FIRST

Godward sinners and wayward saints

Godward sinners

The prostitutes and tax collectors. They know they're weak, so they run to God.

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

Wayward saints

The religious and self-sufficient. So full of their own goodness they miss God.

"But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry." Luke 6:24–25

“

*The devil's masterpiece is not the
prostitute, but the Pharisee.*

REFLECTION

Discussion Questions

- 1 Where do you feel resonance?
- 2 Where do you feel resistance?

02

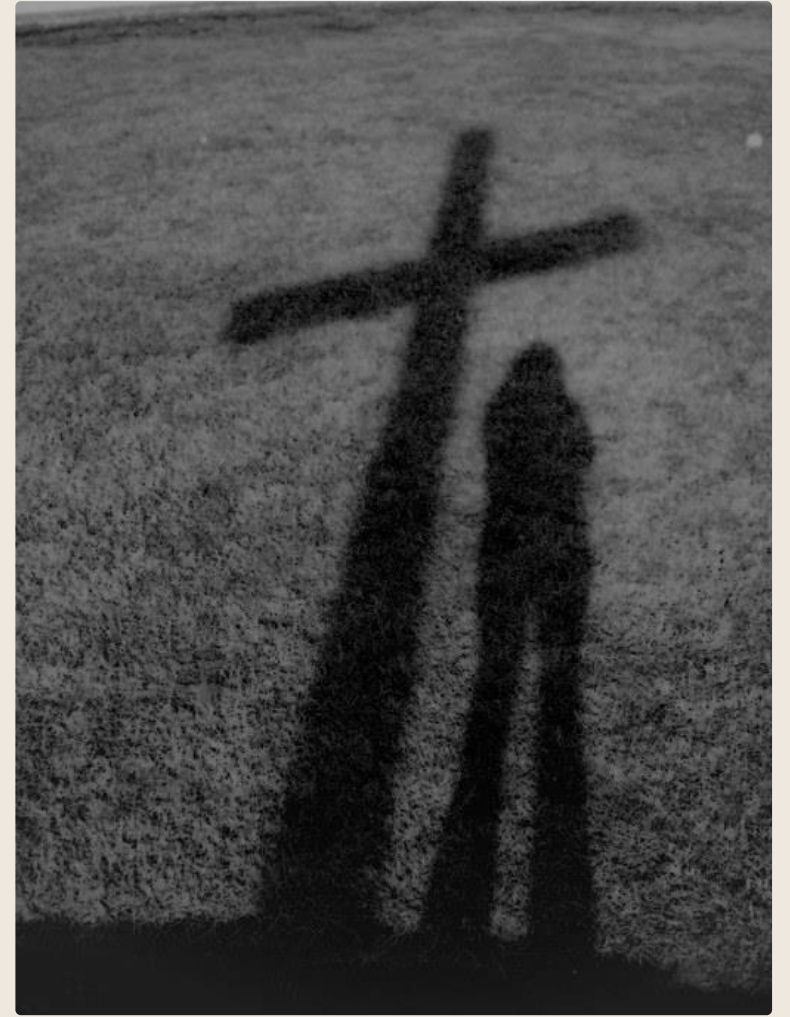
PART TWO

What is God like?

If sin is distrust, the real question is whether God can be trusted.

THE REAL BARRIER

The biggest barrier to faith isn't God. It's the version of God we believe in.



JOHN 17:3

Eternal life is a person, not a place

"And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

REFLECTION

How do you think God sees you?

A FALSE GOD

The Tiger God

A strict, demanding parent pushing you toward a bar of success, and you're never sure whether it's for you or for him.

LIFE WITH THIS GOD LOOKS LIKE

Duty and obligation

"I sacrificed for you. Now you owe me."

Performance and achievement

Love feels earned, and it can be lost.

Obedience without trust

You comply, but you keep your guard up.

Feeling used, not known

You matter for what you produce.

WHAT THE TIGER GOD WANTS

COMPLIANCE
> RELATIONSHIP

If God just wants a clean house, why would you ever trust him?

WHAT THE TIGER GOD PRODUCES

Model minority faith

Being the "good kid" for God: doing the right things, avoiding the wrong ones, hoping it's enough, and never actually learning to trust or enjoy him.

Earn



Deserve



Perform

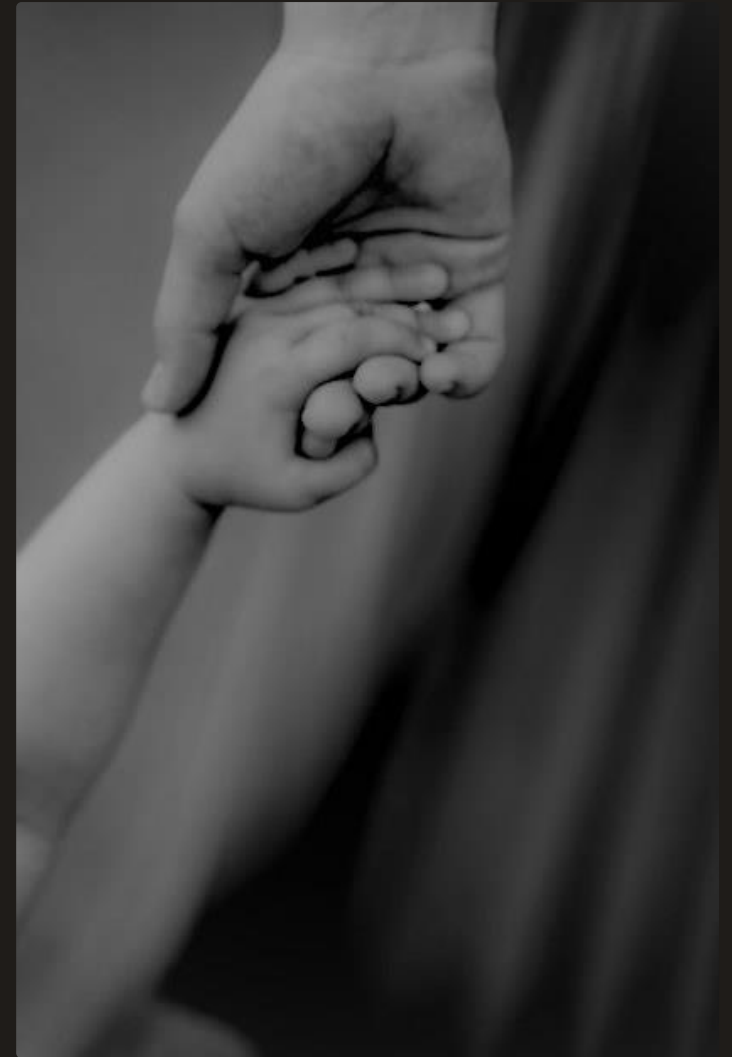
"If I perform well, I'll be accepted."

THE TRUE GOD

Abba Father

"The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"

Romans 8:15 (NIV)



A GRACIOUS, RELATIONAL GOD

God isn't looking for polite servants.
He wants honest children.



GENESIS 32

Israel: the God-wrestler

"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome." (Genesis 32:28, NIV)

THE BOOK OF JOB

The God who shows up for the fight

Job laments, argues and accuses. His friends defend God. Then God speaks, and he sides with Job.

| *"...you have not spoken the truth about me, as my servant Job has (42:7)*

God doesn't want cheap obedience. He wants **you**.



A LITMUS TEST

Do you love God, or do you also like him?

REFLECTION

Discussion Questions

- 1 Where do you feel resonance?
- 2 Where do you feel resistance?

03

PART THREE

What is the gospel?

The gospel is only good news if we have the right view of sin and the right view of God.

PARTIAL GOSPELS

The "gospels" that have shaped us

Gospel	What it gets right	What ends up at the center
Evangelical	Sin is serious; we must respond personally	A destination. Salvation shrinks to a prayer and a ticket to heaven.
Prosperity	God is generous and cares about all of life	Blessings. God becomes a means to the life I want.
Social	God cares about justice and the oppressed	A cause. A kingdom without the King.
Reformed	Grace alone; real clarity on justification	A doctrine. Right answers without enjoying God.

WHAT THEY SHARE

Each is a partial truth treated as the whole truth, and each puts something other than God at the center.

THE GOSPEL IN FOUR ACTS · ACT ONE

Creation: *with* God

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Genesis 1:1

- Heaven and earth, God's space and ours, were one reality.
- Eden was a temple: the place where God dwelt with his people.
- The goal was never just a perfect world. It was a perfect relationship.

BIG IDEA Life is found in being with God.

THE GOSPEL IN FOUR ACTS · ACT TWO

Fall: *away from* God

"Did God actually say...?" Genesis 3:1

- Sin enters as distrust, not just disobedience.
- We decide good and evil on our own terms and build our own kingdoms.
- Every relationship fractures: with God, each other, ourselves and creation.

BIG IDEA Sin is choosing life apart from God.

THE GOSPEL IN FOUR ACTS · ACT THREE

Redemption: God *comes to us*

"But God, being rich in mercy..." Ephesians 2:4

- Instead of abandoning us, God moves toward us.
- In Jesus, God doesn't just send help. He comes himself.
- At the cross, God doesn't demand that we pay. He bears the cost himself.
- Jesus shows us what God is like, and how far he will go to bring us home.

BIG IDEA God restores our relationship with him.

THE GOSPEL IN FOUR ACTS · ACT FOUR

Restoration: *with* God forever

"Behold, I am making all things new." Revelation 21:5

- Heaven and earth are reunited. Sin, death and separation are gone.
- Everything broken is healed; everything unjust is made right.
- We don't just get a better life. We get God himself.
- The story ends not with an escape, but with a wedding.

BIG IDEA We will be with God again.

THE CENTER

God is the center of the gospel.

The gospel doesn't save you. God saves you.
The gospel tells you about the God who saves.

GOSPEL ESSENTIALS

What the gospel is, and isn't

The gospel is not...	The gospel is...
Something we do	An announcement of something God has done
About us going somewhere	God coming here
Only about the sin “in here.”	The restoration of all creation
Just a revelation about grace	A revelation of a gracious God

OUR DEFINITION

The gospel is the good news that **God our Father**, the Creator, out of his great love for us, has graciously come to rescue us from sin, Satan, death and hell, and to renew all things in and through the work of **Jesus Christ** on our behalf, and to establish his kingdom through his people, in the power of the **Holy Spirit**.

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PART FOUR

What is grace?

Grace isn't one part of the Christian faith. It's how we see the whole thing.

A NEW WAY TO SEE

Grace is a window.

We don't stare at a window. We look through it. And what we see through grace is God: who he is, what he's like, and how he feels about us.

"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

C. S. Lewis, "Is Theology Poetry?"



THE PARADIGM SHIFT

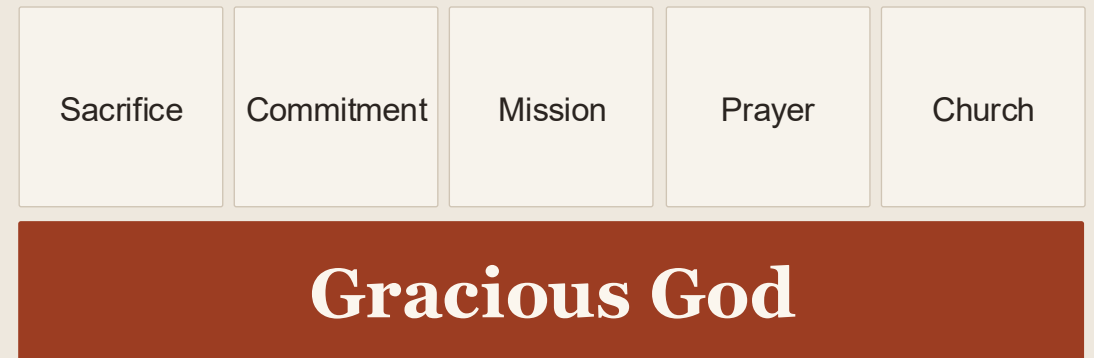
Same practices, different foundation

OLD PARADIGM · THE DEFAULT



Earn → Deserve → Perform
Control → Safety → Obligation

NEW PARADIGM · GRACE



Receive → Trust → Respond
Relationship → Joy → Desire

CONVERSION AS A PARADIGM SHIFT

*"...not only a conversion of the will and of the feelings but a conversion of the mind, a 'paradigm shift' that leads to a new vision of how things are and, not at once but gradually, to the development of a new plausibility structure in which **the most real of all realities is the living God.**"*

Lesslie Newbigin



EVERYTHING, REFRAMED

The gospel redefines everything

	Old paradigm	Grace paradigm
Scripture	A rulebook or an answer key	Where we meet God
Prayer	A way to perform holiness	Communion with God
Jesus	A moral example to copy	The scandalous friend of sinners who shows us the Father
The cross	A debt we now owe	The Father's love made visible
Salvation	Getting to a good place	Knowing and trusting a person
Obedience	Duty that keeps God happy	Trusting that God's ways lead to life

REFRAMED · SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

The goal is God, not godliness

We practice to get to God at all costs, because in his presence we become more human, more like the people we were made to be.

Scripture

The Word of **God**. The emphasis is on God, not the Word. It's where we meet him, not just where we find answers.

Prayer

Communion with **God**. The emphasis is on God, not the prayer. It's where we meet him, not where we perform.

If you don't like God, spiritual practices will feel like death.

Role model or scandal?

Jesus was a PR team's worst nightmare, and the most religious people wanted him dead.

"A friend of tax collectors and sinners"

He spent his time with people whose company would get a pastor cancelled today. (Luke 7:34)

"...go into the kingdom of God before you"

He told religious leaders that tax collectors and prostitutes were closer to God than they were. (Matthew 21:31)

REFRAMED · THE CROSS

Two ways to preach the cross that rebuild the old foundation

DISTORTION

**The cross as
burden**

DISTORTION

**The cross as
protection
from God**

THE TRUTH

**The cross
reveals the
Father's heart**

REFRAMED · SALVATION

A person, not a place

HOW MANY OF US LEARNED IT

Me, living on earth



A moral life or correct ideas about Jesus



Death



The good place or the bad place

When we say we want people to be saved, we mean we want them to know and trust the heart of God.

REFRAMED · OBEDIENCE

The call to obedience is a call to freedom

God's commands aren't arbitrary rules. They're a Father saying, "If you do that, you will destroy yourself."

Sin is destruction

God is for you

Example: Forgiveness

WATCH OUT

Three ways leaders miss the gospel

Balancing grace and law

Obedience becomes duty, without joy, adoration, or pleasure

Grace as protection from God

God is still oppressive. Grace is just my escape from him.

Gospel-centered legalism

We love talking about theology but have no desire to pray, worship or enjoy God.

Each one is grace without the gracious God.

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PART FIVE

Living from grace

Formation is learning to live like a child of God, not an orphan.

FORMATION

Adopted, but living like orphans

ORPHAN MENTALITY

- Stops crying, because no one comes
- Hoards, because there may not be more
- Takes care of itself
- Lives from scarcity

CHILD MENTALITY

- Cries out, because someone always comes
- Opens the fridge freely
- Trusts the Father to provide
- Lives from abundance

"Everything I have is yours." Luke 15:31

Retraining an orphan

Habit of an Orphan	What it believes about God	Practice of a Child
Stops crying	"No one is coming."	Lament
Hides food	"There won't be enough."	Generosity
Protects itself	"I can't let anyone see me."	Confession
Never stops working	"It all depends on me."	Sabbath and sleep

FORMATION · AFFIRMING HUMAN PLEASURES

Toward God, or away from him?

*"Praise to You, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine."
The Sabbath Kiddush blessing*

Most Jewish families drink, yet Jewish communities historically have some of the lowest rates of alcoholism. Drinking happens at the table, with a blessing as a way to commune with God, not run from him.





FORMATION · EVERYTHING IN GOD'S PRESENCE

Sanctifying the ordinary

The goal isn't to be moralistic and pure. It's to bring all of ourselves into God's presence. It's not the spiritual things that most need transforming. It's the mundane.

*"Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."
1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)*

FOR US AS LEADERS

Implications for ministry

Be careful about policing morality

Moralism can be more dangerous than immorality, especially in shame-prone cultures. Call people to holiness by pointing them to God.

Rethink "men and women of God"

Usually it means people who act a certain way. That turns younger brothers into older brothers.

Invitation, never coercion

Especially with the hurting. Coercion is oppressive. God is inviting people into a better life.

SUMMARY

Our shared vocabulary

When we say...	We mean...
Sin	Distrust of God, and everything that expresses it
God	A gracious Father who is for us
Gospel	Good news about who God is and what he has done in Jesus
Grace	A window onto the heart of God
Salvation	Knowing and trusting God, now and forever
Obedience	Trusting that God's ways lead to life
Spiritual practices	Ways to meet God, not to prove ourselves