



GOSPEL EMPHASES FOR RHC

SESSION 4
PERSON
NOT PHILOSOPHY
PART 1 PHILOSOPHY

Handbook



GOSPEL EMPHASES FOR RHC

For the next 7 weeks, our church will be embarking on a series called “Gospel Emphases for RHC” – diving into 4 aspects of the gospel that we hope for our church to grow in understanding so that we can know and love Jesus more deeply.

These 4 aspects that we are emphasising are not an attempt to define the gospel comprehensively or write a “creed” for RHC. Rather, it is something that is specifically contextualised for RHC, in response to the areas that we feel like we may be weaker in understanding the Good News of Jesus for us in our church. We hope that these emphases and tools give us a common language as we use them throughout the life of our church, to strengthen our faith individually and collectively at RHC.

These 4 emphases are:

- The gospel is Good News Not Implications
- The gospel is about a Person, Not a Philosophy
- Christ’s Work is Rich & Relevant
- The gospel Changes Us at a Heart Level

In our CG study over the next few weeks, we’ll be focusing largely on the first two emphases.

Today and for the next week, we’ll be diving deep into the second one: the gospel is about a person, not a philosophy.





WARM-UP CASE STUDY

DIANA
10 MINS

Diana recently started a relationship with someone she met online. When you ask her what she likes about him, she says:

He's just so promising: he's the same age, he's handsome, and got a well-paid job as an investment banker. His job also requires him to travel a lot around Europe, and I've always wanted to see more of the world too! We don't talk much but he's so sweet: he sent me a beautiful necklace last week. It would be ideal if we could meet in person before the wedding, but given his schedule I think it would be difficult. But I think he could be the one. I can't wait for a life together.

In your opinion, how well does Diana know him?

What might be worrying about how she is approaching the relationship?

PERSON NOT PHILOSOPHY

In sending His son to die for our sins, the gospel reveals the very heart of God.

He sends His son for us not because He is compelled by some abstract philosophy, but because he deeply desires for us to be reconciled to Him.

Reducing the gospel to a philosophy and mistaking knowing intellectual facts about God for knowing God, causes us to miss out on the fullness of our relationship with God, which is ironically the main goal of the gospel.

While we must be careful of reducing faith to mindless mysticism, we can also fall to other extreme where we are purely cognitive. If we only or primarily relate to Jesus with our minds, then we fall short of biblical Christianity. We are to love God with our hearts, soul and strength as well.

Most of our bible comprises narrative stories and he also gives us poetry and music (like the psalms). Like music, both stories and poetry grip not just our minds, but our hearts and imaginations, because He is not pleased to be reduced into an abstract philosophy or a collection of facts.

Ultimately, knowing and applying the gospel should lead us to a vibrant and intimate relationship with God Himself.



SELF- REFLECTION

10 MINS

Read through the checklist on the following pages and check the boxes or underline phrases that you can identify with or that might describe how you relate to God.

Note that these descriptions are meant to be broad brushstrokes to help us diagnose how we might relate to God, and are not meant to be exhaustive or picked apart in a dogmatic fashion. Most of us will find that we are on a spectrum.

Once completed, reflect:

1. What do you realise about yourself?

Did you find this activity particularly difficult?

Were you uncomfortable by any of the phrases? Why?

Relating to God as a

Person

Though God already knows everything, because God loves me deeply, He delights to hear from me. He wants me to ask Him and speak to Him freely.

God is living and active. Our relationship is two-way: I can speak to Him honestly and He responds.

Being with God and speaking with Him fills my soul with delight and restedness. My conversations with Him are as rich and varied as my conversations with the people closest to me.

God is my father and friend: he is near and close to me even in valleys. I am moved when I ponder the greatness of God or His love for me.

I can run to God with whatever is on my heart: I can go to Him anytime with my anger, frustration, complaints, confusion, fears, sorrows, praise and joys.

Philosophy

I don't really pray. God is sovereign, He does what He wills and it is the best thing for me anyway.

My primary way of relating to God is to know and learn facts about God or the Bible.

Prayer is a duty that I have to do as a Christian.

I find it difficult to think of God as a father and friend. God is a distant deity.

I only go to God when I need something. I obey God so that I can avoid punishment and gain a reward.

Relating to God as a

Person

Christianity is about being in relationship and walking with God: there is awe, enjoyment and delight of who He is and what He's done for me.

If I were to see Jesus face to face, I imagine Him greeting me with a wide smile and embracing me.

I don't have to have it all together. I can go to God and fall apart in His presence, laying bare my sin, failures and grief before Him. He cares for me.

God sees and knows me personally: he relates to me and walks with me in a way completely unique to everyone else.

I repent because God's arms are always outstretched toward me, and He urges me to come back to Him. I run back to Him because He is the source of all goodness, safety and life.

Philosophy

Christianity feels like it's generally about the "shoulds" (e.g. "should do" or "should be.")

If I were to see Jesus face to face, I imagine Him greeting me with a stern, disappointed or disengaged look.

I think of God as testing me and waiting for me to trip up or evaluating how well I perform.

I know God loves humanity, but I find it difficult to believe that He loves me as an individual.

I only repent so that I can get back on God's good side. Repentance is shameful and I do it to reduce my guilt.



STUDY & DISCUSSION

10 MINS

11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."' 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

25 "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

Luke 15:11-32

2. Examine v17-19. How does the younger brother rationalise his decision to return home? What was the best outcome he was hoping for?
3. Consider how his father responds. How well did the younger son know his father?
4. Examine v28-30. Why was the older brother so angry with the father? What does this reveal about his perception of his father?
5. The fact that the father is a person is seen in his emotions and response to his sons. What kind of a person is the father? (i.e. What is he like? What does he desire? What grieves him?)
6. Consider John 3:16, Romans 5:6-8 and 1 John 4:9-10. How is the heart of the God revealed in the gospel?



What might God be saying to you today through this study?

Share and pray for one another. You can feel free to consider the self-reflection checklist above and how we might relate to God as a distant or abstract philosophy.