

# A GOSPEL PRIMER FOR CHRISTIANS

**Gospel.** *n.* (*god*, good + *spel*, news) good news of salvation for hell-deserving sinners through the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

**Primer.** *n.* a book that covers the basic elements of a subject.

Milton Vincent



# **A Gospel Primer for Christians**

by Milton Vincent

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“...the gospel....  
...of first importance...”

*1 Corinthians 15:1,3*

“If there’s anything in life that we should be passionate about, it’s the gospel. And I don’t mean passionate only about sharing it with others. I mean passionate about thinking about it, dwelling on it, rejoicing in it, allowing it to color the way we look at the world. Only one thing can be of first importance to each of us. And only the gospel ought to be.”

C.J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, 20-21



“Many Christians think the gospel is only for unbelievers. Milton Vincent learned the hard way that we Christians also need the gospel every day to keep us from falling into a performance relationship with God. I share Milton’s enthusiasm for the gospel and warmly commend his ‘primer’ to all believers. It can literally be life changing.”

**Jerry Bridges**, author of *The Discipline of Grace*  
and *The Gospel for Real Life*

“As a pastor, I’ve observed many Christians who are grateful for the gospel but have difficulty applying the gospel to their lives. The truth is, I need to preach the gospel to myself every day—and you do too! In *A Gospel Primer for Christians* Milton Vincent has created a practical tool with a powerful effect. This book will help you understand the gospel more profoundly, reflect on the gospel more faithfully, and experience the power of the gospel more consistently.”

**C.J. Mahaney**, President, Sovereign Grace  
Ministries, and author of *The Cross-Centered Life*

“My good friend and fellow pastor, Milton Vincent, is utterly obsessed with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In *A Gospel Primer for Christians*, he demonstrates why believers—even though already having become the recipients of God’s saving love—ought nevertheless to be continually infatuated with this glorious reality. His capturing of the doctrine of salvation is unique in that virtually every section is explicitly footnoted to multiple Scriptural passages. Part III of the book, with the gospel shown in a beautiful poetic narrative, is alone worth the price of the book. I know of no other book quite like it, both in its approach and impact.”

**Lance Quinn**, Pastor-Teacher of The Bible  
Church of Little Rock, Little Rock, Arkansas



“Most Christians live on the porch of their faith without enjoying the mansion of delights behind the front door. In *A Gospel Primer for Christians*, Milton Vincent takes believers on an amazing tour of the gospel, showing how its familiar truths are actually its most overlooked treasures. This book will not only increase what you know about the gospel, but it will take what you know and helpfully show you what to do with it. This book has made me love the Savior more intimately, hate my sin more deeply, and find the joy that comes from gospel-produced holiness. Open its pages and enjoy the gospel’s mansion of delights!”

**Rick Holland**, Senior Associate Pastor, Grace Community Church, and Director of D.Min. Studies at The Master’s Seminary

“There is no greater news than that Jesus came to die for our sins in order to bring us to God. This biblically saturated book will help you understand why that is such great news. Milton Vincent’s *Gospel Primer for Christians* is one of the rare books that helps us not only to know the Gospel, but also to love the Gospel and see how it applies to every area of our lives. I have used the pre-published version of this book in my devotions for years and I’m thrilled that more people are now able to benefit from it.”

**Bob Kauflin**, Director of Worship Development, Sovereign Grace Ministries

“The exhortation to ‘preach the gospel to yourself’ is a clarion call in a vacuous time within evangelicalism. But what does it mean to ‘preach the Gospel to oneself’ and how can one practically do it? Milton, who obviously meditates on it himself, elaborates on this privilege and grace in such a way that the Christian can revel in God’s grace and the person and work of Christ more intentionally. This book can help any Christian echo the words of the Baptist Preacher/Theologian Andrew Fuller, who said in his diary, ‘Compared with what I deserve to be, how happy my condition!’”

**Stuart Scott**, Associate Professor of Biblical Counseling, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and author of *The Exemplary Husband*



## Dedication



To all  
who have taught me,  
and teach me still



## Acknowledgments



So many have been instrumental to the development of this book, and some deserve special mention.

I am grateful to all those faithful souls at The Master's Seminary, Bob Jones University, and the churches I've attended throughout my life who have taught me and brought me along in my understanding of God and His Word. This book is a tribute to all of them.

Thanks should go to my parents, Bill and Janie Vincent, for teaching me from childhood the Holy Scriptures, within which I have found that which is "*of first importance*."

A special thanks goes to Ib and Yrsa Hansen. Ib managed the internet presentation and distribution of the pre-published primer and also skillfully rescued the electronic copy of the primer from my crashed computer the week I was to send the copy to the publisher. Yrsa handled virtually all the distribution for the pre-published edition of this book and managed the editorial team. I am deeply grateful to both of them for their devotion to this project.

I am much indebted to my younger brother, Robert Vincent, who always so willingly read and offered feedback on every aspect of this primer (from cover to cover) as it developed over the last two and a half years.

Thanks also goes to Ruby Kimble, Cindy Bendshadler, Terrie van Baarsel, Kim Davis, Michelle Assaturian, Kathy Dane, Leah Simpson, Diane Swaim, and Metrice Rochowicz for their crucial work on the editorial team.

I am thankful also for Mike Bullmore and C.J. Mahaney, two new friends in the gospel, without whose feedback and encouragement this project would never have reached this juncture.



A huge thanks goes to my precious wife, Donna, for her undying love for me. Apart from her, some of the gospel truths in this book would never have been grasped by me. I thank God for her patience with me over the years as I have stumbled towards an understanding of the gospel and for her willingness to join me in believing its glorious truths.

I should also give thanks for my four children: Brooke, Brendan, Benjamin, and Breanna. I deserve wrath, yet instead God gives me them. Wow! Through them I have tasted the unconditionality of God's good favor, and I pray that they have tasted that gracious favor in return. I am grateful for their endurance of my obsessive preoccupations with readying this book for publication and for their many encouragements along the way.

My gratitude also goes out to Jan Haley, President of Focus Publishing, who contacted me expressing an interest in publishing this book. It is, indeed, a gracious providence that our paths have crossed on this project, and she truly has been a blessing to work with. I am thankful for Barbara VanThomma's work on the beautiful cover design and for Melanie Schmidt's painstaking work of reformatting and editing this work for publication.

I must also thank the elders and congregation of Cornerstone Fellowship Bible Church, whose love for God and for me has always created a climate in which I could learn God's truth and preach it with liberty Sunday after Sunday. They have grown along with me these last sixteen years and have shown me first-hand the power and glory of the gospel.

Most importantly, I am thankful to my Heavenly Father for sending His Son into the world so that my salvation might be accomplished, to Jesus for giving Himself over in death for me, and to the Holy Spirit for opening my eyes to the glory of the gospel. May He, the Triune God, find this book a serviceable tool to advance His glory.



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Surprised by the Gospel



## Foreword

*by Mike Bullmore*

I believe I was born again when I was eight. I was sitting under the preaching of a godly British missionary named Derek Porter. He was preaching from the book of Jonah about God's grace toward sinners. God used that preaching to speak both deep conviction and wonderful hope to my soul. Later that evening, my father alongside me, I confessed my sinfulness to God and asked him to save me from my sin and all its consequences and to give me the gift of new life in Christ. That is, I believe, when I was born again.

But it wasn't until my mid-twenties that I came to have what I would consider a deep personal understanding and a deep personal treasuring of the gospel. I had been living for years with a heart marked by pride. God patiently but persistently resisted that pride until it broke. And in the wake of that breaking a new kind of understanding took root. It felt like another conversion. A great awakening.

In the ensuing years God used many things to nurture this new working of the gospel: particularly, the preaching and writing of John Piper (which helped me to wonder at the sheer greatness of God revealed in and through the gospel), the friendship and counsel of C.J. Mahaney (which helped me to see the relevance of the gospel to every area of life), and the personal Spirit-directed ministry of my wife Beverly (which helps me know of God's personal favor toward me flowing out from the gospel).

And recently, God has been greatly using this book by Milton Vincent. I first read an early draft of this book back in the fall of 2005 on the way home from a conference at which I had met Milton. He had handed me a copy, humbly asking if I might read it and give him some feedback. I remember



being deeply affected over and over again on that plane ride home as I read Milton's "Reasons to Rehearse the Gospel Daily." It was clear these ideas had been born out of careful, loving, prayerful meditation on gospel truth and it was clear that they had taken time to form. They had a weight and a clarity and a beautiful precision about them. I felt like I had been given a handful of precious diamonds and I could not stop looking at them.

When I arrived at home I immediately emailed Vincent telling him of the effect of his book on my heart and asking him how I might get copies. (I was eager to put the *Primer* in the hands of all my fellow pastors, elders and the care group leaders at my church.) I also urged him to get the *Primer* published. I wanted others, many others, to benefit as I had. In the following months I found myself returning to the *Primer* over and over (in my personal devotions, in our life together as a pastoral team, in pastoral counseling) and I kept having Milton send me more and more copies for our church bookstore. You can imagine my delight when I got word that Focus Publishing had agreed to publish *A Gospel Primer*. I rejoice greatly in this!

This book was written slowly. It savors of a slow cooking. I believe it will be best read slowly. Take your time with it. Let its truths drip down deep. And return to it often. Let it regularly help you preach the life-giving, soul-reviving, heart-rejoicing gospel to yourself. Keep it close by your bed or the place of your time alone with God. It is, quite simply, one of the most spiritually useful books I've read.

Mike Bullmore  
Preaching Pastor  
CrossWay Community Church  
Kenosha, Wisconsin



# Introduction



This book is offered as a handy guide to help Christians experience the gospel more fully by preaching it to themselves each day. It is also offered as a correction to a costly mistake made by Christians who view the gospel as something that has fully served out its purpose the moment they believed in Jesus for salvation. Not knowing what to do with the gospel once they are saved, they lay it aside soon after conversion so they can move on to “bigger and better” things (even Scriptural things). Of course, they don’t think this is what they are doing at the time, yet after many years of floundering in defeat they can look back and see that this is exactly what they have done.

God did not give us His gospel just so we could embrace it and be converted. Actually, He offers it to us every day as a gift that keeps on giving to us everything we need for life and godliness. The wise believer learns this truth early and becomes proficient in extracting available benefits from the gospel each day. We extract these benefits by being absorbed in the gospel, speaking it to ourselves when necessary, and by daring to reckon it true in all we do.

God’s gifts are all of grace, and there is nothing we can do to earn them. However, the wise believer will make sure he is positioning himself in the spot where God’s gracious gifts are located. And the Scripture teaches that all such gifts are located inside the gospel. Hence, the Bible tells Christians to be continuously established and steadfast in the gospel and to refuse to be moved from there (*Colossians 1:23*).

As for myself, after years of frustration, fits and starts, and exhausted collapses in my Christian walk, I have come back to a focus on the gospel and have found its sufficiency for



daily living to be truly overwhelming. After years of church attendance, university and seminary training, and countless hours of Bible study in preparation for preaching many hundreds of sermons, I have found nothing more powerful and life-transforming than the gospel truths affirmed on the following pages. Rehearsing these truths each day has become a pleasurable discipline by which I enjoy God's love and maintain fresh contact with His provision and power for daily living.

Over the course of time, preaching the gospel to myself every day has made more of a difference in my life than any other discipline I have ever practiced. I find myself sinning less, but just as importantly, I find myself recovering my footing more quickly after sinning, due to the immediate comfort found in the gospel. I have also found that when I am absorbed in the gospel, everything else I am supposed to be toward God and others seems to flow out of me more naturally and passionately. Doing right is not always easy, but it is never more easy than when one is breathing deeply the atmosphere of the gospel. I am confident that you will find the same to be true in your life as well.

This book is written partly as a result of the influence of Jerry Bridges' excellent book entitled *The Discipline of Grace* (NavPress, 1994), for it was through this book that I first heard the challenge to preach the gospel to myself every day. Since that time, my method of rehearsing the gospel has evolved from a short list of gospel truths on a 3 x 5 card into the formats presented on the following pages. It is my hope that the formats below will be basic enough for the average reader, yet sufficiently thorough to cover the main categories of gospel thought.

The first part of this book contains *Reasons to Rehearse the Gospel Daily*. The thirty-one reasons given are designed



to remind you, the reader, of some valuable blessings which the gospel can render in the life of the believer who rehearses the gospel in faith each day. The second and third parts of the book contain *A Gospel Narrative* in both a prose and poetic format respectively. Both formats are written in a way that facilitates memorization and smooth recital of the gospel. At the bottom of every page are relevant Scriptures that affirm the truths expressed.

Everything in sections I - III is written in the first person singular (*I, my, me*), for all that is said in these sections is your testimony if you are a believer in Jesus. Therefore, read these words, or better, speak them aloud as a way of testifying daily to your own heart the truth of what God has done for you and made available for you in the gospel. You'd be amazed at the difference such a practice can make in your life.

The last part of this book, entitled, *Surprised by the Gospel*, recounts a portion of my personal gospel testimony and also explains how this book came to be. My hope is that my story will encourage you in the gospel and also motivate you to write the story of your own experience of the gospel. You will find great value in rehearsing the details of your own personal gospel story, and others can receive huge blessing from it as well.

Please view this book as a primer of sorts, as a tool designed merely to get you launched in preaching the gospel to yourself and rehearsing its benefits. The precise wording in sections I - III need not be recited slavishly. In fact, over time you will likely develop your own wording and emphases as your proficiency in the gospel grows. Consequently, you may eventually reach a point where you no longer have need of this tool. If such a day comes, then the purpose of this book will have been fully served.



Also, as you are preaching the gospel to yourself, please savor the tender involvement of the Holy Spirit with you in the process. (Apart from Him, this discipline would be of no effect!) The gospel is true, but it is the Holy Spirit who makes it vivid to the soul. The gospel first came “*by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven*” (1 Peter 1:12); and as you preach the gospel to yourself in dependence upon Him, the gospel will come to you afresh by that same Holy Spirit. The Spirit will seize the opportunity to pour out God’s love in your heart (Romans 5:5); and He will, through the gospel, disclose the heart of the Father towards you (John 16:14-15). Your heavenly Father knew that you would never comprehend on your own the depths of His love, so He sent His Spirit into your life so that the Spirit might search out the very depths of the love of God and then reveal such things to you (1 Corinthians 2:9-10,12). Certainly, the Spirit is ministering to you in this way at all times, but preaching the gospel to yourself provides an opportunity for the Spirit to do so in a concentrated fashion. Such a reality elevates this discipline beyond the mere recitation of facts into something that is profoundly personal between you and the Holy Spirit. Enjoy this!

Finally, it should be noted that the purpose of this book is admittedly narrow, given the larger context of Christian practice. Actually, there are numerous “habits of grace” that are essential to the full experience of God’s grace in the life of the believer. Some of them are as follows: Bible meditation (Acts 20:32; Colossians 3:16), faith (Hebrews 4:2), prayer (Hebrews 4:16), fellowship with the saints (Ephesians 4:29), humility (James 4:6), generosity (2 Corinthians 9:8-14), obedience (Titus 2:11-12), forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32), worship (Ephesians 1:6), and evangelism (2 Corinthians 5:18-20). My purpose here is merely to spotlight the first of



these practices and to provide a specific method by which you can meditate on the gospel in a meaningful way. While preaching the gospel to yourself will powerfully enrich your life in every area, the other habits listed above should also be practiced in order for your experience of the gospel to be truly complete.

Nonetheless, this book is based on the premise that all Christians should become expert in their knowledge and use of the gospel, not simply so they can share it faithfully with non-Christians, but also so they can speak it to themselves every day and experience its benefits. In fact, if Christians would do more preaching of the gospel to themselves, non-Christians might have less trouble comprehending its message, for they would see its truth and power exuding from believers in indisputable ways. This book is offered as a service to this end.

Milton Vincent

Holy Trinity,  
continue to teach me  
that Christ's righteousness satisfies justice  
and evidences thy love;  
help me to make use of it by faith  
as the ground of my peace  
and of thy favour and acceptance,  
so that I may live always near the cross.

*The Valley of Vision*  
"Election"



## PART I

# Reasons to Rehearse the Gospel Daily



“The gospel isn’t one class among many that you’ll attend during your life as a Christian – the gospel is the whole building that all the classes take place in! Rightly approached, all the topics you’ll study and focus on as a believer will be offered to you ‘within the walls’ of the glorious gospel.”

C.J. Mahaney, *The Cross Centered Life*, 75-76