

## ...An Opportunity @ the Arlington Heights Campus...

Announcing an Opportunity to Bless Young Moms

On Wednesday mornings many women come to participate in LIFE groups. One of these groups, particularly, brings young women with children who need loving child care while their moms attend Entrusted with a Child's Heart. As we go into the New Year we are in need of more volunteers, men or women, who would give one or more Wednesday mornings a month to help with pre-school age children. (The 3- and 4-year-olds really love men who will play with them!) Even if you can only help on a temporary basis, please call either Beth Olson (847-394-2508) or Kathy Ruda (224-764-4030).

## ...Upcoming Study @ the Itasca Campus...

Because He Loves Me

Women of Itasca: Please join us on Wednesday evenings, beginning January 11, for a study of *Because He Loves Me* by Elyse Fitzpatrick. In your pursuit of godliness, have you left Jesus behind? Through the study of God's Word, prayerful reading of the book, and discussion with other women, learn how to make the Gospel relevant for every area of your life. We will meet Wednesday evenings, as part of Family LIFE, from 6:30-8. Register online. Contact Sheila Clark, 847.772.9219, with any questions.

## ...What's New @ Barrington...

Women's Night - *Who Am I?*

Friday, January 13, 7-9 PM, The Grove Café, Barrington Campus

Where are we, as women, most tempted to get our identity? Connect with other women at the Barrington Campus as we take a fresh look at what defines us. We're encouraging all women to bring a friend. Grab an "invite" card at the information desk. Also, take the 30-second online identity survey and come that night to see the results! To register and fill out the survey, go to the Barrington Women's Ministry webpage: <http://theorchardefc.org/barrington/ministries-and-groups/adults/womens-ministries/>

- ◇ Copies of this newsletter can be found at the ministry desks at the Arlington Heights, Barrington and Itasca Campuses.
- ◇ To receive the newsletter by email, contact Mariel at [munverricht@theorchardefc.org](mailto:munverricht@theorchardefc.org).
- ◇ Subscribe online at [www.theorchardefc.org](http://www.theorchardefc.org), search for "Women @ The Orchard" and click on "Subscribe to our e-Newsletter."



# Women @

# THE ORCHARD

THE ORCHARD EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH | WOMEN'S MINISTRIES | DECEMBER 2011

## *Unpacking the Gospel*

Recently, a friend asked me, "What exactly do you mean when you talk about the Gospel?" With time for only a quick answer, I decided it might be a good topic to address this month because for years I believed that salvation simply meant professing faith in Jesus Christ, Son of God, who died for our sins. Although I had made a profession of faith as a teenager, I was only vaguely aware of the depths of my sin and had very little knowledge about the God who bore the wrath that I deserved. While my heart was inclined toward God, it would be many years before I would truly come to understand what Good News the Gospel really is every single day!

Without a steady diet of sound doctrine and discipleship, our thinking will be more shaped by the world than the Word. Spiritually immaturity will be reflected in our words, attitudes, and actions. As was true in my own life, due to a failure to connect and fully rely on the Gospel, I set out to be a good Christian. As a firstborn, rule-following "good girl," I realize now that I had defined sin more as the "wrong" things I did than the sin-sick condition of my heart. I had no idea that my understanding of the Gospel was distorted and incomplete, much like the Galatians to whom Paul wrote, *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one....For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Jesus Christ* (Galatians 1:6-10). Like the Galatians, having begun by grace, I was still living with a works mentality.

How do you view the Gospel's relevance in your life? As I interact with women, it is clear that the reason many are living defeated lives is due to an incomplete or distorted view of what Christ accomplished for them through His life, death, and resurrection. They understand that the Gospel is the *Good News* that we have been saved (*justified*) through Christ, yet many have

not grown beyond the elementary doctrines of faith to become mature believers. Hebrews 6 draws our attention to what happens to believers when, after establishing their faith on the foundation of salvation through Christ alone, they do not build on that foundation with the doctrines of Jesus Christ and His gospel. The writer of Hebrews says they have remained infants, immature in faith and thus easily prone to discouragement, doubt, fear, and deception. The same thing is true for many believers today.

Only when we grow in understanding and applying the Gospel of Jesus Christ to our lives will we begin to experience the freedom, joy, and peace that were purchased for us at the Cross. For example, as we study the doctrine of the Incarnate Christ, we contemplate what it means that Jesus became one with us, a human being. That He was fully God, yet also fully man, who took on all the limitations of humanity, means He can identify with us in our temptations because He was tempted in every way we are, yet He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). He can also identify with us in all of our sufferings, for He Himself suffered. But even more than that, by His perfect obedience, submitting even to death on a Cross, Jesus *broke the power* that sin and death had over us. Therefore we have a great High Priest who is not only able to sympathize with our weaknesses, but is able to give us mercy and grace in our time of need (Heb. 4:16). Let's look at how relevant this is.

Perhaps you are struggling with a temptation that you feel powerless over, let's say over-eating. You have tried, but now have nearly given up hope in your ability to exercise *self-control*. This realization and acknowledgement of self's powerlessness is critical to our dependence on Christ alone. But going one step further, the Gospel reveals that we are powerless to do *anything that pleases Christ*, even that which seems easy for us. Reflecting on Matthew's account of Christ's 40

days in the wilderness, we realize that He experienced the full force of every temptation that we will ever struggle with because, though the full power of it was unleashed on Him, He never gave into it. Now, as believers in Christ, the Holy Spirit enables us to say no to sin and yes to choosing God's way. Choice by choice, as we believe that God is more powerful than our sin, and that Christ's Resurrection power lives in us, we will be empowered to appropriate His grace through our obedience and faith in Christ.

Let's take another area in which we are prone to deception apart from the gospel. For so long in my spiritual immaturity, I was easily discouraged by trials and even the fear of trials to come. As I grew in God's truth, I began to see that my real problem was a failure to connect to my daily life gospel truths of who God is, who I am (in my depravity), and what I deserve apart from God's mercy and grace. I came to realize that, deep down, I felt I deserved a certain amount of happiness, peace, financial security, and other inalienable rights of American theology! I had failed to bring the gospel truths to bear in my life that I deserve death, eternal punishment, and God's wrath.

While we were rebels, enemies of God, determined to live life on our own terms and by our own authority, Christ came in human form, suffered unjustly for our sake, and was crucified on a Roman cross. As believers, no matter what you and I have believed about what we are entitled to, in view of God's holiness, the truth is that we are simply undeserving sinners on whom He has poured out His amazing mercy and grace!

Let's bring this into the nitty-gritty stuff of life. Perhaps you don't think your husband deserves to be respected because he is mean-spirited, selfish, uncaring, or has failed to protect and provide for you as he should. The Gospel never excuses our mate's sinful behavior, but it does remind us that we are *both sinners* who have been saved by God's grace alone. This empowers us to stop looking to our husbands to be our savior and acknowledge that Jesus Christ alone can meet our needs and satisfy our deepest longings. Rather than focusing on our husband's sin, it teaches us to suspect our own sin prone hearts first, asking the Lord to reveal lies we believe, disrespect we have shown, unbelief in God's promises, and so on. As singles, it will teach us to look to Christ above all to be our Husband. When we understand that God's Word alone reveals sin, we will humbly and gratefully place ourselves under its authority. When we understand that marriage and gender roles are gospel issues, we will stop insisting on our own rights and be wholly concerned with God's glory. It is the gospel that gives us both humility and God-confidence to lean into His beautiful design for us as women, and whether married or single, enables us to live "self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age" (Titus 2:12). The more I grasp the truth of my own depravity apart from grace, by the power of the Spirit,

the more I will be able and willing to bend that grace toward my undeserving mate.

In my own life I have found the key to spiritual growth and maturity has been the result of two primary things. The first has been the decision to make the study and application of God's Word a top priority in my life. For those who struggle with this, (and it is a primary battleground!) let me say that this is one of those life defining decisions we make. It must not be made based on our feelings, time availability, or convenience. In fact, if we are looking to these things to make it happen we are in trouble right from the start. This decision is made when we come to see that, apart from God's help, *we are never going to be inclined to lay other things aside to study and meditate on God's Word.* Through faith, we must cry out to the God of all mercy to give us a hunger for His truth and a love for Him, because apart from His grace, we will insist on being our own authority and will love only ourselves!

The second key to my spiritual growth has been learning to practice ongoing repentance for sin. The Gospel teaches that after we have repented of trusting our works to save us, we must continually repent of anything we are relying on apart from Christ *to become mature.* Paul addressed this issue with the churches in Galatia, *O foolish Galatians! Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?* (Gal. 3:1-3). It is the Gospel that speaks to the deception of self-sufficiency, independence, a sense of entitlement, and self-righteousness. Jesus once told his disciples they must humble themselves and become completely dependent on Him, like little children (Matthew 18:2-4). We simply can't do such things apart from Him and we must repent every time we try.

Repentance is a change of mind and will, turning us away from following the desires of our flesh and the world, and toward following Christ alone. Jesus Christ paid a great price for sin and death's power over us. Let us guard against cheapening that costly grace by living as though we have no need of it.

Through God's Word, it is the Spirit who transforms us into the likeness of Christ through our faith and obedience. Galatians 2:20 explains that as new creations we must leave behind our identity as we once knew it: *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.* Let us count ourselves dead to sin and alive in Christ through the power that is at work in us for God's glory.

Next month we will apply the gospel to living by faith rather than fear in the New Year. I hope this month you will reflect freshly on what it means to your life that Christ took the form of a man and came to a world that did not recognize or give glory to Him. Practice letting the gospel function each day in both truth and power. It will be the greatest gift you can give to yourself this Christmas!

Merry Christmas! Thanks for letting me share my thoughts with you,

*Linda Green*

Director of Women's Ministries - Arlington Heights Campus



*Making It Personal*

1. Read Hebrews 4:14-16. How does the gospel encourage and equip you in a particular temptation you are struggling with right now?
2. Read Hebrews 5:7-10. How does the gospel encourage and equip you in something that is causing you to suffer?
3. Look up the following Scriptures and the contrast between immature and mature believers. 1 Corinthians 2:6; 3:2; 14:20; Ephesians 4:13; 1 Peter 2:2; 3:15. What are you doing to become mature in Christ? Pray for God to increase your hunger for His Word and His love for Him. Walk in obedience to what He reveals to you today.
4. Reflect on Galatians 2:20. How does your new identity in Christ equip and encourage you in your home, your work, your marriage, as a single, and at church? Write out a prayer of thanksgiving for the Good News of Jesus Christ and His gospel.