

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

Acknowledgements



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 Benshadler, Terrie Van Baarsal, Kim Davis, Michelle Assaturian, Kathy Dane, Leah Kimble, 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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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
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