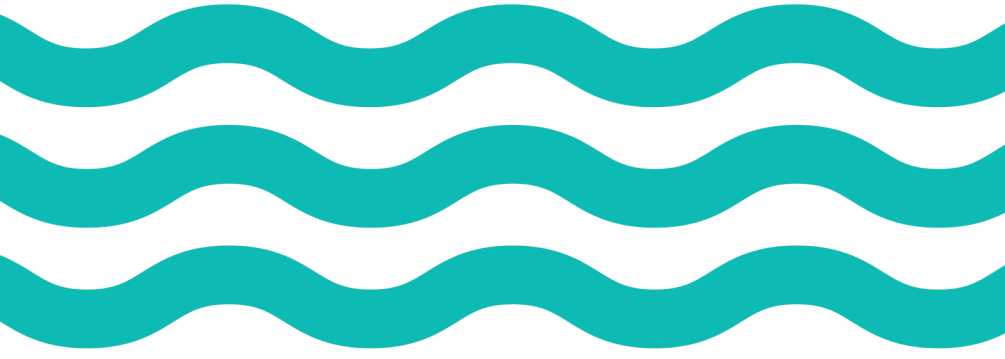
JEFF VANDERSTELT



GOSPEL FLUENCY

Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life

"I love this book because its title delivers. To be able to explain what the gospel is, how it works in our own lives, and how it's shared is a unique and powerful combination I've never seen before. Jeff has written a book that will be around a long time because it reforms evangelism in a fresh way."

Bob Roberts, Senior Pastor, Northwood Church; author, *Bold as Love* and *Lessons from the East*

"Jeff calls us back to the gospel, not as a trite phrase to throw around in Christian circles but as a life-changing language in which we grow more fluent as we use it in community. The analogy to learning a foreign language helps us envision how to become fluent in the gospel, working, eating, and even dreaming while immersed in the good news of Jesus and how that changes everything. This is an extremely practical and helpful book!"

Wendy Alsup, teacher; blogger; author, *Is the Bible Good for Women?* and *Practical Theology for Women*

"It's easy to forget how good the good news of the gospel is. This practical book will help you to see that good news, and to share it with others."

Russell Moore, President, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention

"Even the title of this book, *Gospel Fluency*, gets at a right understanding of the gospel: the message from God that must be spoken. Our communication of the gospel is more than a data dump; it's a message that we must share without accent, as native speakers who have immersed themselves in knowing and speaking the living gospel. Jeff's clear call, through compelling stories and biblical foundations, is to connect the gospel to all areas of life, and then speak it fluently to believers and nonbelievers alike."

J. Mack Stiles, author, *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus* and *Marks of the Messenger*

"Jeff Vanderstelt has a gift for clarifying and simplifying what is often complex and puzzling. *Gospel Fluency* is no exception. In this book, Jeff invites believers, unbelievers, pastors, and church leaders to think about their faith with fresh eyes and fresh language. He invites us not to a system, a catchphrase, or a fad, but to a refreshing vision of Christ our Savior and the life he offers."

Mike Cosper, Pastor of Worship and Arts, Sojourn Community Church, Louisville, Kentucky

"I have known Jeff for over a decade now, and his heart beats for the church to be all that God has called her to be in Christ. He is not just an ideas man; he is on the ground, living out the truths you read in this book. As the culture shifts and attractional ministry fades, Jeff will be a faithful guide for us all."

Matt Chandler, Lead Pastor, The Village Church, Dallas, Texas; President, Acts 29 Church Planting Network; author, *The Mingling of Souls* and *The Explicit Gospel*

"When Christians speak about the gospel, it should sound like our native tongue. *Gospel Fluency* helps us articulate and live the gospel we love. Our 'fluency' in the gospel is necessary for us to be ambassadors for our gospel-giving King. We need books like *Gospel Fluency* to both ground us in our practice of the gospel and raise us out of living our daily lives in the cultural drift."

Daniel Montgomery, Lead Pastor, Sojourn Community Church, Louisville, Kentucky; Founder, Sojourn Network; coauthor, *Faithmapping*, *PROOF*, and *Leadership Mosaic*

"I've been wanting to have a resource from Jeff on this topic for a very long time. It is so, so, so needed. As I've worked with different Christians from several churches around the city of Chicago, I've witnessed the lack of gospel understanding that has permeated many 'solid' churches. I will personally hand out copies of this book like gospel tracts."

Jackie Hill Perry, poet; writer; hip-hop artist

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JEFF VANDERSTELT

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Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life

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To

Jayne, my friend, bride, and partner for life.
Your faith inspires me. Your wisdom helps me.
Your love for Jesus has changed me.

Haylee, Caleb, and Maggie.
You make me smile, laugh, cry, and pray.
You are making me more like Jesus.
I pray you continue to become more like him as well.

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Thank you for embracing the Vanderstelts as family.
I regularly thank God for all of you.
You are so dear to my heart.

The Soma Family of Churches.
You have become more than I ever dreamed
and encourage me more than you know.
You truly are family.
I love you.

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Foreword

The book you are holding is very important. Why? Because it has the potential to save your life.

Every human being on earth needs salvation, not only from the wrath to come, but also from the flimsy theology permeating our Christian communities. That might sound a bit extreme, but in essence it is true. The good news has been demoted to the position of Easter Sunday sermons and altar calls, while sin and discouragement wreak havoc in the inner workings of those sitting in the pews.

If you were to ask many Christians what the gospel is, the answers would sing a tune of Christ's life, death, burial, and resurrection. The accuracy of these answers would leave you to assume that there is application—until you pose a follow-up question, such as, "How do you apply the gospel to the everyday stuff of life?" Then blank stares and fumbling words would reveal the disconnect many Christians have between the gospel and its power not only to save our souls but also to change our lives.

I believe that what you are holding in your hand can be the catalyst for such change.

Though its contents may bring about fresh ideas, I assure you that it is not rooted in anything new. To the contrary, this book follows in the footsteps of the apostles by delivering to you what is of first importance (1 Cor. 15:3), that is, the good news of Jesus Christ.

I personally have been greatly impacted by the gospel-saturated ministry of Jeff Vanderstelt. His emphasis on gospel fluency has shaped everything from my poetry to my music and even the way I discipline my one-year-old. There have been many occasions when I've found her splattering juice around the kitchen floor like a miniature Jackson Pollock, and I've thought, "How I respond in this moment will lay the foundation for how she understands grace and the gospel."

Though she's too young to understand now, the principle is still very pertinent. The gospel should impact us not just theologically but also practically. From our preaching to our parenting, the good news gives us the blueprint for how to function within these spheres in a way that glorifies Christ.

I believe that is why gospel fluency must first take root in our hearts before we can expect it to blossom in our respective ministries. Whether it is motherhood or missions, I have realized that if I am not gospel fluent in my thought life, then I won't be in my speech. If I am not gospel fluent in my speech, then I won't be in my evangelism or my discipleship. I have come across many godly men and women who are walking through life with the people in their churches by teaching them how to study Scripture, helping them understand spiritual disciplines, finances, relationships, and so on. Yet the deceptive blind spot in their discipleship relationships is that they have discipled people in how to successfully do all of the above *without* Christ. Oh, how easy it is to create women and men in *our* image, who are living morally correct lives while being gospel deficient. We do a great disservice to the people God has called us to disciple if we disciple them into anything other than Christ.

Being gospel fluent inevitably shapes how we live, which then affects how we engage with the world around us. This is why this book is so profoundly necessary. It will cause us to get back to the basics of Christianity, where the good news *is* good

news again; where the beautiful reminder of what God did for us in Christ can break through the chaos and usher us into the love of God; where the gospel isn't an appendix to a sermon but the mountain on which all preaching stands; and where we can recognize that the gospel doesn't just save us but *keeps* us.

Jackie Hill Perry

Acknowledgments

First, I have to thank Justin Taylor for continuing to push me toward writing *Gospel Fluency*. Although *Saturate* was my first book, Justin has gently prodded me to write this book for many years now. He blogged about my training on gospel fluency, sent out countless tweets, and regularly asked if I was ever going to put it into print. He made sure that it happened, just as he ensured that I published this book with Crossway. He did it because he believed that this work would serve many, and I earnestly pray it does.

I also must acknowledge how Josh McPherson and the Grace Community Church family in Wenatchee, WA, contributed to this work. Years ago, Josh and the GCC family provided me places to get away and write because they believed this book would greatly serve the church. Thank you, Josh and GCC, for making the space to break my writing ground that eventually led to my finishing *Gospel Fluency*.

And I likely never would have started writing if Sealy Yates, my agent, hadn't listened to two of his authors, who told him to go after me. Thank you, Sealy, for encouraging me to get the initial book proposal out to publishers and for connecting me to the Crossway team that has been such a blessing to me in this process.

Thank you, Greg Bailey, for editing both *Gospel Fluency* and *Saturate*. You have made my work better.

Abe Meysenburg and Randy Sheets, next to Jayne, you are my two faithful friends, who never hesitate to proclaim the gospel to my unbelief and build me up with the gospel in my despairing moments. I have grown in Christ immensely because both of you speak the gospel to me. You are true friends.

I also want to thank Amy Lathrop, Rachel Northey, and Sara Parker, who read many versions of this book as it was being written, providing great feedback while also encouraging me not to give up when I had bad writing days.

I am deeply indebted to Tim Keller for the profound influence he has had on my life, mostly from afar through his preaching, training, and writing. I am certain that I would not be as gospel fluent myself if I had not learned so much from Tim. Other than Jesus Christ, Tim's life and work have had more impact on *Gospel Fluency* than anyone or anything.

Of course, it is to Jesus, my Savior and Lord, I am most indebted for eternity. I love you, Jesus, and will forever live to display and declare your glory. You deserve more than any of us will ever give you, and because of that, I, along with countless others, will spend eternity singing, proclaiming, and displaying your praise! You are worthy of all praise, glory, and honor—my King, my Savior, my Lord, and my Friend.

PART 1

GOSPEL FLUENCY

1

EVERYONE IS AN UNBELIEVER

I'm an unbeliever. So are you.

"*Wait*," you're thinking. "What are you doing writing a book about the gospel of Jesus Christ if you're an unbeliever? And what do you know about me? Who do you think I am?"

I grew up believing that people fall into two categories: you are either a believer or an unbeliever; you either believe in Jesus Christ and what he has done for us or you don't. Now, after more than twenty-five years as a pastor, I see that every one of us is an unbeliever, including me—at least in some areas of our lives.

Don't misunderstand me. I do believe there are some who are regenerate children of God and others who are not yet.

There are those who have been given new life through faith in Jesus. They have become new creations and have been given fresh starts because of their faith in Jesus Christ and what he has done for them. And I believe there are others who are still dead in their sins and not yet truly alive in Christ (see John 1:12–13; 2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:1–10).

When I say we are all unbelievers, I mean we still have places in our lives where we don't believe God. There are spaces where we don't trust his word and don't believe that what he accomplished in Jesus Christ is enough to deal with our past or what we are facing in this moment or the next.

We don't believe his word is true or his work is sufficient.

We don't believe. We are unbelievers.

I struggle with unbelief on a daily basis. I have a conversation with my wife, and when she points out something I've yet to get better at, I hear the word *failure* in my head.

I try to lead a good conversation about the Bible at the dinner table with my children, but instead of eager beavers on the edges of their seats, I get slouched bodies and rolling eyes. *Bad father.*

I teach on being a good neighbor, one who knows the stories of the people who live on your street, but since I moved into my current neighborhood a few months ago, I know only the story of failed attempts to meet people. *Hypocrite.*

Unbelief.

I slip in and out of believing God's word about me and trusting in his work for me. Jesus gave his life to make me a new creation. He died to forgive me of my sins and change my identity from *sinner* to *saint*, from *failure* to *faithful*, and from *bad* to *good* and even *righteous* and *holy*. But I forget what he has said about me. I forget what he has done for me. And sometimes it isn't forgetfulness. Sometimes it's just plain unbelief. I know these things. I just don't believe them.

I am an unbeliever. Not every moment, of course. But I have those moments.

So do you. I'm certain of it.

We all struggle with unbelief in God because the message of who he is and what he has done for us can sound unbelievable at times. We all slip in and out of confidence that what he has done for us in Jesus is sufficient for us today.

It's very possible that even though you are familiar with Jesus, you have yet to believe in him for yourself, for your life. Or maybe you have come to faith in Jesus, but it hasn't really changed what you do daily or how you engage in the everyday stuff of life.

The apostle Paul said to the believers in Jesus in Galatia, "The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God [Jesus], who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). They had started with faith in Jesus, but they were putting their faith and hope in something else to make them right instead of Jesus. Paul called them back to an awareness that the good news about Jesus—the gospel—is for all of life: everything.

A life of true living is a life of faith in Jesus, a life of believing in Jesus in the everyday stuff of life.

I'm still learning how to live like that. I'm still an unbeliever in many ways. And yet, I don't want to stay that way. I want all of my life to be marked by faith in Jesus.

God is intent on making everything about Jesus because it is *through him* that all things came into existence and it is *in him* that they are sustained (Eph. 1:22–23; Col. 1:15–20).

God also wants to rescue you from unbelief and sanctify you to become like Jesus. *Sanctification* is just a big word for becoming more and more *like* Jesus through faith *in* Jesus. You *become like* what you *believe in*. So becoming like Jesus requires believing in him more and more in every part of your

life. Sanctification is moving from unbelief in Jesus to belief in him in the everyday stuff of life.

You're not there yet, are you? Neither am I. We're still unbelievers who need Jesus more—in more ways and more places.

As I wrote this book, I came to see once again how badly I need Jesus. Sometimes I believed my writing could change a life. But when a writing day went poorly, I was crushed under the weight of this responsibility. I needed to believe again that God changes lives, not me.

Sure, he works through us to do it, but he isn't dependent on how well we do it. God can speak through anyone and anything. He actually spoke through a donkey once (in the older versions of the Bible, a different word was used in place of *donkey*.) So I guess he can speak through me.

Remembering this, I went from unbelief to belief. "Jeff," I said to myself (or others said to me when I forgot), "trust in God's work, not yours. Believe in his words spoken over your life through Jesus, not yours." Then I could rest again while I wrote.

So I kept writing as the fruit of my faith in Jesus.

This doesn't just happen for me when I write. I find myself needing to do this when I have to get up early to work out; consider how we are going to pay the bills; or sit in the Interstate 405 parking lot that we call a highway, but which so often isn't moving when I need to be someplace sooner than everyone else on the road!

I need to remember because I forget. I need to believe because I don't.

Thankfully, I don't do this alone. I have a community of people around me who are also professing unbelievers. They believe in Jesus, but not all the time for everything. Not yet, at least.

We are journeying together, moving from unbelief to belief in Jesus more each day—and sometimes less the next day.

That is why I am writing this book. I know that I need this book, and so do you.

We all face daily struggles and battles, sometimes from enemies we can't even see. We hear lies and accusations. We struggle with temptations and we are often deceived. We hear words that were spoken over us when we were younger, echoing in our hearts in ways that don't breed life to our souls. We look at our present situations and wish they were better. And many of us face uncertain futures that, without God, cause us to lead lives of anxiety, worry, and fear.

We all need help because we can come up with plenty of reasons not to believe, not to hope, and not to trust in God's word and work for us.

We need the gospel and we need to become gospel-fluent people. We need to know how to believe and speak the truths of the gospel—the good news of God—in and into the everyday stuff of life. In other words, we need to know how to address the struggles of life and the everyday activities we engage in with what is true of Jesus: the truths of what he accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection, and, as a result, what is true of us as we put our faith in him. The gospel has the power to affect everything in our lives.

I wrote this book because I love unbelievers and I know God does too. He loves you and wants to save you from your unbelief.

I believe the only hope for all of us is the gospel of Jesus Christ and communities that live life together while proclaiming this gospel into one another's lives daily—gospel-fluent communities.

Jesus said we are to make disciples who can make disciples (see Matt. 28:18–20), and a disciple of Jesus should know, believe, and be able to speak the gospel. He or she also should be capable of leading others to know, believe, and speak the gospel.

My hope is that this book, first of all, will bring about hope and healing for you as you come to believe and apply the truths of the gospel to your life. I also hope that you and others around you will become fluent in the gospel, so that together you will be able to lead others to find hope and help in Jesus in every part of their lives.

I am more certain than ever that apart from belief in the gospel, sinners will suffer everlasting punishment and saints will fail to live lives that bring glory and honor to Jesus Christ.

So it is my hope that more sinners will be saved from condemnation and more saints will be set free to overcome sin, fear, and insecurity in their everyday existence.

I hope that this book moves you from unbelief to more belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ and equips you to help others do the same.

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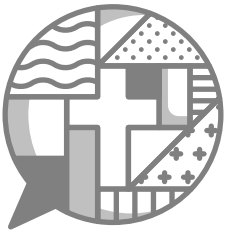


GIVE THEM JESUS

"He's such a jerk! He's doing it again," Alisa said.

"What's he doing?" one of the members in our group asked.

"He's doing what he always does—canceling at the last minute when it's his turn to pick up the kids for the weekend. And then, when I talk to him about it, he intimidates and tries to threaten me. He scares me. And now I'm constantly thinking about how we're going to make it financially if he doesn't help us. Half the time, I don't want the kids to be with him, but I know they need to see their father. I don't want to see him or even talk to him. He's so intimidating! I just can't keep doing this. I'm constantly worrying and can hardly sleep."

Alisa's husband had cheated on her with her best friend.

Subsequently, the marriage had ended in a divorce. Neither of them was a believer in Jesus. Additionally, shortly after the affair, Alisa's house had been destroyed in a fire, and she had lost everything.

Alisa was introduced to our community when Clay and Kristie, new Christians and members of our missional community, asked if we'd be willing to help her. They knew Alisa through a mutual friend, and our kids all attended the same elementary school. Without a husband or a home, it was clear Alisa needed the help of God's family.

So we pitched in together to buy groceries and to provide money for her to purchase clothes and other necessary items. For a season, she and her two daughters lived with Clay and Kristie and their two children, Emma and Keagan. Eventually, Alisa started to hang out with our missional community and started learning about Jesus with us.

"Don't worry," one of the men in our group spoke up. "We'll take care of him! We're not going to let him treat you like this."

Someone else chimed in: "Alisa, you can't put up with this! You've got to stand up to him. And if you won't, we will. We won't just stand by and watch this happen to you."

The conversation continued like this for some time until I realized what was going on.

"Wait a minute, everyone!" I said. "This isn't what Alisa needs right now. She doesn't need us to make this about her husband any more than it already is."

I knew much of her problem had to do with the fact that she had already allowed her husband to have too much influence over her. He had taken center stage in her life to the point where she was emotionally controlled by his every behavior. In a sense, he had become her god.

I went on to say: "All we're doing is affirming him as the

problem. We're making the focus all about getting him to change. Sure, what he's doing is wrong. But we can't make this all about him. What if he never changes? Then Alisa will continue to be a slave to his brokenness. We can't change him. Alisa can't either. Only God can do that."

Alisa needed us to direct her to God for help. She needed something much better at the center of her life and attention—someone who could truly set her free and change her from the inside out. So I said: "We need to give Alisa Jesus, not our efforts to change her ex-husband. I'm not saying that we shouldn't have a conversation with him at some point, or that we shouldn't step in to protect her. However, let's start with Jesus first."

I turned to Alisa, saying: "You need Jesus to help you overcome your fear. You need Jesus to be your source of security and love. In fact, you also need Jesus to enable you to forgive and love your ex-husband."

I've seen this pattern play out many times over the years. I've been guilty of it myself. People share their struggles and, with every good intention, others give good advice or try to step in to be the solution themselves. People do need answers. They are in need of help. But we fail to truly help them if we don't give them Jesus. He is the best answer and the most powerful help they can receive.

Speak the Truth

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the church in Ephesus, states: "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and

fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. *Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ*" (Eph. 4:11–15).

It is God's intent that every person who comes into a relationship with him through Jesus Christ eventually will grow up into maturity. And maturity looks like Jesus. He is the perfect human, providing an example of what we are meant to be. A mature Christian is one who resembles Jesus Christ in thought, attitude, emotion, and behavior. And one of the most significant ways by which we grow up into maturity is by speaking the truth in love to one another.

Many wrongly believe that speaking the truth in love is actually just speaking hard words to one another with loving hearts: "You have bad breath, but since I love you, I've got to speak the truth to you." "We want you in our group, but you aren't very kind to others, and as a result, people don't want to be around you! I'm just speaking the truth in love." But that is not what Paul is talking about here. Sure, we do need to speak truthfully to one another and do it with love, but Paul has something more in mind.

We need to read just a few verses further to discover what Paul means. He clarifies the truth that we are to speak to one another in verse 21. He states, "The truth is in Jesus." "Speaking the truth in love," for Paul, is shorthand for "speaking what is true about Jesus" to one another—that is, speaking the gospel to one another. Paul knows that if people are going to grow up *into* Christ in *every* way, they need to hear the *truths* of Jesus (the gospel) and learn to speak them *into everything*.

As my friends Steve Timmis and Tim Chester like to say: "*What's the question? Jesus is the answer. What's the problem? Jesus is the solution.*"

Too often, when giving people answers to their questions or

solutions to their problems, we give them something other than Jesus. If they are struggling with their finances, we give them the best budgeting plans we know of. If they are working through relational discord, we teach them communication techniques. If they are struggling with doubt, we challenge them to just believe, promising that all will get better if they do.

But we fail if we don't give them Jesus.

In some cases, we encourage them to read their Bibles or pray, which, of course, are wonderful things. However, if we don't teach them to meet and know Jesus through their Bible reading and prayer, we are dangerously close to leading them away from Jesus through very good things. This is the heart of idolatry—taking a good thing and making it a "god thing." We take something God gave us to direct us to him and love it or depend on it more than him. As a result, we fail to come to him through it.

Missing Jesus

The religious leaders in Jesus's day were the greatest Bible scholars and the most religious pray-ers. Yet they completely missed Jesus! At one point, Jesus said to them, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39–40). They loved the Scriptures that point to Jesus, but didn't love and depend on Jesus. They missed the entire point!

I have met too many people who love their Bibles yet have no genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. They don't really know him. They don't really love him. They don't really worship him. Instead, they worship their Bibles. They are not growing up into maturity because they are not growing up into Christ.

Bible studies are great. Prayer is wonderful. Applying wisdom for financial planning, relationship building, and every

other area of life is important and necessary. However, if we fail to give one another Jesus, we lead one another away from him. We might grow in Bible knowledge, but not in love for Jesus. We might become the most religious pray-ers of all and yet be talking to the wrong god. We could have our finances in order while our hearts are completely out of order because we are doing it all for the wrong reasons. We might be great at communication and conflict resolution, but if we are not reconciled with God through Jesus Christ, then our relationships will be shallow and temporary in nature.

Think of it this way: if we are to help one another grow up into Christ in every way, we need to learn how to speak the truths of Christ into everything—every aspect of life, every situation we face, and every issue we address.

What does the gospel of Jesus Christ teach us about our finances? How should we address relational discord in light of the gospel? How does what we know about Jesus shape how we handle anxiety and fear? If we speak the truths about Jesus into each of these issues or situations, we will grow up together in every way *with* Christ, which also means we will grow up in every way *into* Christ.

In other words, if we are going to grow up to be like Christ, we have to grow up with the very truths of Jesus.

However, if we try to instruct, counsel, or grow one another with something other than the truths of Jesus Christ, then every area in which we speak something other than Christ will be an area in which we grow away from him. This is why so many people look to Jesus only for their afterlife; they've been given the truths of Jesus primarily as the answer for going to heaven when they die. But they have little knowledge of how Jesus gives a better answer for what they do with their money, their sexuality, their work, or their families. Jesus is good news to them for their afterlife, but

they wrongly believe he has little to nothing to offer them in the everyday stuff of life.

But he has truth to offer—for everything. He *has* better truth and he *is* better truth.

Jesus is the true and better human, and everything in life is better if Jesus is brought into it. He has done everything better. He can make everything better. And the truths about who he is and what he has done, when applied to our lives, are always a better answer than anything else. There is good news and great help for absolutely everything in life in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus and Sex

For instance, let's consider our sexuality. I remember hearing people say, when I was growing up, "You should wait until you're married to have sex because sex is always better if you wait."

Well, first of all, that isn't entirely true. As a married man, I have found that sex gets better the more you do it. Seriously, that's just true.

In fact, I tell most of the couples who come to me for premarital counseling that their first night together will likely include the worst sex they will ever have, but that it will get better with practice. Not that the wedding night will be bad. Engaging in sexual intercourse with one person to whom you've committed yourself for a lifetime is an amazingly sacred and enjoyable experience. It is God's very good and right plan that sexual intimacy be reserved for marriage.

However, the motive for abstinence is not better sex in the future. In fact, this motivation leads to the opposite experience. Why? Well, if your primary reason for waiting to engage in sexual intimacy is your own satisfaction, you undermine the purpose for sexual intimacy. The purpose is not the fulfillment

of your selfish desires. In fact, most of the marriage problems I encounter in counseling spouses have to do with the faulty mind-set that marriage is all about them and their desires being fulfilled. Couples in the best marriages understand that giving yourself to another to please him or her glorifies God, satisfies the other, and brings great personal joy as well. Great marriages are self-giving, not self-serving.

How do I know this? Because sex and love were created by God, and Jesus showed us, in his life and death, how best to love.

So what reason should we give people to abstain from sexual activity prior to marriage?

Give them Jesus.

Tell them that the picture God has given us of his love for his people is that of a husband pursuing his bride. God loved his bride so much that he pursued her faithfully for hundreds of years. Eventually, God took on flesh in the form of a baby named Jesus, and he humbly lived as a human for thirty-three years. The writer of Hebrews says that Jesus is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because he was tempted in every way just as we are, yet he did not sin (Heb. 4:15). He fully understands us, the church, his bride, because he put himself in our shoes. Therefore, he is able to live with his bride in an understanding way, just as Peter directs husbands to do (1 Pet. 3:7). Jesus really knows his bride, so he really empathizes with her. He gets her better than any man has ever understood a woman!

Jesus loved his bride enough to serve her and give up his life as a ransom for her. She was unfaithful to him. She gave herself to others. She did not wait for him, but grew impatient and easily gave in to those not committed to a covenant relationship. And yet, he paid the bride price of his own life to purchase her out of her adulterous enslavement. His death on the cross paid the debt for her sin and cleansed her of all her impurities. With

his own life, he purchased for her a perfectly pure wedding dress. In fact, the dress she gets to wear is his own righteousness, which covers the shame of her sin. He died to give her freedom, purity, and unending love. Then he rose again and went to prepare a place for her. One day, he will come for his bride and take her home to dwell with him forever. And though it has been more than two thousand years, he is patiently waiting for that day when his bride will be fully prepared, and he will consummate the marriage at the greatest wedding party of all eternity. He has been waiting faithfully all this time for his bride. Talk about a faithful, loving, and patient lover who is willing to wait for the love of his life!

The reason we wait to have sex until we are married is because of Jesus's faithfulness to us. We are his bride, and we live to tell the story of his love for us.

Jesus purchased our lives so that they would display his pure, holy, selfless, unadulterated love for us! And if we fail—*when* we fail—we remember God's love for us and run back to the cross in faith, trusting that Jesus died for us. We believe that his death paid for our sin and cleansed us from all unrighteousness; that we are now clothed in his righteousness; that we are changed; that we are new; and that God has declared us pure through the pure love of Jesus Christ.

This doesn't just change who we are. It changes how we live.

Because of Jesus's pure love for us, we want to tell the story of his love by displaying it through our own sexual purity. We want to be sexually pure not for selfish motives but for godly reasons: we want the world to know that though we have betrayed the love of our life, we have been forgiven and made new, and he has not forsaken us because of what we have done. We want people to see this in our sexual purity. We also want them to hear it in his forgiveness. We want them to hear that though we have sinned—though they have sinned as well—we

have one who can make us pure because he never sinned. His purity is ours and ours is his!

What do we tell people about sexual purity and sexual immorality?

We give them Jesus!

We are Jesus's people, who speak the truths of Jesus into the everyday stuff of life.

Speak the truths of Jesus for rightly ordering our budgets. Speak the truths of Jesus for finding a spouse. Speak the truths of Jesus for how we respond to our employers or employees. Speak the truths of Jesus for how we parent our children. Speak the truths of Jesus into everything.

Alisa needed the truths of Jesus—the gospel—spoken to her during our group time.

"Alisa," I said, "Jesus is the only man who will never let you down. Every other man will fail you, but he never will. God wants you to stop looking to your ex-husband, or any other man for that matter, to be for you what only Jesus can be for you. He wants Jesus to be at the center of your heart, your affections, and your hope. Jesus wants you to know that he loves you very much and wants to be your ultimate protector and provider."

"But how can I know for sure that he will take care of me?" she asked.

"Well, God loved you so much that he sent his only Son to die on the cross for your sins. While you were an enemy of God, God loved you enough to die for you so that you can be forgiven. You can be certain that he will provide for you. If he didn't hold back his only Son, you can be certain he will give you every other good gift that you need as well.

"And not only does he love you and want to provide for you," I continued, "but he also wants to set you free from the past. Jesus suffered for sin—your sin and the sin of others—so

that you not only might be forgiven yourself, but also be able to forgive others and be healed of the wounds you've received through the sins done against you. God wants you to come to him through faith in Jesus for forgiveness and healing.

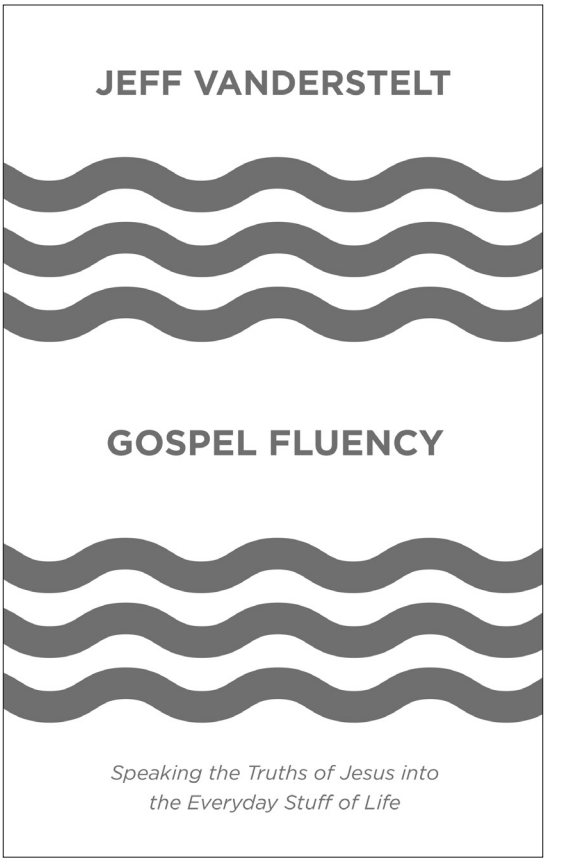
"We can eventually talk to your ex-husband if you'd like, but what is most important is that you meet Jesus, come to know his love for you, and be healed by him yourself. What is most important is that Jesus becomes the center of your life instead of your ex-husband or anything else. God alone can forgive, provide what you really need, and love you forever through what Jesus has done for you" (see John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; 8:32).

This was the beginning of many similar conversations with Alisa about Jesus.

This is what it looks like to speak the truths of Jesus into the everyday stuff of life. This is what it looks like for people to know Jesus in their everyday life, not just their afterlife.

This is gospel fluency.

Now, let's consider what it takes to become gospel fluent.



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At the core of Christianity is belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ. But how should the gospel affect our lives after we believe? And how can we speak gospel truths into everyday issues of life? In this book, experienced pastor and speaker Jeff Vanderstelt shows how all people—Christians and non-Christians alike—need to hear the gospel on a regular basis. Teaching believers what it looks like to be truly "fluent" in the gospel so that it becomes a natural part of our everyday conversations, Vanderstelt shows how the good news of Jesus is our only hope for every aspect of our lives.

JEFF VANDERSTELT is the visionary leader of both Saturate and the Soma Family of Churches, the teaching pastor of Doxa Church in Bellevue, Washington, and the author of *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life*.

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