The Four -Chapter Gospel - An Overview
Made to Flourish Miami - June 2017

Four-Chapter Gospel: Creation – Fall – Redemption - Restoration
It’s the ultimate story of significance.

The Big Picture: Understanding the Bible’s teaching concerning “God’s Big Agenda” may require a shift in the way we view the Gospel, our vocational endeavors and the full scope of His redemptive purposes.

The concept of the Four-Chapter Gospel provides the framework for this change in our thinking and helps us grasp who we were created to be.

Understanding the Four-Chapter Gospel: A Brief Summary

Creation  - Genesis teaches us that God’s creation is real and good. It also teaches us about the nature of the relationship between God and humanity. Adam and Eve had “response-ability”.

- They had the ability to respond to God (personally),
- They had the ability to respond to each other (corporately),
- And they had the ability to respond to the creation (cosmically).

The Fall  - After the Fall, these three capacities for response were damaged and defaced. The Fall affects all three dimensions – personal, corporate, and cosmic:

- Adam and Eve hid from God (personal).
- Adam blames Eve; Eve blames the serpent (corporate).
- Genesis 3:17 says the ground is “cursed” because of Adam and Eve (cosmic).

Notice how all the dimensions, healthy in creation, are inverted after the Fall.

Redemption  - Redemption applies to every area affected by the fall:

- Christ died, rose, and reigns in power for us. According to Romans 8:34, he also prays on our behalf (personal).
- I Corinthians 12:13 tells us that when we accept Christ, we are now “baptized by the one Spirit into the one body” – the church (corporate).
Redemption extends to the whole cosmos. Romans 8:19-21 says that “creation itself will be liberated from its bondage” (cosmic).

Restoration - Restoration is the final chapter (Rev. 21,22) in which the whole creation is finally restored. Almost every time the Bible uses the word “new” (referencing new birth, new selves, new creation, new heavens and new earth, etc.), it uses the Greek word kainos, meaning “renewed.”

God will not throw away creation, but renew it. Al Wolters says, God does not make junk, and he does not junk what he has made.

The Four-Chapter Gospel: Why Does it Matter?

Two Chapters versus Four
(Which version we believe affects our view of everything!)

For over 1800 years, the grand biblical narrative of the Four Chapter Gospel was taught by the church. But in the last two centuries, the evangelical church has reduced the Four-Chapter Gospel to only two chapters: Fall and Redemption.

Most Christians know the Two-Chapter Gospel, even if they may not use that term. This approach states in “chapter one” that our problem is separation from God because of our sin. “Chapter two” describes the solution to this dilemma: Jesus came into the world to bring salvation through his work on the cross.

So, using this approach, the Gospel is divided into two parts: Sin (the Fall) and Redemption.

And while the Two-Chapter Gospel is most certainly true, it is an incomplete story with a number of problems:

• The Two-Chapter Gospel does not tell us why we were created.

• The Two-Chapter Gospel does tell us about our ultimate destiny as believers.

• The Two-Chapter Gospel tends to over emphasize the individualistic aspects of salvation. Salvation becomes all about us.

• The Two-Chapter Gospel tends to lead to an escapist view of redemption. (Many Christians today see their salvation only as a “bus ticket to heaven”. They believe that what they do while they wait for the bus (particularly their workplace endeavors) doesn’t really matter. We twiddle our thumbs and let the world keep on spinning as it is, until Christ returns.

• The Two-Chapter Gospel becomes just a gospel of sin management.
On a basic level, this approach leaves out God’s original good creation (characterized by Shalom – universal flourishing, wholeness and delight), and God’s future restoration of his entire creation (also characterized by Shalom).

A Four-Chapter Gospel, however, sees a different end in sight and this makes all the difference for how we live in the present.

As Mike Metzger says, the Four-Chapter Gospel reminds humanity of its dignity, because it points out two things:

**Our dignity:** The Creation chapter reminds us we are made in God’s image and imbued with worth and value.

**Our role:** Creation also tells us that, being made in God’s image, we possess the creativity of the Creator. We are co- or sub-creators whom he will use to bring about the final chapter, the Restoration of all things.

Tim Keller says this of the Four-Chapter Gospel and its relation to the call to co-labor with God to accomplish His sovereign purposes:

" If…the story of salvation is creation, fall, redemption, restoration, then things look different…the purpose of redemption is not to escape the world but renew it. If we lose the emphasis on the corporate – on the kingdom – we lose the power of the Gospel for cultural transformation. “

We will not answer the call to “vocational stewardship” without a framework that provides context for our work and for cultural transformation.

**Summary View:** The Four-Chapter Gospel “bookends” the Fall and Redemption with two crucial parts: Creation and Restoration. Here is a helpful visual comparison:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two-Chapter Gospel</th>
<th>Four-Chapter Gospel</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redemption</td>
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Conclusion

According to the **Four Chapter Gospel**, the Bible begins with the Creation of all things and ends with the Renewal of all things. And in between, it offers an interpretation of the meaning of all history. And this biblical narrative makes a comprehensive claim on all humanity.

We need to rediscover the lost two chapters to find out why we were created and understand our future destiny as God’s people. The Four-Chapter Gospel is the framework for the significance of our life and work.

Only in this larger framework can we truly understand why our work is important to God and how he has called us to Vocational Stewardship.

As Christians, we are called to live a life so transformed by this Four-Chapter Gospel that others glimpse in it the possibility of their own transformation – and the world’s.

Questions for Reflection

1. How might the **Four-Chapter Gospel** “re-adjust” your view of God’s purposes for His church?

2. How does embracing the additional chapters influence your outlook on the world?

3. What about your own work and significance?

The above outline contains excerpts from “All Things New: Rediscovering the 4-Chapter Gospel” by Hugh Whelchel The Institute for Faith, Work and Economics - tifwe.org Used by permission.