

The Briarpatch Gospel

Shayne Wheeler

Chapter 1

You Are Here: Coming to grips with our fear

1. What did Shayne learn about life and faith from his conversation with Ilya? Describe a conversation you've had in which Jesus felt especially present and alive to you.

2. What does the author mean when he uses the phrase "life in the briarpatch"? Describe what this looks like in your own life and in your church.

3. What does Jesus' time on earth, including his death and resurrection, say about the briarpatch?

Chapter 2

We're Not in Kansas Anymore: Clearing the land mines

1. What are some cultural and ecclesiastical land mines mentioned in the chapter? How do these compare to the land mines you see around you? How can we defuse the land mines in our lives?

2. What attracted Brian to the church? How does this compare to the culture and climate in your own church? How can you make room for people to connect before they commit?

3. How do we make room in our lives for people who are different from us? What specific steps can you take to make room in your life, your family's life, and the life of the church?

4. How does the language you use to describe your relationship with God create open doors for others? How does it create barriers? How can you turn those barriers into open doors?

Chapter 3

The Way In: Navigating the thicket

1. Do you feel as if you have to choose between superficial/safe friendships or downplaying/hiding your faith? Which do you tend toward more often and why? What is a better option?

2. How is love "the way in"? What stands out to you in 1 John 4:7-12?

3. In what ways have you separated your spiritual and physical lives? What can you do to live with greater integrity in the sanctuary and on the street?

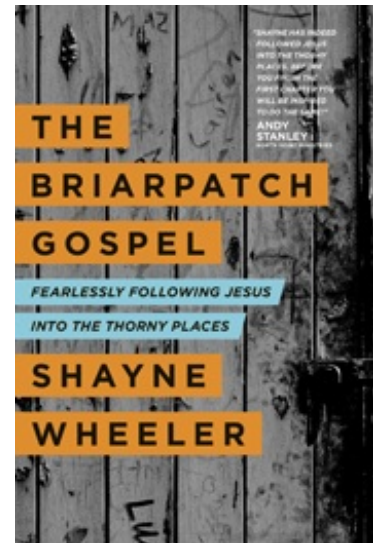
Chapter 4

The Iceberg Lurks: Danger beneath the surface

1. How is your heart like an iceberg? What issues do you hide beneath the surface?

2. When Jesus met the woman at the well, he saw through her brokenness and offered her healing in the form of "living water." Put yourself in her place. If you met Jesus under similar circumstances, what brokenness would he see in your heart? How can you begin to open yourself up to his "living water"?

3. What does it mean to live in the power of Christ's resurrection?



The Briarpatch Gospel

Shayne Wheeler

Chapter 5

Vertigo: The dance of doubt and faith

1. Why is doubt a “dirty little secret” that many Christians don’t want to talk about? How does the author suggest we should deal with our doubt?
2. In order to believe in God and love him, we need some “objective, foundational evidence that he exists and that what he says is true.” What pieces of foundational evidence have you based your faith on?
3. What mysteries do you experience in life? How is your relationship with God a mystery? How have you reconciled the mystery of God with your need for evidence?
4. How would you respond to the author’s suggestion that “we should engage in worshipping God even if we’re not sure we believe in him”? How do you worship God in your own life?

Chapter 6

Pirates and Freaks: Having the courage to change

1. How have you seen the totem poles of piety and cultural popularity dictate people’s behavior? Is there a difference between the totem poles in secular settings versus Christian settings?
2. What does the author say is the reason we fear admitting our imperfections and failures? Do you agree with him? How can we be healed from the fear of being exposed?
3. Describe a time when you were “undressed” by God. How did this lead to healing and growth in your life? Or did it?
4. How can you apply the parable of the Lost Sheep in your everyday life? How does it affect your attitude and approach to “real sinners”?

Chapter 7

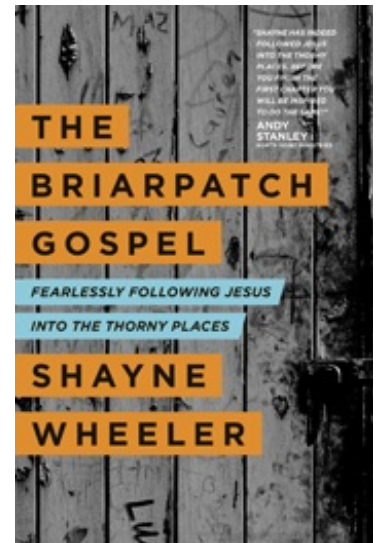
Following the Story: Can such an old book ever lead the way?

1. In what ways is “the story of the Bible foundationally one of hope”?
2. Do you trust the Bible? Are there parts that seem confusing or contradictory to you? How do you reconcile those parts with the Bible’s claim that it is the revelation of God?
3. Why do you suppose God allowed the Bible to contain so much “crazy stuff”? How does this support or undermine your faith in God’s Word?
4. Discuss the difference between viewing the Bible as a compilation of propositional summaries and theological proofs or as a complex, interwoven story of a God who loves, and is redeeming, the world. How can these viewpoints be reconciled?

Chapter 8

Moving toward the Rubble: Meeting God in hurricanes and the homeless

1. Describe Shayne’s friendship with Mr. Buford. Have you ever had a friendship with someone whose perspective is so different from your own? How has this relationship affected you? What have you done to preserve the relationship and keep the dialogue open?



2. As Christians, we are called to be discerning, but we are also called to be loving and caring toward the people around us. How do we balance the two?

3. We tend to think of fasting as going without food for an extended period. How does the prophet Isaiah describe the kind of fast that God desires (see Isaiah 58)?

4. In what ways can you “move toward the rubble” in your neighborhood, community, or town? How does that align with your understanding of evangelism?

Chapter 9

Missing Pieces: Finding the meaning of Jesus in the crucible of suffering

1. What do you think of the quotes at the beginning of this chapter? Do you agree with them? When have you seen them as true or untrue in your life?

2. What explanations do people give for why there is evil and suffering in our world? What answer would you give?

3. How does God use pain and suffering in our lives to further his redemptive purpose for the world? How has your own suffering uniquely equipped you to offer “empathy amid the thorns” to someone else?

Chapter 10

Looking for the Rainbow: Does God really hate gays?

1. Describe your own experience with the issue of homosexuality and the church. How has the church typically responded to this issue?

2. Describe the “chameleon” and “musk ox” responses people or churches often have in regard to difficult social and cultural issues. Which response do you tend toward? What is the third way?

3. What do you think causes the church to respond to issues of sexuality differently than it does to other sensitive issues? What does loving the sinner and hating the sin really look like in our world today? How can we be accepting of people without being accepting of their sin, especially when it comes to a sinful lifestyle?

4. What would it mean for you to go “all in” to the briarpatches in your life? What would need to change, and what would stay the same?

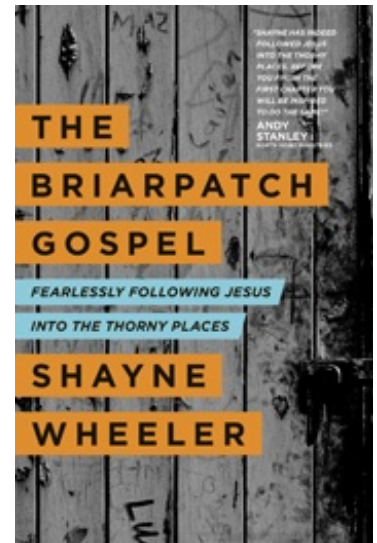
Chapter 11

Open Borders: Living outside the walls

1. In what ways are you already in the midst of the briarpatch? How can you model the hope and healing of the gospel of Jesus Christ right where you are?

2. How does faith in Jesus differ from adherence to other religions?

3. In what ways do you need to “get out of Tennessee”? How can you and your church become more intentional about doing this? What are the benefits of living with “open borders”?



The Briarpatch Gospel

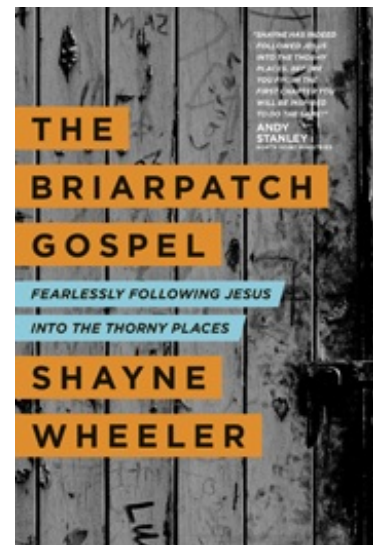
Shayne Wheeler

4. What are some of the “subconscious signals we transmit that subtly undermine the simple and free invitation of Jesus”? In what ways are we making things more complicated than Jesus himself did? How can we become a more accurate reflection of God’s grace?

Chapter 12

Getting in Tune: The harmony of heaven and earth

1. The author says that Jesus’ purpose was “not so much to get us into heaven as it was to get heaven into us and into the world.” What do you think about this perspective? How have you seen God’s Kingdom here on earth already?
2. What do you have that can be offered to God for him to do the miraculous with? Are you willing to give them to God and let him work?
3. Identify a briarpatch in your own life or community. What would it take for you to personally enter it, and how would it change you, your church, and the people God has placed around you?
4. How does understanding the book of Revelation as a new beginning, rather than as an end, affect your perspective on living your life today?



TYNDALE.COM

Notes

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, typical of notebook or composition paper. The background is white, and there are no margins, text, or other markings present.

