Mitch Amago's
Gospel Summary:

I believe that living as a Christian begins with a response. Specifically, I believe that it begins with a response to God's love that which is ultimately revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as seen in the Gospel story. In my opinion, I believe that in order to understand the message of the Gospel, it is important to know that the Christian faith is not about following rules or earning God's favor; it is not about checking off the correct boxes and saying the correct things at the correct time. The Gospel message is about entering into a covenant relationship with the God who creates, redeems, and sustains us. Through Christ, we come to know God's never-ending, never-ceasing, and always overflowing grace. As followers of Christ, we are actively invited into a lifelong journey of discipleship that transforms not only our personal lives and ourselves, but also the communities in which we live, work, and serve.

In the New Testament, we read about how Jesus taught his disciples, both past and present, that the greatest commandments are both to love God with all we've got- with our entire and whole heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. There is no asterisk of who our neighbor is or is not- we are called to love all, no matter what. These commandments that were taught by Jesus are the very foundations and keystones of Christian life and they shape our every decision, relationship, and act of service that we perform. We see, read, and discover throughout each of the four Gospels that Jesus consistently welcomed those who had been excluded. He healed those who suffered. He forgave those who had fallen short in a variety of ways. He challenged both religious leaders and political systems that oppressed or devalued others and called for them to do better. Jesus's earthly ministry revealed to the world both then and now a God whose love reaches beyond boundaries and whose justice seeks the flourishing of all people.

As a member of the United Church of Christ, I understand Jesus' proclamation of the reign of God as both a present reality and an enduring hope. Christians are called not only to proclaim the Gospel but also to embody it by participating in the missio Dei or God's work of justice, reconciliation, and peace. We are called to feed the hungry, care for the sick, welcome the stranger, advocate for those whose voices have been silenced, and work to dismantle systems that deny the dignity of God's children. Because every person bears the imago Dei or image of God, every person possesses sacred worth and deserves to be treated with compassion, respect, and love.

As a national church, the United Church of Christ has provided those who are attendees, members, and onlookers with a reminder that "God is still speaking." I believe that the Holy Spirit continues to guide the Church, both locally and globally, both in the past and in the present. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we are able to prayerfully discern how to live faithfully in an ever-changing world while remaining rooted and steadfast in our witness of Scripture and the life of Jesus. We read the Bible, our sacred text, with reverence. We recognize it as the foundational witness to God's saving work. We seek the Holy Spirit's wisdom through prayer, reason, tradition, and the lived experiences of God's people. This posture of reflection calls us to be a humble people and recognize that our understanding is not stagnant. It is always growing as we listen for God's continuing voice.

Christian discipleship, or the lifelong process of following Jesus, is nurtured in a variety of ways, including through worship, prayer, communion, Scripture, and life together as a family of faith. These various practices and beyond, help to shape us into people who increasingly strive to reflect the character of Jesus. At the same time, we as Christians acknowledge that we have our own brokenness. As a result of that brokenness, we continually depend upon God's grace. Thankfully, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation are not isolated events. They are ongoing practices that deepen our relationship with God and with one another and can often be cyclical, because we all fall short in various periods of our lives.

Central to our faith is the cross and resurrection. They are at the heart of our hope as people of faith and as Christians. In and through the self-giving love of Christ, we are able to encounter a God who willingly enters into human suffering. In and through the resurrection, we encounter the promise of God's love that is stronger than hatred. We encounter justice that is stronger than oppression. We receive a life that is stronger than death. I believe this hope empowers us to persevere through hardship and struggle. I believe it empowers us to participate courageously in God's missio Dei of healing the world.

To live as a Christian, then, ultimately means to follow Jesus by embodying love. To follow Jesus, we practice mercy. We are called to pursue justice. We daily strive to extend an extravagant welcome. Lastly, we walk humbly with God. It is to recognize the imago Dei, or image of God in our neighbors, especially those on the margins. It is to serve with compassion, empathy, and love instead of seeking power or privilege over others. I firmly believe that the Christian faith is one that is not only something we believe, but it is also something we practice and live out. The practice is done through the lives we live: ones of generosity, hospitality, forgiveness, and courageous witness. As followers of Christ, we are called to trust that God is continuing to call and equip the Church to bear witness to the Gospel with humility, hope, and joy, participating in God's ongoing work of renewing all creation.