

Message Discussion Guide A CHURCH IN COVENANT

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. David Platt

April 26, 2009

Nehemiah 9:38

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Connect . . .

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

Option 1

Invite learners to share the jobs or careers that they currently occupy. Ask the following questions:

- How did you prepare for your job?
- Did you want a job description?
- How did a job description help you to understand what was expected of a person in your position?
- Is an accurate job description valuable to an employee?

Explain that today we will be discussing how a covenant helps us to know what is expected of us as believers in a covenant community.

Option 2

Encourage learners to share what they thought church membership meant when they first joined a local church. Invite them to then share how any ideas of church membership may have changed from that first time until now.

Explain that today we will be discussing how a covenant can be beneficial to help us understand what membership means within a local covenant community.

Option 3

Have your attendees share the expectations that existed for being a part of the family system that they grew up in. Ask them how they knew about those expectations. Now ask them what the expectations were to be a member of the last church they joined prior to coming to Brook Hills. Ask them how they knew about those expectations. Discuss whether it's important for a Faith Family to have clarity of expectations like an earthly family for the members of that family.

Explain that today we will be discussing how a covenant can be beneficial to help us understand what membership means within a local covenant community.

Review the Message . . .

Message Discussion Guide A CHURCH IN COVENANT

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. David Platt

April 26, 2009

Nehemiah 9:38

The Value of the Church...

- We are recipients of a new covenant .
- We are members of a new community .

Discussion Questions

- Remind learners that these first two main points are a review of past sermons in the Covenant Community series. A more in-depth study of these topics can be found in the February 1st and March 1st sermon guides.
- Enlist a learner to read Hebrews 10:19-22. How does the author of Hebrews indicate that our hearts are made clean?
- Because of Jesus' sacrifice, God's people no longer had to offer sacrifices for the forgiveness of their sins and were granted access to God's presence. What does this truth indicate about how Jesus' sacrifice brought a new covenant?
- Read Hebrews 10:23-25. How did the new covenant affect the relationships of believers, as they interacted with one another?
- According to the author, what are the benefits of a new community existing together?

Application . . .

- How does our access to God's direct presence affect our relationship with Him?
- How do we take our access to God for granted at times? How can we consistently grasp the reverent nature of this relationship with our Creator?
- How should the new covenant affect our relationships with other believers? With non-believers?
- Why should we be in community with other believers? What is the benefit?
- Explain that persecuted churches throughout history have developed covenants to help them understand the commitment that the members had to one another. How could a covenant enhance the relationships between members of a church body?

The Value of Church Membership...

- Church membership is implied by church gatherings .
- Church membership is implied by church discipline .
- Church membership is implied by church leadership .
- Church membership is implied by church accountability .

Discussion Questions

- David mentioned that the word translated as "church" in the New Testament is the word ecclesia, which literally means "gathering." What does this definition imply about local bodies of Christ?
- Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 18:15-17. How do these instructions for discipline within the church body give evidence to the importance of church membership?

Message Discussion Guide

A CHURCH IN COVENANT

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. David Platt

April 26, 2009

Nehemiah 9:38

- Enlist three volunteers to Hebrews 13:17, Acts 6:1-7, Acts 13:1-3. Are these instructions given to the universal Church or to a local body? What are the implications of these verses to being a part of a local body of believers?

Application . . .

- How can we negate the value of membership with a local body of believers?
- Why do we sometimes try to avoid commitments to a church?
- Have we made membership more like a club than a community? How?

The Value of a Church Covenant...

- A covenant defined... (By Webster)
 - A written agreement or promise usually under seal between two or more parties especially for the performance of some action.
- A church covenant defined...
 - A clear expression of a church's commitment to love one another as a community of faith.

Discussion Questions

- David mentioned that, like the word "Trinity," the exact mention of a church covenant does not exist in the New Testament. In this case, we look to two questions:
 - Is it prohibited?—This answer is "no" except in cases where a covenant is looked to as equivalent to or taking the place of the New Covenant/Scripture.
 - Is it valuable?—How does the existence of covenant relationships in Scripture, including relationships between God and His people, marriages, and friendships illustrate their value?
 - Read Genesis 17:1-5 and 1 Samuel 18:1-3. How did the covenants between God and man and between people illustrate the seriousness of relationships and action?

Application . . .

- How can a church covenant help us to understand how our behavior should look toward other members?
- Why would we be hesitant to enter into a covenant with other believers?
- Could that hesitancy demonstrate a lack of commitment to God's mission and plans for His church? How?

The Foundation of a Church Covenant...

- We are a community grounded in the Word of God.
- We are a community sustained by the grace of God.
- We are a community promoting the good of one another.

Message Discussion Guide

A CHURCH IN COVENANT

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. David Platt

April 26, 2009

Nehemiah 9:38

- We are a community demonstrating the _____ glory _____ of God.

Discussion Questions

- Invite learners to recount any of the story of Nehemiah that they know. Emphasize that the events of Nehemiah come after Jerusalem had been destroyed, God's people had been defeated and sent into exile. The people had returned with Ezra to rebuild the temple. Nehemiah and the people rebuilt the wall around Jerusalem in Chapters 1-8, and God was now beginning to rebuild His people in Chapter 9.
- Enlist a volunteer to read Nehemiah 8:1-8. How did the people's response to the Word of God illustrate the importance of it in their lives?
- Encourage learners to look through Nehemiah 9:5-37 and to pick out examples of how God remained gracious to His people through their history. How did God's grace completely sustained His people?
- Read Nehemiah 9:38. To what does "because of all this" refer? Why did the people of God want to enter into covenant with one another?
- Explain that Nehemiah 10:28-39 spells out how this covenant would promote good for one another. Looking at Verse 29, why did these people want to do good to one another?
- Enlist a learner to read Nehemiah 12:43. What was the importance of this covenant community?

Application . . .

- How should our lives reflect an attitude of awe and respect to God's Word?
- How does our knowledge of and time spent with God's Word line up with our claim that God's Word is authoritative and important in our lives?
- How should the grace of God drive us to live in relationship with other believers?
- How does the Word of God live through us when we interact in covenant community?
- Why would our behavior toward each other affect how others view God?
- Why would a covenant community make us feel uncomfortable?
- In an individualistic society, how does a covenant community appear contrary to what we strive for every day?
- What is at stake in our relationships within the church?
- What is the determining factor in our choosing to follow God's Word or our own desires?

The Beginning of a Church Covenant...

As members of The Church at Brook Hills, we _____ affirm _____ this covenant with one another by God's grace, for our good, and ultimately for God's glory.

Application . . .

- Explain that this statement is the beginning of the church covenant with Brook Hills.
- How could this covenant change our hearts and our behavior toward the church?