

Message Discussion Guide

LIFEBLOOD, THE GOSPEL: WHAT WE BELIEVE

The Church at Brook Hills . Dr. David Platt . April 13, 2008 Romans 3:21-26

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...

Option 1

Ask group members to think back to the beginning of the service on Sunday, when David asked everyone to quickly and briefly write down the meaning of the gospel. Ask them to pull out their message notes if they have them and to turn to the back where they wrote their definition of the gospel.

Then, ask group members to get share their original definitions of the gospel and their experience with being asked this question (be sure to divide your group into smaller groups if you lead a group with more than 6 or 8). Provide the following questions and encourage members to keep these questions in mind throughout your time together as you review the message:

- In light of the message we heard and the truths from the text in Romans, have some elements been missing in your explanation of the gospel? What is the one thing most needed to make your proclamation of the gospel more effective?
- What difference would it make if you added those elements to your explanation of the gospel?
- Are you able to explain the gospel objectively as well as share your personal experience with its truths?
- Could you easily turn in the Bible to find four or five appropriate verses/passages that would explain the gospel clearly to people?

Option 2

Discuss some of the ways that you and your group have heard the gospel presented in recent years in American culture. Then spend some time evaluating how well those presentations communicate the whole message of the gospel. The goal for this exercise isn't to bash methods of sharing the gospel but to evaluate them in light of Scripture. Almost all modern gospel presentations use Scripture, but many still do not present the complete message.

Consider some of these questions as you discuss various "methods".

- Is God presented as the Creator? Is there a clear Creator/creature distinction that establishes God's right to lay claim on our lives?
- Is God's nature and character described? His holiness? His justice? His love?
- Is mankind's moral responsibility to God made clear? Is the origin of sin and the Fall of mankind presented?

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- Is the nature and seriousness of the human problem clearly revealed? Is sin defined?
- Is alienation and separation from God explained? Are humans contrasted with God such that our separation from Him is understood?
- Is God's judgment and wrath against sinful humanity revealed? Is there a warning about hell and eternal punishment?
- Is it clear that we are utterly incapable of saving ourselves through good works, morality, or religious exercise?
- Is it clear that Jesus Christ is God's gracious provision to resolve our problem of sin and reconcile us with God?
- Is Christ's humanity presented? Are you told that Jesus lived a perfect life?
- Is Christ's deity addressed?
- Is it clear that Jesus' death was more than just suffering on a cross, but that He was a substitutionary sacrifice for sinners? Is it clear that the price for our sin must be paid either personally under God's wrath or vicariously through Christ?
- Is it announced that Jesus Christ was victoriously and bodily resurrected from the grave? That he is now ascended into heaven as the exalted Lord and only mediator between God and humanity?
- Is the necessity of a personal response of repentance and faith made clear? Is it clear that conversion is not based on intellectual assent, emotionalism, or mere external response?
- Are unbelievers manipulated to respond by withholding information or emphasizing certain aspects of the gospel over others?
- Are unbelievers asked to consider and count the cost of following Christ?
- Do they know that they are primarily getting God and not just forgiveness of sins, peace, and a "better life"?

Review the Message...

The Gospel

The just and gracious God of the universe looked upon hopelessly sinful people and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin on the cross to show His power over sin in the resurrection so that all who have faith in Him will be reconciled to God forever.

The just and gracious God of the universe...

- **God is creator.**
 - We read in Romans 1:25 about people worshiping created things rather than the Creator, who is forever praised.
 - Discuss some parallels between the sin recorded in Romans 1:25 and the temptations the modern church faces now? How do we exchange the truth about God for a lie?

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- How does God's role as Creator give Him the right to lay claim on our lives? [Note: He owns us and everything He has created]
 - Discuss some parallels between God's initial creation of all things and what God is doing through Christ in saving those who trust in Him. [Note: 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:14-15; Revelation 21:5, etc...]
- **God is judge.**
 - Beginning in Romans 1:18, Paul starts to explore the foundational elements of the gospel message. The truth of God's wrath is not the gospel – that is, it is not “good news.”
 - Why does Paul start with this truth?
 - How is the truth of God's wrath against sin received in modern North American culture?
 - How should the reception of this truth in our culture affect our presentation of the gospel message?
 - Romans 2:1-16 includes principles of God's judgment.
 - Who will God judge?
 - On what basis does God judge mankind?
 - Why must we affirm God's justice in His judgment and wrath against sin?
 - **God is gracious.**
 - Romans 3:24 speaks to how we are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.
 - Why did God provide a way for us to be justified? [Note: This is ultimately an unanswerable question because it questions God's motives. Use this question to create discussion, but affirm that it is simply because God desired to provide a way – justification is only by His grace.]
 - Discuss the presumed tension between God's gracious gift of salvation (i.e. it cannot be earned) and verses such as Romans 2:6-7 – “God will give to each person according to what he has done”. How might this tension be resolved? [Consider Galatians 5 and James 1 in answering this question.]
- ...looked upon hopelessly sinful people...**
- **We have rebelled against God.**
 - How does Romans 3:10-18 portray the state of mankind and help shape our understanding of God?
 - According to Roman's 3:10-18, does mankind have the ability not to rebel against God by his actions?
 - If so, does any man choose not to rebel against God?
 - If not, how does this truth affect our understanding of God's grace?

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- **We are separated from God.**
 - Why did the sin that originated in the garden separate all mankind from a right relationship with God?
 - Why is humanity's separation from God the result of Adam's first sin and not every sin he committed? (See Romans 5:16-19) [Note: The key issue here is one's sin nature – we are separated from God because we are sinners not merely because we sin]

- **We are dead without God.**
 - According to Ephesians 2:1-3
 - What brings death?
 - Just as the Spirit of God is at work in those who believe, who is a guiding influence in the lives of those who follow the ways of the world?
 - Discuss the implications of losing sight of this truth in our culture – that the greatest problem of the human race (and our own individual lives) is not lack of education, communication, or material well-being, but our sinful status before God.
 - David said that people “can't go from death to life on one's own”. Is this an encouragement or discouragement for you to proclaim the gospel message? Why?

...and sent His Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, to bear His wrath against sin on the cross and to show His power over sin in the resurrection...

- **Jesus' life displayed the righteousness of God.**
 - What must we admit about ourselves if we are to rely on Christ's life for our salvation and eternal destiny?
 - Why is it important to proclaim Christ's righteous life lived perfectly under God's rule when we present the gospel message? [Note: 2 Corinthians 5:21]

- **Jesus' death satisfied the wrath of God.**
 - For various reasons, many think it is unfair that God would punish people for their sins. What does Jesus' death on the cross, absorbing God's wrath for our sins, demonstrate about our understanding of fairness in God's eyes? How does God's grace impact this understanding of fairness?
 - In light of David's message, what new insight have you gained to Christ's statement on the cross in John 19:30 – “It is finished”?
 - Discuss the range of emotions or attitudes we often have when we think about Christ acting as our substitute and suffering for us on the cross.

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- How might our thinking about His substitutionary work change when we see that His true suffering was “drinking the cup” of God’s wrath against all of humanity’s sin?
- **Jesus’ resurrection demonstrated the power of God.**
 - How does the resurrection justify Jesus’ life and vindicate His death sentence on the cross?
 - What is the significance of declaring Jesus’ resurrection when communicating the gospel message?
 - When we were born again, we received new spiritual life. If we think of this new spiritual life as part of the resurrection power of Christ working within us, how does that give us encouragement as we follow Christ? As we minister to people’s needs?

...so that all who have faith in His will be reconciled to God...

- **God is the giver of the Gospel.**
 - The ultimate cause of Christ’s atoning work on the cross is found in the love and the justice of God. Was there anything in us that required God to love us or to take steps to save us?
 - Based on this truth and the truths discussed so far, what is an appropriate response to someone that claims to reject any God that would “send people to Hell”?
 - Do your answers to these questions help you to appreciate the character of God’s love for you as a person who did not at all deserve that love?
 - How does God’s role as giver of the gospel relate to His role as creator?
 - The Hebrew word *bara* means to create out of nothing. (The word is used seven times in the first creation account in Genesis.) Only God can do this, to create *ex nihilo*, from nothing. Just as was recorded in Romans 2:25 when people worshiped created things rather than the creator, how similarly do people today oftentimes treasure the gifts of God and ignore God who is the giver?
 - God is the source of every good gift. (See James 1:17-18).
- **God is the gift of the Gospel.**
 - What are some common misconceptions of what the gifts/outcomes of the gospel are?
 - David clearly said, “If you don’t want God, you will not get Heaven.” What are some ways that people commonly describe Heaven? (“I want to watch football all day,” “I want to sleep as much as I can,” or “I want the perfect body”).
 - To whom does Heaven belong and for what purpose does a believer live—in Heaven and on earth?
 - What is truly so unexplainably wonderful about being eternally in God’s Kingdom? (See Revelation 4:8-11.)

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- **God is the goal of the Gospel.**
 - Based on Romans 3:25-26, why did Jesus go to the cross?
 - For whom did Jesus go to the cross? (See John 17:1-4).

...forever.

- **The risk...**
 - **We can know all of these truths and still not be saved.**
 - What's missing in the life of a person who knows all these truths yet still walks in darkness?
 - How is it possible for someone to "do all the right things" and still not be saved?
- **The reality...**
 - **Our eternal destiny hinges on a biblical response to the Gospel.**
 - What is the only acceptable basis for an eternity spent with God?
 - What is the biblical response to the Gospel?
 - In light of Romans 3:10-18, how can one ever respond to the gospel in repentance and faith?

Transform...

It's important to walk from this message and this time together as believers who are more fully equipped to share the gospel and live in its power. Spend time praying for the Holy Spirit to open our eyes and hearts to understand more fully the great mystery of Jesus Christ.

If time allows, get into the pairs/smaller groups again and allow each member to share the gospel again or discuss questions they may have about how they could share more effectively.

If time is short or group members need more time to internalize, encourage them to ponder these truths throughout the week and let them know this exercise will be a priority the next time you meet together.