

Message Discussion Guide SIN IN THE CAMP (Part 2, continued)

The Church at Brook Hills . Dr. David Platt . February 17, 2008, 2008 . Joshua 7:1-26

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 . . .

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

Option 1

Allow each person in the group to answer which of the following he or she would choose, and why:

- **A chick flick or a heroic epic film**
- **Chocolate chip cookies or a filet mignon**
- **Classical music or rock music**
- **Paper or plastic (at the grocery store)**
- **Only using salt or only using pepper**
- **Ford or Chevy**
- **(Add more of your own as you have time, but end with the following . . .)**
- **Listening to jokes . . . or listening to a sermon on sin.**

Once each person has shared, discuss: **While there's nothing necessarily wrong with jokes from the pulpit, why is it important that God's people be confronted with the truth of sin?**

Explain that we're about to take another look at the seriousness of sin as revealed through the Old Testament story of Achan's sin.

Option 2

Read an excerpt from C.S. Lewis' book, *The Screwtape Letters*.

*(NOTE: If you are not familiar with *The Screwtape Letters*, it is important to know that "Screwtape" is the name of a senior demon and he is writing to his young nephew demon named "Wormwood" with instructions on how to appropriately tempt humanity. Thus the "Enemy" referred to in this passage is God Himself)*

"You will say that these are very small sins; and doubtless, like all young tempters, you are anxious to be able to report spectacular wickedness. But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed, the safest road to Hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without mile-stones, without signposts." – Letter 12

- **Have you experienced the adversary doing such things? If so, how?**
- **Do you think the church as a whole is aware of Satan's schemes against us, especially in light of how intentionally crafty he is? Why or why not?**

Explain that we're about to take a serious look at sin and its effects on the Church—and the incredible hope we have because of God's mercy.

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Review the Message . . .

Read 2 Corinthians 4:4-6. There is a battle between the god of this world blinding the minds of unbelievers and the true God shining light into our hearts. And right in the middle, Paul says, "We preach Jesus Christ as Lord." Emphasize that this truth is why this series is so important: We have an adversary set out to blind our minds, and if we don't see God's truth in His Word, we won't see it.

Review the context: Joshua 7 covers the sin of Achan, an Israelite who took a robe, gold, and silver for himself when God commanded the people to destroy *everything*. After repeated victories, the people of God were defeated at Ai, and 36 people die. Read Joshua 7:1-26.

The Bottom Line... We need a radically God-centered perspective of sin.

One Sin...

(From last week – February 10, 2008. . .)

1. Harms the entire people of God.

- 1. Sin always affects your faith family.**
- 2. Sin always affects your physical family.**

(And now, this week – February 17, 2008. . .)

2. Forfeits the blessing and presence of God.

- Call on volunteers to quickly read these verses while the group listens for a theme: Joshua 6:27, Deuteronomy 31:23; Joshua 1:5, 9, 17; 3:7; 5-6. (Make sure they understand that God's presence was the theme of Joshua's life and leadership up to this point.)
- Read Joshua 7:12. **Why is this verse so startling in light of the previous verses we read?** (*We now see God's presence was conditional upon the purity of God's people. Stress this point to your group.*)
- Read Ephesians 1:13-14. **How does this truth that the Holy Spirit seals believers fit with the truth that God's presence is conditional upon His people's purity?** (*While the Holy Spirit won't leave us, we can choose to forfeit the fullness of His presence in our lives.*)
- Refer to Joshua 7:1-4. **What is Joshua's assumption in these verses?** (*God's presence, for he didn't know the condition of the people due to Achan's sin.*)
- Stress that because of one sin in the camp, the presence of God wasn't with them, and that's why they lost the battle at Ai. Point out that it wasn't because the army at Ai was so great that they lost; they later obliterate Ai in Joshua 8. The difference between Joshua 7 and 8 is the presence of God. **How do we see this same principle at work in the church today?**

Application . . .

- **How have we as the Church assumed that the fullness of God's presence is with us, all the while ignoring the lack of purity among us? Give some examples of this.**
- **Why should this second point, that one sin forfeits the blessing and presence of God, motivate us to fast and pray?** (*Because we can't be holy apart from God's presence.*)
- **The story of Achan's sin teaches that even the "smallest" sin can damage fellowship with God. How does this change the way we approach God?**

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3. Brings dishonor on the glory of God.

Emphasize that bringing dishonor on the glory of God takes nothing away from His worth, but it does take away from His honor and reputation.

- Read Joshua 7:9. **What concern does Joshua bring to God?** (*That other nations would wipe out the Israelites, taking honor away from God's name. Joshua knew why God had saved them from Egypt: to make His name known as great among the nations. If they went into the Promised Land and took things that were devoted to the worship of pagan gods for themselves they would jeopardize God's reputation in the Promised Land.*)
- **Because Joshua knew God hadn't saved them from pagan Egypt to come out and worship pagan gods, as soon as he realized what had happened, what did he do?** (*He knew the sin had to be dealt with severely, so he took action.*) **What does this example encourage us to do in our own life, practically speaking?**

Application . . .

- **Does the Church, in general, realize what's at stake from the sins of its members? Why or why not? How does a lack of confession and not viewing sin with seriousness cheapen other's (and our own) view of the Gospel?** (*It demonstrates that we either don't believe in or we refuse to recognize and submit to God's power and holiness. It demonstrates that the Gospel makes little difference in our lives and ultimately no difference in the world.*)
- Read 1 Peter 1:17-19. **What does it look like to live our lives in reverent fear? What should be our motivation to do this?**
- **How do our actions show we understand that our holiness has a direct effect on the world's understanding of God's holiness?**
- David said, "Your life is a commentary on the greatness of God." **How does this truth convict the way we lived last week? How does it challenge us to change this week?**

4. Warrants the swift and just wrath of God.

Divide your group in half. Enlist volunteers to read the following verses. Instruct one half of the group to explain each first from a God-centered view of sin, and the other half from a human-centered view of sin: Genesis 19:16-19, 23-26; Leviticus 10:1-4; Numbers 15:32-36; 2 Samuel 6:1-7; Acts 5:1-8.

- **How do these verses become problematic for people who look at God's judgment from a human-centered perspective?**
- **Is the issue in these verses the size of the sin or against whom the sin was committed?** (*Who the sin was against.*) **Why does this make all the difference?**
- **How do these verses help us see that God's wrath is always just?**

Application . . .

- David said, "One sin – eating a piece of fruit in disobedience to God, in pride, in unfaithfulness, one sin, and we have the effects we see throughout history . . . World wars, a holocaust, cancer, disease, tsunamis, earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, terrorism, pain, and suffering—all because of one sin." **Is this truth troubling? How? What does it show us about God's character?**
- **When we personalize the truth that one sin warrants the swift and just wrath of God, how does that change the way we live?**

5. Leads us to the waiting mercy of God.

- Read Joshua 7:19-21. Achan confessed his sin, but he was still stoned. **Does Achan seem repentant? Why or why not? Is there a difference between confession and repentance?**

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- Consider the following facets of confession: Recognition, Remorse, Repentance, and Restoration. **Which of these do you see Achan exhibit?**
- Read Psalm 51:1-12. **How did David's confession differ from Achan's?**
- **According to Joshua 8:1, how do we know that sin has been purged and the people have been restored in their fellowship with God?**

Application . . .

- **How have you experienced the facets of confession: Recognition, Remorse, Repentance, and Restoration? Which of these facets of confession, if any, seem more difficult than the others? Why?**
- **How would you describe the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow?** (2 Corinthians 7:10-11)
- David said, "The path to restoration is paved with true confession, deep confession, honest confession, and it is not easy, but it is worth it." **How have you felt this truth?**
- **In light of the four main points in this message, how does this fifth and final point illustrate the heart of the Gospel?**
- **How does the concept of "waiting mercy" illustrate God's heart toward rebellious humanity?** (2 Peter 3:9, note the entire context of 2 Peter 3 – a day of impending judgment; see also Ezekiel 33:10-11)