

## Small Group Guide THE EXTRAORDINARY IN THE ORDINARY

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*Jonathan Bean*

*July 27, 2014*

*Acts 8:26-40*

Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciple-makers, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge (Main Truth) to understanding (Why It Matters) to application (Now What Do We Do?). Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

## GETTING STARTED

### *Before Small Group*

#### **Readings for July 28-August 3**

Judges 11-17 and Acts 15-21

#### *Where We Are In The Story ~ Old Testament (Judges)*

**Background of Judges:** While authorship of Judges is traditionally assigned to Samuel, we do not know who wrote this book. Judges presents Israel's cycle of idolatry, judgment, repentance, and deliverance that occurred between the death of Joshua and the establishment of Israel's monarchy (Josh. 2:11-19). Throughout this book, God remains faithful to His covenant, but Israel receives judgment that comes as a result of God's promises to *punish* His people for their disobedience. However, Israel's depravity emphasizes the scandal and the greatness of God's mercy and forgiveness. While God raises up twelve men and women during this time period to lead His people, *He* remains the ultimate Judge and Savior of Israel.

#### **Structure of Judges:**

- Judges 1:1-3:6 introduces the reader to the circumstances after Joshua's death and gives an overview of the cycle Israel would follow as God raised up judges to deliver and to lead His people.
- Judges 3:7-16:31 provides accounts of twelve judges in Israel's history.
- Judges 17-21 describes the moral descent of Israel and how the nation demonstrated little difference from their pagan neighbors.

**This Week in Judges:** Judges 11 starts with an unlikely character – the son of a prostitute who is the black sheep of the family and is driven out by them, and he goes from a dysfunctional family to a band of outlaws (11:1-3). Understandably, he hesitated when the same group of men who had cast him out later asked him to lead them in battle against the Ammonites. The Ammonite king had an erroneous understanding of history. He thought that Israel had taken his land when they were coming out of Egypt, which is why he was attacking them and trying to retrieve the land (11:12-13). Jephthah tries to peacefully resolve the conflict by explaining the history of what really happened, which is that Israel had asked permission from King Sihon to pass through Ammonite land on their journey from Egypt to Canaan, and he not only refused to let them pass, he attacked them (see Dt. 2:26-37). Israel defeated the Ammonites and, as a result, took the land. Jephthah demonstrated Israel's right to the land historically, legally, and theologically in his argument.

Judges 11:29 tells us that the Spirit was with Jephthah, but in the very next verse, Jephthah expresses uncertainty about God giving him success against the Ammonites (the use of the word "if") and makes a foolish vow to sacrifice to God whatever first comes out of his home when he returns from battle in victory (most likely thinking it would be an animal or even a servant). When his daughter, his only child, walked out, Jephthah had a choice. God had already stated His abhorrence of human sacrifices (Dt. 12:31), and in

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Leviticus 27:1-8, He had provided instruction on what a person was to do if they were unable to fulfill their vow. Obviously, God would not want him to kill someone in order to keep a vow, so Jephthah's actions illustrate how paganism had infiltrated the thinking of the Israelite people and how he viewed God to act like the fickle pagan gods worshipped by the nations around them. His deficient faith brought great tragedy to his family and affected his leadership.

The civil war between the men of Gilead and the Ephraimites in Judges 12 only emphasizes the moral deterioration of Israel, for instead of focusing on the conquest of Canaan, they had begun to fight each other. The life of Samson further demonstrates the moral downfall of the nation, particularly as he intentionally and explicitly broke two of the three parts of his Nazirite vow (13:7; 14:8-9; 16:18-22), sought marriage to a Philistine woman (14:1-15:8), and visited a prostitute (16:1). Unlike the previous instances of foreign oppression in the book of Judges, there is no mention of the Israelites crying out to God when they were dominated by the Philistines, and the Philistines lorded over them for forty years, which is the longest span of oppression mentioned in Judges. So God sent Samson to rescue a people who had not sought deliverance, and Judges describes him as an imperfect leader who served his own physical appetites more than he served God. In his commentary on Judges and Ruth, Robert Chisholm states: "In some respects Samson represented Israel...Despite his miraculous beginning and tremendous God-given potential, he missed his calling to be God's consecrated servant. He became a humiliated prisoner on foreign soil, but in the end was vindicated by God when he desperately begged for divine intervention" (433).

Judges 17 further describes the moral descent of the nation. First, an Israelite steals money from his mother (17:1-2), and the mother takes some of the returned silver (not all of it like she vowed) and makes an idol out of it (17:3-4). They blatantly disregard the second command from God to not make any idols (Ex. 20:4). Then, the family creates a household temple to this god and assigns one of the family members to be a priest of this god (17:5). As if to explain the apostasy, the author of Judges states: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (17:6). To make matters worse, Micah hires a Levite, a priest, to be an advisor and a priest of this household god, and the Levite agrees (17:7-13)!

#### *Where We Are In The Story ~ New Testament (Acts)*

**Background of Acts:** As with the Luke's Gospel, Luke wrote Acts to a man named Theophilus to describe the events that occurred after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, and Luke 1:1-4 states the purpose of both Luke and Acts: to provide a narrative of the truth from eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word. Acts details the thirty years following the resurrection of Christ and describes the spread of the gospel throughout Asia and Europe.

#### **Structure of Acts:**

- Acts 1-5 describes the advent of the church.
- Acts 6:1-9:31 portrays the persecution and the growth of the church.
- Acts 9:32-12:24 details the inclusion of the Gentiles into the faith.
- Acts 13:1-19:20 follows the missionary journeys of Paul.
- Acts 19:21-28:31 chronicles Paul's journey to Jerusalem where he is arrested, tried, and sent to Rome for an audience with Caesar.

**This Week in Acts:** When Peter shared his report with the church in Jerusalem, they rejoiced in God's work among the Gentiles (Acts 10:18), and Acts 15 tells of the Jerusalem Council in which the elders and apostles of the early church had to decide on doctrine regarding the Gentiles and circumcision. Would they force every male Gentile believer to become circumcised as they had done with Gentiles who had converted to Judaism? Peter argued that God saved and accepted the Gentiles and imparted the Holy Spirit to them without circumcision, so why should they require something of them that God had not specified? Barnabas and Paul reported what they had witnessed God doing among the Gentiles, and James quotes Amos 9:11-12 as he reiterates God's plan to restore the house of David including Gentiles among those who would seek the Lord. The Council ruled that the Gentiles need not be circumcised, but to promote unity and the opportunity for

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table fellowship between the Jews and Gentiles, the Council encouraged the Gentiles to abstain from sexual immorality, things that have been offered to idols, bloody food, and things that had been strangled.

From the Jerusalem Council came the decision to send Judas and Silas to relay the results of the Council to the church at Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. While at Antioch, Paul and Barnabas disagreed about whether or not John Mark should accompany them on their next missionary journey. Scripture does not inform us as to why John Mark left Paul and Barnabas at Perga (see Acts 13:13), but Acts 15:38 indicates that Paul did not agree with John Mark's reasoning to the extent that they should not include him in their next journey. Their disagreement led them to separate with Barnabas taking John Mark with him to Cyprus and Paul taking Silas with him to Syria and Cilicia, so instead of one missionary expedition, there were now two, which enabled more people to hear the gospel. Whatever contention Paul had with John Mark, when Paul wrote 2 Timothy at the end of his life, he included instruction for Luke to bring Mark with him to Rome to visit Paul "for he is very useful to me for ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11), which indicates that reconciliation and partnership in the gospel had been reestablished between the two men.

Paul's second missionary journey included traveling back through Derbe and Lystra to encourage the believers there, and it was here that Paul met Timothy, who would become like a son to Paul and who would later lead the church at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:2-3; 2 Tim. 1:2). Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised after the Jerusalem Council ruled that circumcision was not necessary for the Gentile believers? In his commentary on Acts, F.F. Bruce explains, "By Jewish law Timothy was a Jew, because he was the son of a Jewish mother, but because he was uncircumcised he was technically an apostate Jew. If Paul wished to maintain his links with the synagogue, he could not be seen to countenance apostasy" (p. 304). Since Paul initially visited the synagogue when sharing the gospel in a new city, he was attempting to avoid an issue that would have caused division and would have hindered the people from hearing the message he was proclaiming. So Timothy's circumcision was done to prevent any barrier to people initially hearing the gospel.

The conversion of Lydia in Acts 16 is ironic. Paul had originally intended to travel to Bithynia when God gave him a vision telling him to go to Macedonia (the region north of Greece). His first convert in Europe was a woman from Thyatira (modern Turkey) named Lydia. To demonstrate the diversity of the early church, this church at Philippi initially started with a successful Asian businesswoman, a former demon-possessed slave girl, and a Philippian jailor and his family. From Philippi, Paul and Silas traveled to Thessalonica in Greece, and their proclamation of the gospel in the synagogue there led to such an uprising in the city that they were described as the "men who have turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). Having only been in the city for a few days, there was little time to disciple the believers in the way of faith, but in 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul commends the church in Thessalonica for diligently taking the proclaiming God's Word in surrounding regions despite persecution and for how their lives had been visibly altered because of their faith. The Spirit of God was faithful in growing this new set of converts, even when they came to the faith from outright paganism and experienced persecution because of their decision to follow Christ.

If you look at a map of Paul's missionary journeys, you can see that he was strategic in his choice of cities. He worked east to west (Syria to Cilicia to Asia to Greece to Rome), taking the gospel to areas that had yet to be reached, and he chose large population centers, often port cities, where the gospel could easily be disseminated into surrounding areas and beyond. This is why he spent a longer amount of time in cities such as Corinth and Ephesus – their location meant a greater opportunity for the gospel to be advanced. He also sought to revisit churches that he had helped found, and the epistles in the New Testament written by Paul give evidence of his continued nurturing of these groups of believers even when he was not able to be present with them.

Acts 20-21 presents the beginning of the end of Paul's ministry. The Holy Spirit led Paul to Jerusalem and had testified to him that imprisonment and suffering was before him (Acts 20:23). Acts 20-21 describes Paul's submission to God's will and willingness to suffer and to die "for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13). The rest of Acts chronicles the events surrounding Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and his journey to Rome where he waited to appear before Caesar.

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### *During Small Group*

*Welcome* – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

*Looking Back* – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster deeper relationships among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

*Looking Up* – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other's families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group's prayer time.

### *Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)*

- *Pray for Our Lives:* Praise God for His active work in our lives and the world around us. Pray for obedience to follow God's leading in how He uses us. Ask for the Spirit to clearly guide us in where to go and with whom to meet for gospel conversations. Ask Him to grant us understanding and empower us to share God's Word with boldness and clarity. Praise God for the joy we find in walking with Him in faith. Pray for God to receive much honor and glory through His faithful work in and through us.
- *Pray for Our City:* This week we are praying for our Ready Day One initiative at Oliver Elementary School in Gate City this Saturday, August 2, in partnership with Mission Alabama, local churches, and other school partners. Our goal this year is to help prepare all students in need at Oliver Elementary School and all middle and high school students in Marks Village to be ready to start school on Thursday, August 14. We are also praying for Church of the Highlands and Chris Hodges, Pastor.
- *Pray for Our World:* This week we are praying for the nine individuals being sent out as Mid-Termers this fall. These individuals and one family will be serving up to two years in various places around the world including Haiti, Guatemala, Central Asia, East Asia, and South Asia. Join us this week as we pray for God to use these Mid-Termers to make His name known.

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### MAIN TRUTH

#### Message Outline

#### The Extraordinary in the Ordinary Acts 8:26-40

- God is supernaturally at work in the world around us.
  - He ordains whom he uses.
  - He orders where we go.
  - He organizes those whom we meet.
  - He orchestrates what they need.
- God works through the power of the Spirit in us.
  - We operate in tune with the Spirit.
  - We obey as the Spirit guides us.
  - We have opportunities to join where the Spirit is at work.
  - We open our mouths as the Spirit prompts us.
  - We observe the Spirit working through the Word.
- God is working to bring ultimate joy to anyone who trusts in him.
  - Even for those we consider unworthy.
  - Even for those we consider unreachable.
  - Even for those we consider undesirable.
- God works out His purpose for our good and His glory.
  - Preach the Word...
    - In everything, at every time, everywhere, to everyone.

#### Message Summary

In the narrative of Philip and the Ethiopian, God is supernaturally at work in using the Church to reach the nations with the gospel. Just as God chose to use Philip, He chooses to His church to spread the good news of the gospel, and no one is outside the reach of God's promise of salvation if they repent and place their trust in Christ. The question is, "Do we believe that?"

God is not only in the big picture of life but in the ordinary little things as well, and He is orchestrating His divine plan of salvation through His Church. We have no excuse today because we have the whole council of God including the Great Commission that commands us to make disciples and reminds us that Christ is with us through the power of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, God has commanded His people to bring joy to the nations through preaching the Word in everything, at every time, everywhere, and to everyone for His glory.

### WHY IT MATTERS

#### Digging Deeper

*As the leader, there are at least three directions the small group can take in light of the current Bible reading plan. Knowing the people in the group, prayerfully consider what would be the best route to help those in your group grow. The group's meetings could also vary with each week, so if one week's sermon prompts a lot of thought and discussion, option one could be what the group does that week while the next week could be different. As the leader, feel the freedom to take all or just some of the content in this guide and do what is best for your group.*

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- *Using the discussion questions below, the small group time can focus on discussing the sermon and how to apply it.*
- *The group can discuss the Bible readings from the past week. If choosing this route, ensure that the group does not simply discuss information but also focuses on how to apply what they have learned from the Bible readings. The information in the “Where We Are in the Story” section can assist the leader in knowing the background and context for the readings.*
- *Using the REAP (read, examine, apply, pray) outline for studying Scripture, the group can take one or both passages from that day’s readings and discuss them. So if the group meets on Monday, then you could pick one or both of the passages for Monday. This also helps those who are new to studying the Bible or who struggle with reading it learn how to do so. To assist the group with REAP questions, download the Guide to Personal Worship from [brookhills.org](http://brookhills.org).*

Read Romans 1:16-17 together as a group: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”

Discuss ways in which we show that we are “ashamed” of the gospel as followers of Christ. How do we hinder the advancement of the Kingdom and the good news from reaching the nations? Next, talk through practical ways we can trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to boldly share a message of salvation to everyone. In other words, how can we live by faith and faithfully share the gospel as righteous followers of Christ? How do our lives need to change in order for that to happen?

## **NOW WHAT DO WE DO?**

### *Group Discussion & Application*

*Use the following questions to help review the application of God’s Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).*

- Read Acts 1:8. In what ways does this verse reveal God’s redemptive plan to use the Church to reach the nations?
- Read Acts 8:26-40. What do we learn about God in this text? How does this text show that God directly intervenes in the interaction between Philip and the Ethiopian?
- In what ways has God been at work in your life supernaturally? If it is hard to come up with something, discuss why it is so hard to think of the supernatural in our culture today.
- What are some ways that we function as though God is not around us and, instead, spend time focusing on what we can see and touch in the natural world?
- Have you ever wondered why God has you where He does, or why He sent you somewhere? Talk about ways that God works the extraordinary in the details of where we are. Examples would be in the neighborhood you live in, the job you have, or the family you were born into.
- Do we look at those people whom we encounter everyday knowing that God has ordained it? What needs to change in our lives to reflect that God is divinely orchestrating the people that we meet?
- The instructions of the Holy Spirit do not always make sense. Why is that important? How does faith play an important role in trusting what we do not fully understand? When we do not why God is leading us in a certain direction, what truths do we need to remind ourselves of?
- Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-6. What parts of our lives are worth imitating? How can the gospel come to those around us, “Not only in word, but in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction”?
- Discuss opportunities you have as an individual, as a family, and as a small group to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit.

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- Name one person in your life who is not a believer. Pray for that person. What are ways that you could begin a conversation with them about spiritual things? How could you transition that conversation to Christ? What does faithfulness in your relationship with them look like? If you cannot think of an unbeliever in your life, pray that God would reveal one that you can intentionally engage. What in your life needs to change in order for you to engage unbelievers?
- Read 1 Timothy 3:16. When we open our mouth, do we begin with Scripture or our opinions? How does studying and internalizing the Word impact the counsel we give others?
- Do we trust that we have the Spirit of power inside us? If so, what would our lives look like? Do we trust that there is no one outside the reach of the gospel? How is that trust showing in our lives?
- The gospel is good news for anyone that trusts in him. What is an example of trust that you can practically give to the Lord?
- Read or recite Matthew 28:18-20. The Great Commission is something we recite as a faith family every week. What danger is there in the familiarity of this passage? Walk through this command verse by verse with a fresh perspective through the power of the Holy Spirit so that everyone, everywhere, and every time in everything can be reached can be reached with the gospel.