

Small Group Guide

THE GOD WHO HOLDS THE WORLD IN HIS HANDS

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. David Platt

February 6, 2011

Acts 9:32-12:25

This guide is a tool to help you lead your small group into spiritual transformation. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering, owning, and applying the truths of God's Word. There may be aspects 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 an aspect of their relationship with God. Your role is to help facilitate this encounter with God in His Word through His Body, not just to complete the guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid group task list.

Relate . . .

Begin your group time by engaging in relational conversations and prayer that may include the following elements:

Welcome—a simple, brief time to greet one another (especially new friends), enjoy refreshments, and make announcements.

Review—a time to review the truths discussed last week and report on how members have had success or frustrations in applying those truths during the week. The leader will want to provide encouragement and shepherding during this time. Periodically, the leader will also want to review the gospel and allow members to share reports about opportunities they've had to share the gospel. Occasionally, the leader will want to revisit the vision for the group too and discuss ways to accomplish that vision better.

Prayer—a time of general prayer with the whole group praying for struggles regarding the application of truths, for those with whom the group is sharing the gospel, and for understanding of today's truths.

Reflect . . .

Use the following summary and questions to review this week's message and reflect on its implications in our lives:

Sermon Outline

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Acts 9:32-12:25

Two Miracles...

- Aeneas: Victory over _____ disease _____.
- Dorcas: Victory over _____ death _____.
 - See the _____ presence _____ of Christ at work in His people.
 - See the _____ kingdom _____ of Christ advancing through His people.

Two Conversions...

- Cornelius: Conversion to _____ Christ _____.
 - God moves His _____ people _____.
 - God empowers His _____ gospel _____.
 - The life, _____ death _____, and resurrection of Christ.

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- God sends His Spirit.
- Peter: Conversion of the Church.
 - From deep-seated prejudice to divinely-ordered openness.
 - From selfish pride to selfless humility.
 - From traditional favoritism to gospel fellowship.
 - From cultural isolation to global involvement.

Two Churches...

- Jerusalem: Mono ethnic believers.
 - Founded by noteworthy leaders of the church.
 - The center for mission among the Jews.
 - Scattered as a result of persecution.
- Antioch: Multi ethnic Christians.
 - Founded by unnamed members of the church.
 - The center for mission to the Gentiles.
 - Started as a result of persecution.

Two Disciples...

- James: Beheaded as a follower of Christ.
- Peter: Rescued as a follower of Christ.

Two Gods...

- Herod: The man who wanted to be applauded as God.
- God: The God who refuses to share praise with man.

Two Conclusions...

- Our responsibility is urgent.
 - Unbelievers: Believe the Gospel now.
 - Turn from your sin and yourself.
 - Trust in Christ as Lord.
 - Believers: Proclaim the Gospel to the nations.
 - The gospel is a divine message.
 - The gospel requires a human messenger.
 - His power is available to His people.
 - As we pray.
 - As we preach.
 - His plan is aimed at all peoples.
 - He is sending us.
 - He is preparing them.
- God's sovereignty is unstoppable.
 - He holds world leaders in His hands.

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- He holds our _____ lives _____ in His hands.
 - Whether...
 - In peace or in persecution.
 - In health or in sickness.
 - In life or in death.
 - He will...
 - Accomplish our _____ good _____.
 - Show His _____ glory _____.

Message Summary

Reading through the accounts included in this passage, David compared and contrasted several pairs of instruments or principles that God used in the spread of His gospel, as presented in Acts 9:32-12:25. First, the accounts of Aeneas and Dorcas emphasize the power of Christ over disease and death for the advancement of His kingdom through the work of His people. Next, both Cornelius and Peter experienced conversions that showed evidence of God's desire that the Gentiles hear and receive the gospel. Furthering this truth is the contrast of the church in Jerusalem with the church in Antioch. The latter is known for its missional heart for the Gentiles. God's mission is evident- proclaim the gospel to the world. God calls for human messengers to deliver His gospel.

Noting God's sovereignty in all things, David pointed out that within this passage; two of Jesus' inner circle was persecuted because of their devotion to Him. One, James the brother of John, was beheaded. The other, Peter, was miraculously released the day before he was to die. The leader responsible for James' death was Herod, who desired the praise of man as if her were God. Subsequently, God would not share His praise and struck Herod down. Although God's sovereignty was evident in these circumstances, as in all situations from this passage, we may not understand why some appeared to end less miraculously than others. At this point, we must remember that God in His wisdom will always look out for our good in the midst of showing His glory in the greatest way.

Discuss

Choose some of the following questions to review the Head (What does God want me to know?), Heart (What does God want me to value?), and Hands (What does God want me to do?) aspects of the message. You know your group the best; select questions that will best help them dive into and apply the Word.

- What was the root cause of Peter's prejudice against Gentiles?
- How could his issues of pride and prejudice have prevented him from being a part of such an amazing outpouring of God's grace?
- Against what specific people or people groups have we experienced overt or hidden prejudices? How? Why?
- Are their people or people groups that we think are beyond God's grace? Do our actions and our beliefs agree with one another?
- If we want to align our hearts with Christ, why must we ask for a heart that desires for all people to know Christ?
- What are some sacrifices we might have to make in order to make sharing the gospel a priority in our lives?
- Might God call us into environments in which we are not comfortable? Are we willing to go wherever people need the gospel, or have we put limits on our obedience?

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- How can we loosen our grip on our control over our lives and be open to anything God may want us to do or anywhere God may want us to go for the sake of the gospel?
- How would you contrast the church at Jerusalem with the church in Antioch?
- What does the unnamed founding members of the church in Antioch indicate to us about the serious personal responsibility that its members felt for community and mission—apart from apathy or notoriety?
- Why is it easier to turn inward like the church at Jerusalem instead of outward like the church in Antioch?
- Which church does our small group most resemble? How?
- What steps do we need to take to be a center for sending and proclaiming, like the church at Antioch?
- Thinking about the different outcomes of James and Peter’s persecution in this passage, why could both men have had complete trust in God?
- How do we tend to react when we struggle through life and see others who seem to have it easy?
- What knowledge about God’s character gives us peace in times of struggle?
- How can we use that knowledge to help us have a sure trust in His sovereignty and a willingness to go through whatever His plan for our lives may hold?
- How do our prayers need to change to reflect a desire for God’s glory above our own wishes?

Respond . . .

Encourage your group to break out into smaller, same-gender groups where they will respond to the truths of the message. These groups will share with one another based on the following questions and then close in prayer:

- What are the main truths that God wants you to know from the message?
- How do your thoughts need to adjust to align with these truths?
- According to the truths from the message, what does God want you to value?
- How do your values need to change to align with His values?
- What actions does God want you to take according to the truths of this message?
- What is an action that you can start to implement today or tomorrow?

Close this time by praying for each other, specifically for strength in the application of these truths and for the lost people with whom you are seeking to share the gospel.