

Small Group Guide

THE CHURCH: A DISPLAY OF GOD'S WISDOM

The Church at Brook Hills,

Jonathan B.

November 20, 2011

Ephesians 3:1-13

This guide is a tool to help you lead your group into spiritual transformation. Use it as a resource to train your group into potential disciple-makers and 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 with 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 review the vision for the group 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 for our lives. (As a training tool, leaders might want to have various members summarize the teachings in their own words each week sharing how they think the Scripture applied to the original hearers and how the principles apply to us today.)

Message Outline

The Church, A Display of God's Wisdom

"When this world exerts its fullest powers to oppose the gospel, it only serves to reveal the powerlessness of rebellion against God. Invariably, those very exertions have a way of wonderfully exposing God's purposeful hand as he works out all things for the good of those who love him." Mark Dever

A Church Shaped by the Word of God

- We must locate ourselves in the story of redemption. (Eph. 1:22-23)
- "In Ephesians the Church, the body of Christ, is a new community created by God to be the dwelling place and vehicle of His Spirit, with a view to the consummation of His eternal purpose and the establishment of His dominion throughout all creation." F.F. Bruce

A Church Sharing in the Work of God

- We are stewards of the grace of God. (Eph. 3:2)
 - Aware of the great grace we have received from God. (Eph 2:4-7)
 - Alert to other people's great need of God's grace.

A Church Serving the World

- We are heralds of the gospel to all nations. (Eph 3:6-9)
- Collective implications for us as The Church at Brook Hills
 - One mission- we glorify God by making disciples of all nations.

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- Two contexts- reached and unreached
- Three sending avenues- short-term, mid-term, long-term missions
- Personal implications for each of us
 - God is leading me to...

A Church Sacrificing for the Worship of God

- We are motivated by the glory due His Name.
- We are united with the global body of Christ.

A Church Displaying the Wisdom of God (Eph 3:10)

- We are a manifold display of God's wisdom.
- We make known His glory to all of creation. (Eph 1:21, 6:12)

God's cosmic purpose is to gather His Church from all nations as a display of His glory to all of His Creation. (Eph 1:10-12)

Message Summary

While imprisoned and in the midst of suffering, Paul wrote a letter to the church at Ephesus. He clearly wrote of God's redemption through Christ and the church's role in accomplishing God's mission. God's story was recorded in Scripture, which served as the authority for Paul's belief system and the way he evaluated the circumstances in his life. God desires that people of all nations praise Him, and He has called the church to deliver that message to the nations. In God's story of redemption, the Church is not only the redeemed but also the workers. God has bestowed His grace on the Church for His purposes. Therefore, the Church is a steward of God's grace, proclaiming the gospel to all who are in great need of His grace. The motivation to proclaim the gospel to the nations is nothing less than the desire to see the name of Christ glorified among the world. As the Church brings others to glorify God, they also display His glory and wisdom to all of creation.

Group Discussion

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?).

- What is the danger of using our experiences to evaluate Scripture instead of the other way around?
- In the midst of suffering, why is our dependence on and time in Scripture so much more important to our faith than how we "feel"?
- How can we help to foster an atmosphere where we feel the freedom to be honest about our struggles and feelings but also the knowledge to encourage and support each other with Scripture?
- How have we or our culture often disregarded or neglected the role of the church in God's story of redemption? What does this indicate about our value of the church?
- In a mission setting (a reached context), why is working with a local church imperative to long-term discipleship and church health? In an unreached mission setting why is it important to start by planting churches there?
- How can we damage the work of the church and the fruit of the gospel by bypassing the local church in any area of the world?
- How is our idea of grace and salvation affected by the truth that both were given for a purpose?
- What is a steward? How are believers stewards of God's grace?
- If we are meant to be heralds of the gospel to all nations but are not, what does that indicate about the seriousness with which we view God's calling on our lives? What does it indicate about our intimacy with Christ?
- How do we promote or cease the spread of the gospel with our lives?
- How can we actively and intentionally be a part of God's work at home and across the world?
- What is our motivation for spreading the gospel?

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- How can people, feelings, dreams, or anything other than the desire to see God glorified cause us to abandon the nations?
- Why is it important to the global mission of God to unite with fellow believers around the world?
- How can we address any prejudices or biases that may occur within our own hearts, concerning the global church?

Respond . . .

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

- What are some of the main truths that God wants you to know from this study?
- How do your thoughts need to adjust to align with these truths?
- According to the truths from this study, what does God want you to desire/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 study?
- What is an action that you can start to implement today or tomorrow?
- What is going to be the most difficult aspect of this study to personally apply?

Close this time by praying for each other, specifically for strength to apply these truths, for personal needs, for the lost people with whom you are seeking to share the gospel, and for our weekly prayer focus as a church.

Weekly Prayer Focus ... (from our worship guide)

- *Lives and Church: Pray that we here at Brook Hills would be faithful stewards of the gospel that has been given to us by declaring and displaying it in Birmingham and in all nations.*
- *Local: This week we are praying for Lifeline Children's Services, a Christ-centered adoption service here in Birmingham that also gives support to foster care and pregnancy matters. We are also praying for Dawson Memorial Baptist, Gary Fenton, Pastor.*
- *Global: This week we are praying for Jacob and Allyson, our partners serving in Southeast Asia.*