

## Small Group Guide EASTER

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*Dr. David Platt*

*April 8, 2012*

*Matthew 28:1–15*

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.)*

#### THE ULTIMATE QUESTION...

Did Jesus rise from the dead?

#### POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS...

- Jesus didn't \_\_\_\_\_ die \_\_\_\_\_ on the cross.
- Jesus' tomb was not \_\_\_\_\_ empty \_\_\_\_\_.
- The disciples \_\_\_\_\_ stole \_\_\_\_\_ the body of Jesus.
- The disciples were \_\_\_\_\_ delusional \_\_\_\_\_ when they claimed to see Jesus.
- Jesus died on the cross and actually rose from the grave.

#### STARTLING IMPLICATIONS...

If Jesus rose from the dead...

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- He has authority over \_\_\_\_\_ life \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ death \_\_\_\_\_.

*“No one takes [my life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again.”*

*John 10:18*

- He has authority over \_\_\_\_\_ sin \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Satan \_\_\_\_\_.

*“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

*1 Corinthians 15:55-57*

- He has authority over \_\_\_\_\_ you \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ me \_\_\_\_\_.

*“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”*

*Romans 10:9-13*

- He \_\_\_\_\_ reigns \_\_\_\_\_ over us supremely.
- He \_\_\_\_\_ loves \_\_\_\_\_ us deeply.
- He will \_\_\_\_\_ judge \_\_\_\_\_ us eternally.

### THE PERSONAL QUESTION...

- Do you \_\_\_\_\_ believe \_\_\_\_\_ in the historical resurrection of Jesus?
- Do you \_\_\_\_\_ surrender \_\_\_\_\_ to the universal authority of Jesus?

### Message Summary

*Dr. Platt began by reading Matthew’s account of the Resurrection (28:1–15). He noted, if truth were completely subjective and unknowable, then all religions would be equally valid. But truth is objective. For instance, you either have money in your bank account or you don’t.*

*Since truth does matter, it is important to consider the question: Did Jesus rise from the dead? Is it a true statement? In fact, this is the ultimate question of our existence, determining our destiny now and forever.*

*Dr. Platt examined several theories that are often used to explain away the resurrection. These theories do not pass the plausibility test. Why? First, nearly all objective scholars agree with the earliest witnesses and eyewitnesses that Jesus really died. Second, most inquirers accept that the tomb was really empty. Third, there is the incontrovertible fact that about 2,000 years ago, without precedent, more than 500 people claim to have seen the resurrected Jesus and at the cost of their very lives, these seemingly unremarkable people began spreading a message of good news, which had the Resurrection at its core. This movement quickly grew, even among those hostile at first; and this movement continues today with 2 billion adherents. It does not seem plausible that this is the work of lying, fraudulent, or delusional disciples.*

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---

*If it is true that Jesus rose from the dead, then He has authority over life and death, sin and Satan, you and me. It is also true that He loves us deeply. His reign, or Lordship, is independent of our opinion, and He will judge us eternally one day.*

*Jesus' resurrection demands a two-fold response from every human being. Will we believe and accept the truth of His historical, bodily resurrection? Will we repent and surrender to His universal authority, trusting and following Him in faith?*

### 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?).

- Does objective truth exist? Why or why not? Why does it matter? Is it possible for all religions to be equally valid? Why or why not?
- Is it possible for someone to build his/her life on a lie? Just because something “works,” does that make it true? How would you explain the importance of objective truth to someone?
- Why is Jesus' resurrection the ultimate truth claim that we each must evaluate? How is ignoring the question of the resurrection a form of evaluating that question?
- If Jesus did not rise from the dead, what are the implications for Christians? Read 1 Corinthians 15:13–19 to supplement your answers.
- What are some possible skeptical explanations to dismiss the Resurrection? Do you know people who find these plausible? Why might they accept these explanations?
- Read Matthew 28:1–15. Did Jesus really die? Why do you believe so? Was the tomb really empty? Do you think a mix-up was likely?
- The apostles (eyewitnesses) were eventually imprisoned and/or killed for their faith, along with many other early Christ followers. How does this fact undercut the “stolen body” theory? Do people usually want to die for a message they know is a fraud?
- Read 1 Corinthians 15:1–11. How does this passage undermine the plausibility of the “delusion” theory? Is it likely 500 people had the same delusion at the same time? Is it likely people hostile to the faith (Paul) would have invented the same visions as those close to Jesus? What incentive did Paul have to make up Jesus' appearance to him?
- Why is the Resurrection the cornerstone of Christian faith? Read John 10:18 and 1 Corinthians 15:55–57. What are the spiritual implications following from His Resurrection? How does it prove His love for us? How does it demonstrate His kingly authority over all things?
- If Jesus died for us but did not rise from the dead, where would that leave us? How does the Resurrection give our lives hope, meaning, and purpose? How does the Resurrection affect our view of justice? earthly tragedy?
- Can a person believe in the historical Resurrection without being born again (a converted follower of Christ)? What role might the Holy Spirit play in convincing someone of the truth of the Resurrection? What role might be played by earthly/cultural tradition, knowledge, or wisdom?
- Read Romans 10:9–13. Why is belief in the historical Resurrection not the same as saving faith? What is necessary for saving faith? Ask the group to break down what it means to surrender to the universal authority of Jesus confessing Jesus as Lord.
- After hearing this message, do you feel better equipped to share the good news of the Resurrection? Knowing the glorious results of the Resurrection, do you feel a greater and more urgent desire to share with your friends? family? neighbors? people in Birmingham? those around the world who've never

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heard? For whom should your small group join you in praying for opportunities for you to share the gospel?

- Why is it important to be able to reasonably defend our faith? Can pride become a temptation when defending the truth of Christ's Resurrection? If so, how? Why is it important to bathe our witnessing efforts in prayer?

### **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 ...**

- **Pray for Our Lives:** *As we celebrate Easter this Sunday, we continue on from last week in the end of Matthew, where we see his account of the resurrection. If anything proves the kingship of Jesus Christ, it is His resurrection from the dead. The final chapter in Matthew's Gospel is a record of victory. It is a thrilling fact that believers today share in that victory. Jesus' resurrection confirms His identity and that God the Father accepted His accomplishment at the cross. We must never underestimate the importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The world believes that Jesus died, but the world does not believe that He has risen from the dead. The reality of His resurrection changes everything in our lives, in the church, and in the world. Pray that God would use the truth of His resurrection to bring to Christ many who will be gathered with us this week.*
- **Pray for Our City:** *This week we are praying for Briarwood Presbyterian, Harry Reeder, pastor. We are also praying for families in the Birmingham area who have family members with special needs and for the upcoming P.U.R.E Celebration at Samford University for special needs families.*
- **Pray for Our World:** *Each week this month we will highlight a missionary or partner from Brook Hill serving in the Horn of Africa. For more ways to pray, visit [prayforthehorn.com](http://prayforthehorn.com). This week we are praying for Brook Hills long-term missionary, Jessica T. She was commissioned in December 2011 to join our North Africa church planting team. She now uses her nursing skills on the field to help run a health clinic, which provides great opportunities to engage an unreached people with the gospel.*