

## Small Group Guide

# THE INSTITUTION AND CONFESSION OF THE CHURCH

*The Church at Brook Hills,*

*Dr. David Platt*

*April 15, 2012*

*Matthew 16*

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 INSTITUTION AND CONFESSION OF THE CHURCH**

Matthew 16:1-28

#### **The Characters in Matthew 16...**

- The Pharisees and Sadducees...
  - The Pharisees...
    - Marked by self-righteousness: asserting themselves in the face of God.
  - The Sadducees...
    - Marked by self-indulgence: pleasing themselves apart from God.
  - Together...
    - They were focused on temporal matters.
    - They were blind to eternal realities.
- The Disciples...
  - Marked by self-denial: crucifying themselves for the glory of God.
  - The lesson...
    - They would leave behind temporal pursuits.
    - They would live for eternal pleasure.

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### The Church in Matthew 16...

- The community of people who know Jesus intimately.
  - A true understanding of Christ comes not from human invention.
  - A true understanding of Christ comes only from divine revelation.
  - Who you say Jesus is will determine everything about how you follow Him.
- The community of people who proclaim Jesus confidently.
  - The rock of the church: the people of God proclaiming the gospel of Christ.
  - Death cannot stop this Messiah.
    - Death will not stop His messengers.
  - Christ gives His authority to the church.
    - We speak with the authority of Christ.
  - Is Peter the first pope?
    - This text is not about a supreme pope; it's about a sovereign Savior.
    - This text is not about a necessary pope; it's about a non-negotiable declaration.
    - This text is not about an infallible pope; it's about an invincible mission.
- The community of people who obey Jesus sacrificially.
  - Jesus would suffer necessarily.
  - We now suffer willingly.
    - Die to yourself.
    - Take up your cross.
    - Follow Jesus.
    - Find life.
    - Eagerly expect the King to come.
    - Eternally experience the kingdom to come.

### Message Summary

Matthew 16 serves as the root of the church's institution in Scripture, and in this text, Christ delineates between the characteristics of the His followers and the characteristics of the Pharisees and Sadducees, highlighting that His disciples will follow Him in His suffering. As an "assembly of called out ones," three characteristics describe the church in this passage: a community of people who know Christ intimately, who proclaim Jesus confidently, and who obey Christ sacrificially.

What we believe about Jesus determines how we live. If we, like Peter, truly believe that He is the Messiah, the Son of God, we will boldly proclaim the gospel with Christ's authority, willingly die to ourselves, and faithfully follow Christ as we eagerly anticipate His return. As those who have received God's mercy, this is what it means to live as disciples in His Kingdom and to be the church.

### 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?).

- Since the previous two sermons jumped ahead in Matthew to look at the death and resurrection of Jesus at Easter, take time to review what occurred in Matthew 14-15 and how this connects to Matthew 16.
- Describe the sign of Jonah (see Matt. 12:38-42). The Pharisees and Sadducees asked Jesus for a sign, but why is this the only sign given to the "evil and adulterous generation" (Matt. 16:4)? (They could observe the weather, but because of their sin and spiritual blindness, they failed to see the "signs of the times", how God was working in their midst through Jesus, the Christ. Because sin makes us numb to God's activity around us and because they were evil needing forgiveness themselves, their only sign would be Christ's resurrection.)

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- In Matthew 16:5-12, Christ warns the disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Describe the image of leaven. What is the leaven (the beliefs and practices) of these two groups? Characterize how self-righteousness plays out in someone's life and what self-indulgence practically looks like in a person's day-to-day life. Toward which of these tendencies are you inclined? How can we avoid self-righteous legalism and self-indulgent living in our own lives?
- Why does Jesus remind the disciples of the feeding of the 5,000 and the feeding of the 4,000 (Matt. 16:9-10)? How do these two events connect to Jesus' rebuke of the disciples' faith and his warning regarding the leaven of the Pharisees? Share examples together of when God has demonstrated such patience and mercy towards you. How can remembering these examples and sharing similar stories with one another help encourage each other's faithfulness and increase our faith each day?
- In contrast to the Pharisees' self-righteousness and the Sadducees' self-indulgence, Christ's followers are to be characterized by self-denial. As a small group, put flesh on bones and describe what such a life practically looks like in the context of family, friendships, work relationships, interactions with strangers, caring for the needy, etc. In each of these areas, how are you leaving behind temporal, fleshly pursuits and living for eternity? Discuss how this week you will die to yourself for the sake of Christ.
- What is the significance of Peter confessing Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of God" (Matt. 16:16)? Verse 21 begins with the phrase "from that time." How is it significant that Christ's revelation to the disciples regarding specific details of His death and the reminder of the cost involved in following Him comes *after* their confession of Him as Christ, the Son of God.
- What is the meaning of Jesus' statement to Peter in verses 18-19? Are you, like Peter and the apostles, proclaiming Christ? Identify hindrances to your proclamation. By God's grace, how can you overcome those hindrances? (Christ has given you His authority to proclaim His gospel. Do not give up what you have the freedom to do and what so many of our brothers and sisters are not forsaking to do in persecution – proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to people who are eternally damned.)
- In verses 21-23, what does Peter's response to Jesus' prediction indicate about his understanding at that time of God's plan? Peter, as the Devil when tempting Christ (Matt. 4), suggests that Christ obtain His rightful rule and authority apart from suffering and death, and as a result, the "rock" becomes a hindrance (literally a stumbling block) to God's redemptive plan. The disciples needed to understand that Jesus' suffering was part of God's plan and that suffering is the path of all who follow Christ (Matt. 16:24). How does God use suffering for His glory?
- In verses 24-28, Christ outlines how His true followers (the Church) are to obey Him sacrificially. What does sacrificial obedience look like in your own life? What is your obedience to Christ costing you? Worship of God offers Him that which costs you something. Are you putting aside your desires, your ambitions, your thoughts, your plans, and your possessions for the sake of Christ and for the sake of others? What is one way that you can die to yourself this week?
- What prevents the self-righteous and self-indulgent from dying to self, taking up their cross, and following Christ? People act like the God they worship. How are you faithfully following Christ? Examine your heart and life to determine if your life worships the Christ you proclaim to follow. Confess any sin that you identify.
- How are you eagerly expecting and waiting for Christ's return? Are you wasting your life or living for eternity now (see Matt. 16:25-28)?
- Jesus indicated in verse 17 that true understanding of His identity stems from divine revelation (also see Jn. 6:44). Think of the people you know who do not know Christ. Consider all of the unreached people groups in the world as well as all of the Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and atheists on this planet who have a false perception of salvation. Pray for the grace of God in their lives, for an understanding of the gospel, and for them to trust Christ as Savior and Lord.

## **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:*

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- 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)**

- *Pray for our Lives: This week we see Simon Peter's bold confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Praise God for revealing to us who Jesus truly is. Thank God for saving us through the work of his Son, the Christ. Pray that we would all be bold in our own confession of who Jesus is. Pray for the continued advancement of Christ's Church to all peoples. Ask for God's strength and help as we daily take up our crosses and follow Him.*
- *Pray for our City: This week we are praying for Hunter Street Baptist Church, Buddy Gray, Pastor. We are also praying for those who made new commitments to Christ and those who clearly heard the gospel preached at our Easter Worship Gatherings and yet have not yet made a decision to repent of their sin and submit to Christ's reign in their lives.*
- *Pray for our World: Each week this month, we will highlight a missionary or partner from Brook Hills 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 Church Planters, JD and JJ. Commissioned a year ago, JD and JJ have settled into their new home and are leading a team running a health clinic. This clinic helps engage an unreached people group with the gospel.*