

## Small Group Guide

### WHY PRAY? TO BE PREPARED

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. Jim Shaddix

December 9, 2012

Luke 21:34-36

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*

##### **We must prepare for the end times and Christ's return**

(Luke 21:34-35; cf. Matthew 24:42; 25:13; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 12:35-48; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-8)

- The second coming is certain
- The difficulty will intensify
- The end will be a surprise
- The judgment will be final
- The effects will be global

##### **There is a relationship between prayer and preparation**

(Luke 21:36; cf. Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 18:1-8; 22:46; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; 1 Peter 4:7)

- Pray for strength to hold up under increasing pressure
- Pray that you'll be found faithful when Christ returns

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- Pray for other believers to endure faithfully to the end
- Pray with gratitude for God's grace through the journey
- Think rightly about the end times so you'll keep praying

#### *Message Summary*

Jesus often informed His disciples that He would be leaving them to return for His people at a later date. Despite their requests to know when His return would take place, Jesus taught them that the time after His ascension into heaven and before His return would be a time of persecution and suffering that would test their faith. Because so much was at stake, Jesus warned them to be prepared for these times that would only end with His second coming. His admonishment was not simply to make sure that they had secured an eternal home with Him but to prepare themselves to remain faithful during the difficulty of living in the end times and waiting for Christ's return. Jesus told His disciples that this preparation is continually accomplished through prayer. Prayer is essential to preparation for Christ's return.

The last days are not distinguished in the Bible as a set amount of time directly prior to Christ's second coming; rather, they are the times between His physical departure, as recorded in the New Testament, and His return, which has yet to happen. That means that we are currently living in the end times and must seek to engage in continual prayer as we seek to prepare ourselves and our faith community for the struggles of living within the end times.

#### *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?).

- Many people understand the "end times" to be a designated time that will pass immediately prior to Christ's second coming. The New Testament is clear that the end times is the entire time between Christ's ascension and His return. How does this view impact the way that we study and react to teachings about the persecution that will occur?
- How is preparation for what happens in the process that leads up to Christ's second coming different from preparation for the actual day of His return?
- Not having a date for Jesus' return can either drive us to apathy or to passion toward preparing for His second coming. How can we avoid becoming apathetic toward the certainty of His return? Looking at Jesus' commands in Luke 21:34-36 and the commands of Matthew 26:41; Mark 14:38; Luke 18:1-8; 22:46; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; and 1 Peter 4:7, what is the picture given to us concerning our attitude and posture toward preparing for the end times?
- The verbs used by Jesus and the other writers are in the form that gives a meaning of "keep staying awake," "keep being on guard," etc. How do these instructions inform our understanding of what it means to be prepared? How does the imagery inform our view of living in the end times as a time of war and battle for souls?
- Jesus honestly warned that the things of this world can weigh our hearts down to the point that we are no longer concerned with the reality of the eternal significance of the end times. What happens to a believer's effectiveness for Christ when he or she is consumed with the cares of or the dangers of the world around us instead of on God's mission?
- The context of Luke 21 includes Jesus' teaching that difficulties and persecution that will occur in the end times, but He never gives a specific time of His return. What, then, is the purpose of preparing oneself for the end times?
- How does Jesus' call for us to remain faithful reveal the war on faith that surrounds us?
- How does Jesus connect preparation and prayer in Luke 21:34-36?
- How will our prayer lives be affected when we understand the relationship between prayer and enduring faith in these days?

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- Is prayer essential to remaining faithful to Christ? What does our answer to this question reveal about our view of prayer? How does our answer reveal about our reliance upon ourselves instead of God?
- What circumstances or people around you are the most difficult in terms of weakening your faith? How can we pray for these situations as opportunities to be witnesses for His glory, in light of Luke 21:13-15?
- How can we make a practice of praying for the strength to stand fast in our faith against pressure? How can we grow in prayer as a family? As a small group?
- Peter encourages us in 1 Peter 4:7 to think rightly about the end times. What is right thinking about the end times? (Consider truths such as the certainty of Christ's return, our propensity to wander from Him, the eternal significance and finality of the end times, our call to be faithful, and our opportunities to be witnesses for His glory.)
- How does a heart of gratitude toward God's unmerited grace in our preparedness reveal our complete dependence upon in for endurance as well as ultimate victory?

#### **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)**

- *For Our Lives: This week we will look at Luke 21. Through this text we will see that prayer is crucial if believers are to faithfully persevere as strangers in this world on mission for Christ. Pray for God to guard us from complacency and the desire for comfort and safety in this world. Pray for Him to use prayer in our Body to stir up a holy urgency for making Him known. Pray for God to cause perseverance in the face of trial and hardship, especially for our brother and sisters around the world.*
- *For Our City: This week we are praying for one of our partners, Mission Birmingham Transformation Strategies, the community development sister organization of Mission Birmingham. This group is committed to building strategic bridges and effective partnerships, leading to holistic community transformation based on a gospel foundation. They were our partners for Ready Day One. We are also praying for the First Baptist Church of Alabaster and Dr. Steve Andrews, Pastor.*
- *For Our World: This week we are praying for Brook Hills' Long-Term missionary Sharron Schaffer, serving in Guatemala. Sharron serves at Casa de Aleluya, a home for orphaned and abandoned children in San Bartolome, Guatemala. Her main role is to teach sewing to young girls living at the orphanage so they can have opportunity for job skills in the future. Sharron also serves as the director of the baby dorm at Casa. To find out more about Sharron and her work in Guatemala read her blog: [sharronsmeditations.blogspot.com](http://sharronsmeditations.blogspot.com).*