

Small Group Guide

CONTEMPLATING THE ETERNAL AT CHRISTMAS

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

December 23, 2012

Hebrews 9:27-28

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

CONTEMPLATING THE ETERNAL AT CHRISTMAS

Hebrews 9:27-28

- We are practically surrounded by the superficial.
- We are continually blinded by the temporal.
- We are subtly numbed by the trivial.
- We desperately need to contemplate the eternal.

We need to contemplate our lives.

- Life is precious (Gn. 1:26-31; 2:7-9; Jb. 10:11-12; Ps. 22:9-10; 139:13-16).
- Life is valuable (Ps. 8:3-8; Is. 49:1; Jer. 1:5; Lk. 1:14-16; Gal. 1:15-16).
- Life is fleeting (Ps. 39:4-5; 102:11; 103:15-16; Jas. 4:13-14).

We need to contemplate our death.

- Death is coming (2 Sm. 14:14; Ps. 90:10; Eccl. 9:2-5).
 - It is often surprising.
 - It is inevitably sure.
- Death is a consequence of sin (Gn. 2:15-17; 3:22-24; 6:13; Ps. 90:5-9).

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- Death is a multi-faceted enemy (Mt. 10:28; Eccl. 12:7; 1 Cor. 15:26; Jas. 2:26).
 - Spiritual death: The separation of a person from God (Gn. 3:22-24; Rom. 5:12).
 - We are all spiritually dead (Eph. 2:1-3).
 - Physical death: The cessation of life in our physical body (Gn. 5:1-8).
 - We will all experience physical death (1 Cor. 15:22).
 - Eternal death: The finalization of separation from God (Rv. 20:6; 21:8).
 - We all deserve eternal death (Rom. 6:23).
- Death is not the end (Jn. 5:27-28).

We need to contemplate coming judgment.

- The fact of judgment is inescapable (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:5-11; Rv. 20:11-15).
- The desire for judgment is instinctual (Hb. 1:2-4).
- The warnings of judgment are undeniable (2 Pt. 2:4-10).
- The scope of judgment will be universal (Is. 66:15-24).
- The nature of judgment will be personal (Mt. 7:21-23; Rom. 14:10-12; Eccl. 11:9; 12:14).
- The effect of judgment will be eternal (Mt. 25:46; Rv. 21:6-8).

We need to contemplate the coming of Jesus.

- He came once in humility to provide salvation from sin.
 - He lived the life we could not live (Jn. 18:38; Heb. 4:15; 1 Jn. 3:5).
 - He died the death we deserve to die (Heb. 2:17; Rom. 5:6-8; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pt. 2:24; 2 Cor. 5:21).
 - He conquered the enemy we cannot conquer (1 Cor. 15:3-8; Heb. 2:14-15; Col. 2:13-15).
- He is coming back in glory to execute judgment for sinners.
 - Those who have turned from Jesus...
 - Dread (or are disinterested in) the return of Jesus (2 Thes. 1:5-10).
 - Death remains an eternally hopeless enemy (Rv. 20:12-15).
 - Those who have trusted in Jesus...
 - Long and look forward to the return of Jesus (Phil. 3:20; Rv. 22:20).
 - Death has become a surprisingly helpful friend (Phil. 1:20-23; Lk. 23:46).

Message Summary

Based on Hebrews 9:27-28, today's message helps us focus on the eternal as we prepare to celebrate Christmas. Surrounded by superficial, temporal, and trivial things in this world, we are easily blinded by those things and fail to see the eternal realities that should drive our daily lives if we neglect to contemplate the eternal. As we consider our own lives, we find that it is precious, valuable, and uncontrollably fleeting, which then leads us to contemplate death. As Hebrews 9:27 states, everyone dies—both physically in the body and spiritually as we are separated from God apart from faith in Christ. Thinking about death leads to the next reality we must contemplate: judgment is coming. Each person who lives will give an account of his or her life before God after death. How we choose to live determines our eternal destiny. Those who accept by faith the salvation that Jesus provides for us from our sin will spend eternity with Him. By living the perfect, sinless life we were unable to achieve and by dying the death we deserved on our behalf, Christ conquered the enemy we in our own strength are unable to conquer. Apart from Christ, death remains a hopeless enemy, but in Christ, we long for Him, which shows our true faith in Him and changes our focus from this temporal world to the eternal realities found in Him.

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?).

- To what level do the superficial, temporal, and trivial things that surround you (especially at Christmas) numb you to eternal realities? Is this numbing more or less evident in your life at Christmas?

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- Do you often contemplate your life as precious, valuable, and fleeting? How does your perspective on the world around you change when you have spent time thinking about these life truths? How do your values change?
- Do you live as though death is coming? Why or why not?
- Why is it good to think about the reality of death? How can thinking about death become an unhealthy practice?
- As you consider the three aspects of death—spiritual death, physical death, and eternal death—how would you explain the differences among them to an unbeliever or a new believer?
- How should the knowledge that death is not the end motivate you to action both personally and as you relate to others?
- As you contemplate the realities of Christ's coming, what truths have meant the most to you in your journey with Christ this past year? What realities about His second coming have made a difference in the way you live?
- Why is Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection the ultimate answer to the greatest problem of life?
- Do you value the reality that you are made right with God because of Christ? Why is it essential for believers to value Christ more deeply with each passing day?
- How would you describe the moment you stopped dreading death?
- What does it take for dying to become gain? Are you confident as you contemplate the coming judgment? How can you help others gain confidence because of Christ's coming?

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)

- *Church: Praise God the Father for sending His Son Jesus to earth. Pray we will all readily remember the birth of the Christ Child we celebrate at Christmas. Rejoice in His salvation. Pray for all those who have not put their faith in Him to listen to the gospel and do so. Pray for endurance and perseverance as we eagerly await Christ's second coming. Pray for Jesus to return soon.*
- *Local: This week we are praying for the impact of several programs that reach out to urban and needy families at Christmas, particular the Christmas in the City emphasis in Marks Village. We are also praying for Trinity Baptist Church and John E. King, Jr., Pastor.*

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- *Global: This week we are praying for the eleven Mid-Termers who are being highlighted. These Mid-Termers will be leaving from January through March. Most of the Mid-Termers in this group will spend a year in the field. This group will be serving across the world in East Asia, Central Asia, South Asia, Ecuador, Uganda, and Botswana. To learn more about these Mid-Termers and find out other ways to pray, please visit globalblog.brookhills.org. We are also praying for our Short-Term team serving in East Asia.*