

Small Group Guide

THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST

The Church at Brook Hills Dr. David Platt February 24, 2013 1 John 3:5; 1 Peter 2:24; Revelation 1:18

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 SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST 1 John 3:5; 1 Peter 2:24; Revelation 1:18

The Divine (and Human) Dilemma...

- The ultimate question...
 - How can a holy God save rebellious sinners who are due His judgment?
- The underlying tension...
 - How can God express His holy justice without condemning us in our sin?
 - How can God express His holy love without condoning us in our sin?

The Sufficiency of Christ...

- Knowing this Gospel Thread...
 - Jesus alone is able to remove our sin and restore us to God.
 - Because of who He is.
 - His humanity: See His humble character.
 - His deity: Hear His extravagant claims.
 - Because of what He has done.

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- Jesus lived the life we could not live. (1 John 3:5)
 - He was fully tempted by sin.
 - He fully triumphed over sin.
 - As perfect man, He alone is able to substitute for human sin.
 - As perfect God, He alone is able to satisfy divine judgment.
- Jesus died the death we deserve to die. (1 Peter 2:24)
 - The essence of sin: Man substitutes himself for God.
 - Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be.
 - The essence of salvation: God substitutes Himself for man.
 - God sacrifices Himself for man and puts Himself where only man deserves to be.
 - At the cross, God expresses His judgment upon sin, endures His judgment against sin, and enables salvation for sinners.
- Jesus conquered the enemy we cannot conquer. (Revelation 1:18)
 - He is Lord over life and death.
 - He is Lord over sin and Satan.
 - He is Lord over you and me.
- Weaving this Gospel Thread...
 - Intentionally talk about Jesus.
 - Talking about Jesus' life...
 - Look for opportunities to highlight Jesus' example for us.
 - Look for opportunities to acknowledge Jesus' work in us.
 - Look for opportunities to point out Jesus' identification with us.
 - Talking about Jesus' death...
 - Never stop emphasizing the gravity of sin.
 - Never stop talking about your gratitude for Christ.
 - Talking about Jesus' resurrection...
 - Speak about difficulties with hope.
 - Speak about death with joy.
 - Talking with Pluralist Paul...
 - Highlight the all-important distinctions between taste, tradition, and truth.
 - Talking with Open-Minded Olivia...
 - Explain the pursuing love of God in the perceived narrowness of the gospel.
 - Talking with Nominal Nancy...
 - Point out how a privatized faith in a resurrected Christ is practically impossible.

Digging Deeper

Continuing the *Threads* series, this week's message addresses the great dilemma **faced by a holy God and the sufficiency of Christ required to solve it**. Many times the gospel is presented in a way that portrays a benevolent God who loves humankind so much that He sent Christ to redeem them from their sin. Although this statement is true and is found almost verbatim in John 3:16, we often convey this message in a way that portrays sinners as lovable. God does love the world but not because sinners themselves are lovable—but because *He* is loving. We must be careful when sharing the gospel that, as discussed a few weeks ago, we begin with God and emphasize His holy justice and love. It is only with a proper view of His character that we can have a proper view of the depravity of the sinfulness of humankind. Faced with a God who must condemn sin and the reality that no one is without sin, we then enter the tension of the gospel. We must be careful not to avoid this tension, for in it lies the hope of the gospel. When you share the gospel, do you try to avoid places of tension? Why? How can this diminish the gospel?

Help small group members recognize that we do not share the gospel to fill empty seats in heaven. Instead, we share the gospel to bring life to those who are dead and cannot save themselves. We share the gospel to bring worship to the only One worthy of the attention and affection of all of humankind. What is your primary motivator for sharing the gospel? How can a reevaluation of your motivations transform your desire and passion to share with those who are without Christ?

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Many people in our culture today are not bothered by the belief in or the mention of God. However, they are often offended by Jesus, particularly by the belief that *He alone* is the way to salvation (Jn. 14:6). Discuss with small group members the implications of having multiple options available for salvation. Guide them to understand that if multiple options for salvation were available...

- We would have no clear picture of what would actually satisfy God's required penalty for sin and would have no idea of what He wants.
- We would not know which "ways" were acceptable and which were not.
- God would be accepting of people who do not align with His Word.
- If we have no guidelines and are be "good," then our salvation is not based on God but on our own efforts.
- God's character would be compromised.

Although these statements are not all of the implications of a pluralistic approach to salvation, they clearly show the confusion that would arise. Discuss the absolute loving act of God by making one and only one way to Himself through Jesus and by telling us His plan in Scripture. How easy He makes it! How is humanity's pride and sinfulness on display when we boldly proclaim that God should send no one to hell?

In addition, sharing the gospel with "open-minded" or pluralistic individuals may be helped by explaining the entire story of Scripture, focused on the loving pursuit of humankind's redemption by a loving God. Encourage members to partner with another and practice briefly and succinctly telling the whole story of Scripture, weaving the truths of the gospel throughout.

As members share the gospel with others, they will no doubt encounter persons who believe in the reality of Jesus but simply think He was a good man, teacher, or prophet. Others may believe that He was just a man whose followers embellished stories about Him. Still, others may not care whether He actually existed as a man or not because they do not acknowledge the accuracy and infallibility of the Bible. Talk through these possible encounters with members, being sure to encourage them that they do not have to have all of the answers to questions as they share with others. Emphasize that a healthy discussion is opened when they agree to do further research but that they can begin to look for answers to these questions and beliefs as they prepare to encounter people of other faiths and of no faith. Several resources mentioned to aid in preparing for questions like these are *Why I Am a Christian* by John Stott, *Basic Christianity* by John Stott, *The Reason for God* by Tim Keller, and *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis. Discuss with your small group how they can respond to a Pluralist Paul, Open-Minded Olivia, and Nominal Nancy.

As with the previous two weeks, think through "church" terms used to explain Christ and salvation such as redemption, substitution, propitiation, atonement, reconciliation, incarnation, justification, ransom, and imputation. What do these terms mean? How would you explain these concepts to a nonbeliever even if you do not use the words themselves? For example, use the concept of a slave auction to describe the term redemption. As slaves were once sold at the auction block, God bought us out of slavery to sin, purchasing us with the blood of His Son. Explain that the debt paid to release us from sin's slavery was *not* issued to Satan or to sin. Rather, *God* required payment to satisfy *His* wrath and judgment since He is the One whose holiness is offended by sin. Christ paid the penalty for sin, and God the Father accepted His death as the payment (ransom) to release us from our bondage.

With justification, use the example of a courtroom where the judge pardons the person who is guilty. Although we are guilty of our sin and deserve the punishment of eternal separation from God, God declares that those who trust in Him and turn from their sin are "not guilty." How is this possible? Because Christ takes the punishment that we are due. He takes our place and is our substitute even though He is completely innocent.

Also, process with your small group common questions that nonbelievers pose about Christ. Such questions may include:

- Why did Christ have to come to earth and die?
- How do we know Christ is fully human and fully God?

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- Why is it important that Christ be fully human and fully God?
- Why was the virgin birth of Christ necessary?
- How do we know that Jesus actually rose from the dead?
- Why is it important that Jesus is the only way to God? Why can't there be multiple paths to God?
- How is Jesus unique from us, from the founders of other religions (i.e., Muhammad, Siddhartha Gautama (Buddha), Joseph Smith, etc.), and from the gods of other religions?

Continue to provide opportunities within small group time for folks to share about gospel conversations they were able to have this past week. Pray for the salvation of the lost encountered this past week and for the lost in your spheres of influence. Praise Christ for humbling Himself by coming to earth and dying for such wretched sinners (Rom. 5:6-11; Phil. 2:5-11).

Message Summary

The holy justice of God and the sinfulness of man create a tension for our Creator. Although He loves the world (Jn. 3:16), He cannot condone sin. Yet, He cannot condemn those whom He loves. God requires payment for sin but wants to have a relationship with people. Christ came to build a bridge between humanity who is lost in sin and God who cannot tolerate sin. As fully God and fully man, Jesus came to redeem humanity. In His humanity, He lived in complete obedience to God's Law and fulfilled the commands of the Father—a requirement that no one could meet. In His divinity, He was able to satisfy the wrath of God against sin as He provided Himself as the perfect sacrifice. In His death, He was a substitute on our behalf and, in His resurrection, a conquering Savior. He is the way of salvation, and His life and death were sufficient to bring redemption to a sinful people on behalf of a God who judges sin rightly and who loves wholly.

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?).

- How is the just character of God at odds with the loving character of God when we consider salvation? What are the implications for God's character if He did not rightly judge sin by condemning sinners?
- Why is the tension between God's love and His justice essential to the gospel? How does it help us see the seriousness of our sin?
- Our culture is often poised for the opportunity to question the goodness of God when we see or experience suffering instead of taking a hard look at humankind's own sinful depravity. What does this tendency indicate about our propensity to substitute ourselves where only God should be?
- Without tension there is no obvious need for a Savior. How can we share the gospel in a way that does not skip the justice of God in favor of solely proclaiming His love? Why are both essential to showing a need for Christ?
- Jesus lived a life that is often admired by our culture. Describe what qualities He possesses that today's culture wants to uphold.
- How can we use these qualities and character traits to talk about Jesus in our daily lives? What are some specific situations and examples in which we can discuss traits such as His care for the poor, His loving kindness, His rebuke of superficial religious leaders, etc.?
- What claims did Christ make of Himself that should cause concern for His goodness or His mental stability if He were not the Son of God?
- Why would individuals *not* believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ? How can you respond to their claims?
- How can we use the truth of Christ's claims to be God to speak about the truth of the gospel in the face of other beliefs? Why is Christianity (and other religions) either true or not? Why is it not feasible to believe that all beliefs lead to the same place?
- How did Christ's life as a man enable Him to be the only eligible substitute to pay the penalty for sin?
- Throughout His perfect life, Jesus constantly pointed His followers toward His impending death. How does this unique approach to His life (and death) illustrate His uniqueness among other religious figures? What does this indicate about the power of His death?

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- How is the root of all sin a desire to substitute ourselves for God? What does that indicate about the condition of our hearts?
- At times, we will need to ask forgiveness of others. How can we use those times of personal repentance as opportunities to speak of our propensity to sin, Christ's work on the cross on our behalf, and our gratefulness for His sacrifice?
- In an effort to make others feel better about themselves, we often minimize sin. Particularly in our families and with those close to us, how can we use conflict or occurrences of sin to truthfully present sin while maximizing the grace of God on the cross?
- Name some stories from Jesus' recorded life on earth in which He experienced suffering and in which He came to others in their suffering. How can we use these examples to share with others who are hurting?
- What trials are we experiencing at this time in which we can speak of the hope and joy of Christ?
- How can we patiently and authentically share the hope and joy of Christ with others who are in the midst of hardships, without being trite?
- How can we model a life for our families and friends that cannot be mistaken for nominal Christianity?
- In looking for opportunities to talk about Christ, one way is to share how Christ is working in you. How is He currently working in you?

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: Thank Jesus for doing everything necessary for salvation. Praise Him for living a perfect life. Praise Him for dying in our place and paying the penalty for our sin. Praise Him for conquering sin and death. Ask Jesus to remove your sin or praise Him for doing so. Ask Jesus to restore you to God or praise Him for doing so.*
- *For Our City: This week we are praying for the success of a new Homework Lab to reach and support the children and teens living in Marks Village, especially the fatherless. We are also praying for 16th street Baptist Church and Arthur Price, Pastor.*
- *For Our World: This week we are praying for Brook Hills' mid-term missionary Raquel Patterson, serving in England. Raquel is serving at a local church helping to strengthen their ministry as they share the gospel and make disciples in their communities. Her main role is to work in a nursery school, giving her access to many families in the surrounding community, most of who are not Christians.*

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