

Small Group Guide THE URGENCY OF ETERNITY

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

March 10, 2013

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9;
Philippians 3:20; John 3:16

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 URGENCY OF ETERNITY

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9; Philippians 3:20; John 3:16

The Urgency of Eternity...

- Knowing this Gospel Thread...
 - Our eternal destiny hinges on our response to Jesus.
 - Hell is a dreadful reality for those who turn from Jesus. (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9)
 - A place of continual rebellion.
 - A place of final separation.
 - A place of eternal duration.
 - Heaven is a glorious reality for those who trust in Jesus. (Philippians 3:20)
 - A place of full reconciliation.
 - A place of complete resurrection.
 - A place of ultimate reunion.
 - Will you turn from Jesus or will you trust in Jesus? (John 3:16)
 - Will you turn from Jesus?
 - Live without Christ now.

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- Die without Christ forever.
- Will you trust in Jesus?
 - Die with Christ now.
 - Live with Christ forever.
- Weaving this Gospel Thread...
 - Minimize your conversations about temporal things.
 - Maximize your conversations about eternal things.
 - Talking about hell...
 - Speak about God's character with humble confidence.
 - Speak about God's judgment with healthy fear.
 - Speak about God's wrath with honest compassion.
 - Talking about heaven...
 - Talk like this world is not your hope.
 - Live like this world is not your home.
 - Talk about your anticipation of being with God.
 - Talk about your realization that dying is gain.
 - CALLing people to turn and trust...
 - Clarify the Gospel.
 - Ask...
 - If they have any questions.
 - If they have ever turned from their sin and themselves and trusted in Jesus as Savior and Lord.
 - If they would like to turn from their sin and themselves and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord now.
 - Let the Holy Spirit work.
 - Invite them to call out to God to save them.
 - Be willing to let them be alone with God.
 - Lead them as a new follower of Christ.
 - We don't want to manufacture decisions.
 - We do want to make disciples.

The Church at Brook Hills...

- Do we realize people's condition?
- Do we possess the heart of Christ?
- Do we want our lives to count?

Digging Deeper

As we continue in our series on personal evangelism, follow up with your small group about the people they have had the opportunity to share with over the past few weeks. How have these gospel encounters been going? Is there anyone that has not shared during the past few weeks of this series? Why not? As a leader, how can you encourage them as they seek to share their faith? Take a few moments to pray for people who are wrestling with the truths that were shared with them. Pray for additional opportunities to weave gospel threads this next week.

If there are members in your small group who have not already shared their personal story at threads@brookhills.org, encourage them to do so this week. This gives our church leaders a chance to pray and support all of us as we seek to share our story with others.

How are the people in your small group doing memorizing the Scripture associated with each gospel thread? Is there anyone in your group who has more experience with this spiritual discipline that could offer help or

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give advice to others who are struggling? Is there anyone who might help lead the group in this way? Encourage accountability between smaller groups of two or three to continue memorizing the Threads verses.

In the sermon, Pastor David uses the acronym CALL to help believers think through how they can call unbelievers to turn from their sin and to trust in Christ. Talk through the steps of this acronym with your small group members. Ask if they have any questions about the components included in the acronym, and address any questions that they raise.

- **Clarify** the gospel – Make sure the people you sharing with understand the whole gospel. The gospel tells us who God is, who we are, what Christ has done, what it means to put your faith in Jesus, and how to be reconciled to God and to spend eternity with Him.
- **Ask** – Ask the person if they have any questions. Use open-ended questions such as “What do *you* think about what we have discussed?” Avoiding “yes” or “no” questions allows you to find out what the person understands about God, sin, Jesus, salvation, and eternity. Also, ask if they would like to turn and trust Jesus now. They may say that they are not ready to do that. If so, communicate that you are available if they want to talk more or have any further questions about what you have shared with them. Continue to build a relationship with the person.
- **Let** the Holy Spirit work – Only the Spirit of God can lead people to turn from their sin and to trust in Jesus. We do not want to manipulate someone into making a decision. Invite them to call out to God to save them. However, be willing to let them spend time alone with God if that is what they need.
- **Lead** them as a new follower of Christ – The goal of sharing the gospel is to make disciples. Encourage them to be baptized and to be willing to lead them in their new Christian life. Teach them to study the Bible. Teach them to pray. Be available to answer further questions.

Today, the urgency of eternity may not always be popular or politically correct to believe and to profess. There may be the temptation to stop short of sharing this gospel thread, but it is an essential element of the gospel. In a culture that is focused on the here and now, discuss why it may have become tempting or comfortable to minimize the truth of this particular thread. Encourage your small group to weave the *whole* gospel into their conversations. Are there any threads that they feel reluctant sharing? Ask them to consider how the gospel would be incomplete without all five threads. If someone is struggling with sharing their faith, how could you or someone else in your group come alongside them to help them? Sharing the gospel is simple, but it is not easy. Encourage your small group to boldly express *whole* gospel.

Remind your small group that we do not share the gospel to move people from the line going to hell into the line going to heaven. We do not simply want people to make decisions. Instead, our goal is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Every single person responds to Christ in one of two ways and will end up in one of two eternal destinations when they die.

There are two responses and two eternal destinations:

- **Will you turn from Jesus?** – Those who turn away from Jesus in this life will spend eternity separated from Him in their death. If someone is not actively trusting in Christ for the salvation, they are rebelling against Him.
- **Hell is a dreadful reality for those who turn from Jesus** – Hell is a place of eternal conscious punishment for the wicked. The greatness of God’s holiness and justice demands that He punish sin. Those who die without Christ will face God’s judgment against sin for eternity. For the unbeliever, death is a frightening reality.
- **Will you trust in Jesus?** – Those who trust Jesus in their life will never be separated from Him in their death. Those who believe in Jesus will be reconciled to Him forever and will spend eternity in His presence.
- **Heaven is a glorious reality for those who trust in Christ** – While God is present everywhere, His glory and presence are most fully known and experienced in Heaven. There, we will be fully reconciled to God and free from the sin the separated us from Him. We will not sin or even desire to

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sin. Our thoughts, attitudes, and actions will all be in accordance with God's will. For the Christian, dying is gain.

Do you know what the members of your small group think about eternity? What do they believe about Heaven and Hell? What we believe about Heaven and Hell will affect the way we speak about them. Christians as well as secular culture offers many ideas about what these places are like. Members of your small group, as well as the people they share with, may have ideas about eternity that are more closely related to the representation in movies and popular culture than Scripture's descriptions. Additionally, there are several popular books published in recent years by people who claim to have traveled to or to have had glimpses of Heaven or Hell. Discuss with your small group why we should examine the Scriptures for all matters related to eternity over and above extra-biblical resources. If they are sharing the gospel and people do ask questions about such post-death experiences, encourage small group members to direct attention to what Scripture *does* tell us instead of focusing on the unknown. Together, identify verses in Scripture that describe Heaven, Hell, and eternity. Direct the small group members to study these passages for themselves and to consider underlining these passages or to even write these references on a card that they can place in their Bibles.

If members in your small group still have questions or would like to know more about Heaven or Hell, encourage them to read solid evangelical resources that expand on Scripture rather than reading about a book about someone's personal experience. Some helpful resources may include: *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn or *Erasing Hell* by Francis Chan. Also, most systematic theology books such as *Systematic Theology* by Wayne Grudem and *Christian Theology* by Millard J. Erickson address these doctrines.

Discuss with your small group common questions that nonbelievers may ask about eternity. Such questions may include:

- Would a loving God send people to Hell?
- What are Heaven and Hell like?
- Why is Jesus is the only way to Heaven?
- If I am a good person will I go to Heaven?
- What happens to those who never have the opportunity to hear about Jesus?
- What happens to children who die in infancy or to people with profound mental disabilities that prevent them from understanding salvation?

How would your respond to each of these questions? What Scripture could you use as you share?

If you are sharing with someone from a different religious background, they may have ideas about eternity that involve components such as purgatory or reincarnation. How would you address these beliefs? How would you respond to someone who simply believes there is nothing after death? How would you respond if a non-believer asked you if you thought *they* were going to hell? How would you speak to someone who professes to be a Christian and who believes in universalism (the belief that everyone will be saved) or annihilationism (the belief that the wicked have no afterlife)? Every person we speak with will likely have some belief about what happens after we die. Involve the group and come up with questions we could ask to begin to weave this gospel thread into conversations

Ensure that your small group knows how to explain "church words" related to the urgency of eternity such as: saved, lost, eternity, glorification, eternal punishment, Heaven, Hell, reconciliation, resurrection, restoration, perseverance, etc. Encourage the group to avoid or to at least to explain these terms when they are sharing with non-believers.

Lastly, there may be those in your small group who are unsure of their own eternal destiny. If there are unbelievers present, graciously urge them to trust in Jesus for their eternal hope. If there are believers wrestling with these issues, reassure them that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved

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(Rom. 10:13) and that all who come to Jesus he will never cast out (Jn. 6:37). If questions do arise over whether or not Christians can lose their salvation, direct attention to Jesus' words in John 10:27-30.

Message Summary

The message this week focuses on the last of the five gospel threads: the urgency of eternity. The eternal fate of people hangs on their response to Jesus Christ. Every person is either actively *turning from* Jesus, which leads to eternal death in Hell, or *trusting in* Jesus, which leads to eternal life in Heaven. Scripture teaches that there are two roads to two destinations. One road holds eternal joy and the other eternal suffering. As Christ-followers, we should urge people to turn from their sin and to trust in Jesus Christ. He alone can save them. We weave this thread in our everyday life by minimizing our conversations about temporal things and by focusing on the eternal. We speak about Hell with humble confidence and about Heaven with eager anticipation. We call people to repent and to believe the gospel, and we lead them in their new life in Christ.

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?).

- Why do followers of Christ risk embarrassment, awkwardness, fear, etc. to share the gospel with those who do not believe?
- If you have shared the gospel with someone in the last few weeks and it did *not* go well, how can you learn and be encouraged by that experience? If this has happened to anyone recently and they would not mind sharing what they learned from it, encourage them to do so.
- When we proclaim the gospel, people's eternal destination is in the balance. Do you proclaim the gospel with the conviction that people's eternal destiny is at stake? How does this give us an increased sense of urgency?
- Read Matthew 10:28 and Mark 9:43-49. How does Jesus talk about Hell? What does Jesus believe about Hell? How would you respond to someone who mistakenly believes that Jesus did not teach about Hell?
- What imagery does the rest of the Bible use to describe Hell? Many people debate whether these images and descriptions should be taken literally or figuratively. Either way what do they reveal about Hell?
- People who turn from Christ in life with live without Him in death. How is Hell the natural outcome for people who reject God's mercy and grace?
- Read Revelation 21:3 and 22:4-5. How does the Bible describe the relationship between God and man in Heaven? What does it mean to be a citizen of Heaven? How does that effect the way we live today?
- Read John 3:16. What two choices does every living person have concerning eternity? How does believing this truth compel us to spread the gospel with great urgency? Take a moment to pray that your small group would proclaim the gospel to a lost world with urgency and boldness.
- What types of thoughts and activities keep us from focusing on eternity? What can you do this week to turn your thoughts from the temporary to the eternal? Think about conversations you have had over the last week. Do the things you talk about reflect your belief in eternity?
- Why do we talk about Hell with humble confidence? How do we minimize God's holiness and justice by not speaking about Hell? What should our attitude be when expressing hard truths to those separated from God?
- What do your conversations over the past week reveal about your hope? How can we should confidence in Jesus and in the hope of Heaven in our daily lives? How does your life look different from the world?
- We do not share the gospel to spread information. We proclaim the gospel to see people call upon the Lord to be saved. Who can you call to turn and trust in Christ this week? Why do we invite people to call to God to save them instead of leading them in a "sinner's prayer"?
- We are called to make disciples not to manufacture decisions. How can we order our lives to shepherd new believers as they grow in knowledge and understanding of the gospel? Are you actively involved in discipling other believers? What steps can you take to grow in this area?
- Do you realize the condition of the lost? What is Christ's heart for the lost? Do you possess the same heart and passion for the lost as Christ? Pray for God to burden you for lost.

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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: Pray for God to keep the reality of eternity ever present in our minds as a motivating factor for sharing the gospel boldly and frequently with all those around us. Praise Him for both His justice and mercy made evident in the promises of eternity. Praise God for graciously calling us to follow the narrow road, which leads to life. Pray for those you know who are unbelievers and who are following the wide road, which leads to destruction. Pray for the greater church culture of our nation to take seriously the gravity of what is at stake in regards to people's eternal destinations. Ask the Holy Spirit to maintain humility in our lives through a proper understanding of eternity.*
- *Local: This week we are praying for a group of Brook Hills faith family members who minister to those in the Birmingham City Jail, both long-term and short-term inmates. For more than a year, women have been visiting the ladies in the facility, leading Bible studies, and investing their lives among them. We are also praying for Covenant Community Fellowship Church and Frank A. Woodson, Pastor. Frank is also the executive director of Mission Birmingham Transformation Strategies.*
- *Global: This week we are praying for Brook Hills Mid-Term Leslie C. serving in the Middle East. Leslie is working among a Muslim unreached people group through healthcare and community development projects in their area. Leslie is a nurse and has been serving in the Middle East since September and will soon return home in May. Join us this week as we pray for Leslie.*