

Small Group Guide

THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN PREACHING – PART 1

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. Jim Shaddix

April 21, 2013

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciple-makers, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge (Main Truth) to understanding (Why It Matters) to application (Now What Do We Do?). Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

GETTING STARTED

Welcome – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

Looking Back – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster deeper relationships among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

Looking Up – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other's families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group's prayer time.

Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- *Pray for Our Lives: Pray for us all to understand the proper place of preaching in our worship and our lives. Pray for our preachers to faithfully and humbly deliver the truth of God's Word each week in our corporate worship gatherings. Pray for us to grow in our commitment to the message of the preachers rather than the preachers themselves. Ask God to help us see the act of preaching and our listening as worship. Pray for us to grow in our knowledge of a relationship with God through the act of preaching. Pray we will magnify the message of the gospel above anything else.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for Grace House Ministries (grace-house.org) in Fairfield, a residential Christian ministry for 24 school age girls who are from crisis backgrounds. We are also praying for Hunter Street Baptist Church and Buddy Gray, Pastor.*
- *Pray for Our World: Throughout the month of April, our faith family is committed to praying for the Hui, a Muslim people group in China. There are around 13 million Hui in China and up until recently no Hui church established among them. This week we are praying for Hui believers. There are very few believers among the Hui and even*

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fewer churches. This week, join us as we pray for the small number of Hui believers in China. For more information go to www.pray4hui.com

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

“The Cross and Christian Preaching” – Part 1
1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Reminders for the church...

- The message of the cross is the resource of God's power.
(1 Corinthians 1:17-31; cf. Romans 1:16)
 - To convert those who receive it.
 - To condemn those who reject it.
- The preaching of the cross is the response of God's people.
(1 Corinthians 1:17-18, 21, 23)

Challenges for pastors and people...

1. Let's own the preaching event as a community of faith.
(1 Corinthians 2:1-5; cf. 1 Corinthians 1:1-31)
 - Pray for it in advance.
 - Plan for it in your schedule.
 - Prepare for it in your heart.
 - Participate in it every week.
 - Process it when it's over.
 - Practice it in your life.
2. Let's approach the preaching event as an act of worship.
(1 Corinthians 2:1-5; cf. Nehemiah 8:1-8; Psalms 56:4,10; 119:48; 130:5-7; 138:2; 1 Corinthians 1:29-31)
 - God has chosen a foolish message of atonement—the cross.
 - God has chosen a foolish method to advance it—preaching.
 - God has chosen foolish men and women to announce it—us.

*Why? So when He releases His power to transform lives,
we can draw only one conclusion: “Only God could have done that!”*

- Bring your Bible so you can interact with God's voice.
 - Record your insights so you can reflect on God's voice.
 - Express your emotions when prompted by God's voice.
 - Still your spirit when overwhelmed by God's voice.
3. Let's receive the message from God, not just about God.
(1 Corinthians 1:1; cf. Genesis 1:26-27; 3:22; Psalm 17:15; Romans 8:29-30; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18;

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Galatians 4:19; Philippians 3:20-21; Colossians 3:9-10; 2 Peter 1:2-4; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 21:1; 22:2,4)

- Expect the sermon to re-create you, not merely rehabilitate you.
 - Expect the sermon to make you godly, not just give you guidance.
 - Expect the sermon to provide transformation, not just information.
4. Let's resolve to magnify the message of the gospel alone.
(1 Corinthians 2:2; cf. Luke 9:23-24; 2 Corinthians 4:10; Philippians 3:8-11)
- Listen for the crucified Lord in every sermon.
 - Look for the crucified life in every sermon.

Message Summary

Continuing with our series on 1 Corinthians, this week's message is the first of two focusing on Christian preaching. The message of the cross is the resource of God's power, and it saves or condemns all who hear it. We should take ownership of the preaching event as God's people. The community of faith should be active participants in the preaching event and value it as an act of worship to God. All Christian preaching should exalt the gospel message above all else. As Christ-followers, we should look for the crucified Lord in every sermon and let that motivate us to model the crucified life before a lost and dying world.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

Since the inception of the Christian church, believers have gathered together to worship the Lord through the preaching and teaching of His Word, the singing of songs, and the ordinances of baptism and communion. How do the people in your group view preaching? What do they believe preaching to be? Who is qualified to preach? What ideas do they have about its purpose? Do they view it as worship? Has their view of preaching progressed as they have matured in their faith? There may be new believers in your group who are just now beginning to regularly hear from God through preaching. Others may have grown up in different Christian traditions where preaching does not look the same as it does in our faith family. All of this will shape the way the people in your small group respond to the preaching of Scripture.

The litmus test of Christian preaching should ultimately be whether it promotes the gospel. The cross of Christ is the benchmark of Christian preaching. The cross establishes how we preach as well as what we are to preach. In our recent *Threads* sermon series, we focused on the necessary elements or threads of the gospel. What are the necessary elements of preaching? How does the Bible define preaching? What passages of Scripture would you use to form this definition? What makes Christian preaching distinct? Why do we intentionally focus our preaching on the cross as opposed to a topical message about felt needs like parenting or money management? What are the differences between Christian preaching and a God-honoring discussion on these topics or a variety of other topics? Take some time to discuss with your group why we make the cross the cornerstone of our preaching and teaching.

We are blessed to live in a place where we can regularly, openly, and publically gather to hear from God through the preaching of the gospel. This is a great privilege that many Christians around the world do not enjoy freely. Pray together for our brothers and sisters who lack these freedoms, and pray for the church to be strengthened in such areas, for the Word of God to be faithfully taught, and for these believers to be unified. Remind your small group that as we gather we are not merely spectators who are passively involved in the preaching event. Encourage the members of your small group to intentionally set aside time each week to

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prepare their hearts and minds for corporate worship. Discuss what Saturday nights and Sundays look like leading up to their attendance at a worship gathering. Do their current routines prepare them to be attentive and sensitive to the preached Word? If not, how can they alter their current routines to better prepare themselves and to reflect afterwards on what they heard? Help them become better hearers of teaching and participants in preaching. In the sermon, Pastor Jim offers six exhortations to own the preaching event as a community of faith, which are included below. Discuss these in depth with your small group. Encourage group members to identify one of these exhortations that they can practice next Sunday, and the next time your group meets, discuss the attempts to heed these exhortations.

- **Pray for it in advance.** When we hear Christ-centered preaching, we are receiving a message from God. The message of the cross is the power of salvation to all who hear and believe (Romans 1:16; 10:9). Do you spend intentional time in prayer that God would use the preaching of His Word to bring many people into His Kingdom? The great 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon was converted to faith in Christ when he wandered into a small church to get out of the snow on his way to another appointment and heard the gospel. Likewise, there may be many people in our worship gatherings who are not yet in the Kingdom. They may have come by invitation or by circumstances, but because God is sovereign, their attendance is not by accident. Pray that the Lord would graciously save many through the proclamation of the cross each week. Pray also that the Lord would use the preaching to work in your own life. Since preaching God's Word is an incredible privilege and responsibility (James 3:1), spend time in intentional prayer for the leaders who are preaching each week.
- **Plan for it in your schedule.** We live in a world where there are continuous strains on our time and energy. It is essential that we make intentional time to hear from God through corporate worship gatherings with a local church. Do you and the members of your group prioritize being involved with a corporate worship gathering above and beyond other plans and events? There are certainly those in the small group whose jobs that will keep this from happening every week, but we should all seek to make corporate worship a priority. Do our schedules reflect this?
- **Prepare for it in your heart.** Preaching is not a lecture centered on the intake of information. True preaching should interact with our hearts and minds and apply to our lives as Christ-followers. We should all expect to hear from God through the preaching of the cross. What does the night before church or the hours before you attend a worship gathering look like? Are they filled with a flurry of activity and stress, or do you intentionally take time to quiet your heart before God with the expectation that He will speak to you through His Word in preaching? Carve out time to be still and quiet before the Lord as you prepare to hear the Word preached.
- **Participate in it every week.** We are not passive observers in preaching. After we have prepared our hearts, we should come to preaching as an eager participant. Christian preaching involves hearing and interacting with truth from God Himself. Often, we attend a worship gathering and find our hearts and minds are somewhere else. The preaching of God's Word is not the time to zone out. We should be vigilant and active participants in the preaching event. Follow along in your Bible. Bring a pen and paper to take notes. As you hear truth, actively respond in your heart or respond verbally if you feel comfortable. Respond with reverence and awe. There is no one correct response, but we should all seek to take part in preaching.
- **Process when it's over.** Our interaction with preaching does not end when we close our Bibles and put away our notes. Allow room for the message to interact with your heart and life in the moments, minutes, hours, day, or weeks after. Take a few moments later in the week to pull out your notes and to review the Scriptures taught. Consider meeting with a few other believers to pray and continue to process the truths from the sermon. Ask yourself tough questions and respond. Meet with an unbeliever and tell them what God is teaching you.
- **Practice it in your life.** God's Word is to be applied and obeyed in our lives. If we simply take in information and never move to practicing with our lives we are missing the point. What we hear from

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God in preaching should move us closer to Christ-likeness. James 1:22-25 offers a stern warning against merely being a hearer of the Word. Revelation from God should result in action in our lives. The practice of our faith in our lives is the evidence of the fruit of salvation. True heart change results in us becoming doers of the Word.

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

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?).

- The preaching of God's Word relates to the whole community of faith, not simply to those individuals who may be seminary trained and teach the whole body on a weekly basis. Paul's letter was addressed to ordinary Christians in the church at Corinth (1:2, 10, 26). What steps can we as a faith family do to take ownership of the weekly preaching of God's Word?
- Read 1 Corinthians 1:16-18. Paul puts a chronological priority on discussing preaching before he moves on to address other issues within the church in Corinth. Why does he do this? How does Paul's definition of preaching shape the rest of his letter to the Corinthians?
- The cross demands action and obedience. Why is the proclamation and teaching of God's Word the only natural response to the truth of the cross? Do you and the members of your small group respond to preaching this way? Does the faithful preaching of God's Word encourage and press you to proclaim these truths to others? Are there any unbelievers in your sphere of influence whom you can tell what you learned this week?
- Do you make it a priority to hear preaching in our faith family every time you are able? Do you eagerly anticipate the weekly teaching of God's Word? If not, what does that say about the value you place on preaching? If you do not place a priority on preaching, what can you do to make yourself more available to hear the teaching of God's Word?
- If we do anything to the glory of God, it is an act of worship. Yet we often use worship as a synonym for music. The line between musical worship and preaching is a line we have drawn ourselves. What is worship? How is the public preaching of God's Word a powerful act of worship?
- How would you respond to someone who does not value preaching or who sees it as foolish as many people in the first century world did? What can you do to demonstrate to others the value of the preaching of God's Word?
- When we hear the faithful preaching of God's Word, we are hearing from God's own voice. The words of the Scripture are God's own words. How does the Bible speak about itself? Does it make a distinction between the words of Scripture and God Himself? Consult Psalm 56; 119:48; 130:5; 138:2.
- Read 1 Corinthians 2:1-2. What does Paul seek to proclaim as the central message of his preaching? How is Christ described in these verses? Why does Paul preach Christ as crucified as opposed to a great moral teacher or conquering king? When you share Christ to others, does your description align with Paul's description?
- If you see the Bible as a set of questions and answers, a guidebook for life, or a road map to salvation, how will that affect how you heard God's Word? What do you believe the purpose of the Bible to be? Do you need to correct your own thinking about the Bible?
- Christian preaching should always lead us to the foot of the cross. Do you actively look for the crucified life in every sermon? Do you seek to be conformed to the image of Christ as a result of preaching? How can you begin to interact with preaching on a deeper level? How does the weekly proclamation of God's Word motivate you to model the crucified life before others?
- Doing nothing with the truth of God's Word is still a response to God's Word. In light of this sermon and passage, how can you this week apply what you have heard?