

## Small Group Guide THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN PREACHING - PART 2

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. Jim Shaddix

April 28, 2013

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

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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 look for the Spirit to work in power despite our weaknesses. Pray we will look beyond delivery and personality of our preachers to the power of the Spirit at work through the preaching. Ask God to attune you to His conviction found through the preaching of His Word. Pray we will all respond to preaching with obedience. Pray for God to strengthen us with His power for the obedience to this Word. Pray for us to make much of the power of the gospel in preaching and not the preachers doing it.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week marks the 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the Children's Crusade in Birmingham when 1,000 students marched to bring unity in the city and the Body of Christ. As Christians come together Thursday for the annual Mayor's Prayer Breakfast (register at [mbtsal.org](http://mbtsal.org)), we are praying that God will bring new unity in His Body for the sake of the Mission of Christ. We are also praying for Greater Shiloh Baptist Church and Dr. Michael Wesley, Pastor.*

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- *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 the Donxiang Peoples, a smaller sub-culture of the Hui. For more information go to [www.pray4hui.com](http://www.pray4hui.com). We are also praying for our Student Short-Term Team serving among unreached people groups in Atlanta.*

## MAIN TRUTH

### Message Outline

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

### Reminders for the church...

- The message of the cross is the resource of God's power.
- The preaching of the cross is the response of God's people.

### Challenges for pastors and people...

1. Let's own the preaching event as a community of faith.
2. Let's approach the preaching event as an act of worship.
3. Let's receive the message *from* God, not just *about* God.
4. Let's resolve to magnify the message of the gospel alone.
5. Let's anticipate the Spirit's power in our weaknesses.  
(1 Corinthians 2:3-4; cf. 1 Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 31:30; Zechariah 4:6; 1 Corinthians 1:26-28; 2 Corinthians 4:7-12; 12:6-10)
  - Consider God's 'twisted' economy when you feel weak.
  - Celebrate the weaknesses of those who preach to you.
  - Come to the message of the cross with your weaknesses.
6. Let's respond to the gospel message with obedient lives.  
(1 Corinthians 2:5)
  - Respond to God's Word with your obedience.
  - Rely on God's power for your obedience.
7. Let's magnify the gospel's power, not the gifted preachers.  
(1 Corinthians 2:5; cf. Acts 20:36-37; 1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 2:1; Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13; Hebrews 13:7-8,17)
  - Resist the Christian 'rock star' culture.
  - Celebrate the broader kingdom impact.
  - Affirm faithful pastors of local churches.
  - Credit the message, not the messengers.
  - Value the biblical model of teaching teams.

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- Come for the teaching, not the teacher.
- Honor, love and obey faithful teachers.

#### *Message Summary*

This week's message continues our study of the cross and Christian preaching from 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. From this passage, we see that God uses our weakness to exalt Himself, and He also graciously allows us to come to the foot of His cross with our own weakness. As we hear preaching, we should respond with teachable hearts and obedient lives. When we participate in the preaching event, we should always magnify the gospel's power rather than gifted preachers, for the gospel alone has the power to save.

## **WHY IT MATTERS**

#### *Digging Deeper*

Since this passage is part two of the previous week's sermon, rehearse with the group the first five challenges for pastors and people regarding Christian preaching. Also, take some time at the beginning to follow up with your group regarding the six exhortations from last week (pray, plan, prepare, participate, process, and practice). Which of these did your small group incorporate into their rhythms of worship this week? How did it enrich and enliven their participation in the preaching event this week? Consider asking a few people to share their experience. Challenge them to add more of these into their weekly practice as they participate in preaching. Did anyone share what they learned last week with a non-believer? If so, how did they respond? Encourage each person in the group to identify one or two people they can share with over the next week. Ask them to share the names of those with whom they plan on sharing with another member of the small group in order to provide accountability and prayer as they share.

Spend some time this week rehearsing the historical context of this passage, particularly regarding the Sophists. Many Bible scholars and teachers agree that Paul was speaking against this particular group of people, for the Sophists were public speakers who were praised and followed by fans because of their ability to speak passionately and powerfully in public. It would be difficult for us today to fully grasp the following this group would have enjoyed during the first century in a cosmopolitan city like Corinth. Sophists would choose a topic and convincingly speak about it in a variety of contexts (public forums, businesses, pagan temples, festivals, etc). These men spoke in order to gain social standing and the praise of men and were followed like celebrities. Unfortunately, some Sophist ideals had been imported into the Christian church. Those who failed to rise to the standards of the Sophists would simply be disregarded. This became a problem for the church in Corinth because the power of the Christian gospel is the message itself, not its delivery.

Try to help your small group connect the original context with our culture today. What parallels can be drawn to our own time? Help them consider how intimidating this would have been for the ordinary Christian believers in Corinth with little skill or training in preaching, particularly when the message they have been given to preach is regarded as foolish (1 Cor. 1:18). Are the members of your small group ever discouraged to speak the gospel message for the same reason? Do they think that preaching is a specialized task only for those who are particularly gifted public speakers or for those with seminary degrees? Does anyone in the group find themselves more inclined to hear the gospel when it preached by certain teachers? Do they value the gospel for the message itself, or do they find it more acceptable from certain teachers? If so, how does that devalue the gospel?

We are blessed to live in a place where we have widespread access to the preaching and teaching of many pastors through multiple avenues such as podcasts, the Internet, Christian radio, and television. Many of these resources are free, and the influence of these teachers is far reaching. Praise God that many of these

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teachers are faithful ministers of the gospel and that we have such access to the wisdom and teaching of many gifted pastors. Unfortunately, we are still sinful people, and there is a temptation to glorify these preachers above the gospel of Jesus Christ. As the people in your small group continue to think about preaching, help them remember the these exhortations:

- **Resist the Christian ‘rock star’ culture.** There is a dangerous element in North American Christian culture to glamorize particular preachers and pastors. Remember that God does not measure success in human terms. Speaking to thousands at a conference and selling many books is not an accurate indicator of how much or how little God is blessing a pastor’s ministry. Each pastor’s gifting and ministry assignment is different. We must be careful to maintain an appropriate attitude towards this culture and continually examine our own hearts in light of it. At the end of the sermon, Pastor David remarked how the praise of man is poison to the soul. While we want to encourage our pastors, how can we be sensitive on our end, so we are not inflating their pride and ego?
- **Celebrate the broader kingdom impact.** While we need to be watchful of the “rock star” culture, we should also praise God that many pastors enjoy the ministry that they do. We will never know how many people have come to faith in Christ while they were reading a book they were given, listening to sermon they were encouraged to download, or going to a conference they were invited to attend. Praise God that He allows faithful servants of His Word to enjoy such kingdom impacting ministries! This does not apply just to preachers but also to small group leaders and to believers in the local church. We can be tempted to compare ourselves to others or to measure our success by what we are doing. Do we look around at others, or are we focusing on Christ and what *He* is accomplishing?
- **Affirm faithful pastors of local churches.** God gives all pastors a particular calling and gifting. To some, this gifting may involve preaching to thousands at conferences. To others, it involves serving faithfully at a local church. The overwhelming majority of pastors serve the Lord in obscurity, and most Christians are taught each week by pastors who will never enjoy notoriety. As a church, we need to pray for and encourage these brothers often. Take the time thank these men for their service to the kingdom.
- **Credit the message, not the messengers.** There is no pastor who has ever saved someone. Salvation belongs to the Lord (Ps. 3:8). A good teacher may help us better understand what God has said, but, ultimately, a good teacher is delivering a message from God. The gospel message is the center of Christian preaching. The gospel message alone carries the power necessary to see changed lives. The worth of Christian preaching is inextricably linked to the message of the cross.
- **Value the biblical model of teaching teams.** Jesus sent the disciples out in teams of two (Mk. 6:7; Lk. 10:1). The Holy Spirit appointed a missionary team in Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2). Paul left Titus in Crete with instructions to appoint elders (Tit. 1:5). The New Testament puts a high priority on having a multiplicity of pastors in a church. Almost every reference to elders in the Bible is plural. The responsibility of teaching and preaching the Word of God should be held and shared by a group of elders rather than a single individual. Discuss the value of teams with your small group. What are the benefits of having a plurality of elders and preachers in the local church?
- **Come for the teaching, not the teacher.** When we attend a worship gathering, our highest priority should be to worship God and to be taught by Him through His Word. Gifted teachers will come and go, but Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever (Heb. 13:8). The gospel never changes. If we are coming to worship for the purpose hear a particular teacher rather than gospel teaching, we need to seriously reconsider our motivation. Encourage your small group to check their hearts regarding their attitude towards particular preachers. Do they have a teachable spirit regardless of who is in the pulpit? Are they attentive, or do they begin to tune out when the preacher who opens the Word is not on their A-list?

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- **Honor, love, and obey faithful teachers.** We should all honor those who speak the Word of God to us (Heb. 13:7). Whether or not our pastor is known within the wider Christian culture, the church should praise God for faithful teachers. We also need to remember that faithful Bible teachers are not teaching a message of their own but words from God. Faithful teaching should always result in loving obedience from the hearers.

## 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?).

- 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 gives us helpful guidelines for what preaching should be and for how it should affect us. What is the goal and motive of Christian preaching? What should we anticipate happening when we preach or when we listen to others preach? How does Paul describe his own preaching?
- What does Paul mean when he says that he came to the Corinthians in "fear and much trembling"? Do you revere God's Word in this way?
- Read 1 Corinthians 2:5. When Paul sacrifices human conventions and wisdom, what does he get in return? How can you model this approach when sharing the gospel with others?
- While we want to be sensitive to our context, there is a danger in mainstream Christianity in trying to be too relevant to our own culture. What are the dangers of Christians and churches seeking cultural relevance?
- What is God's "twisted economy"? How does this keep us humble and grounded? How is this counterintuitive to the contemporary worldview? Consider 1 Samuel 16:7, Proverbs 31:30 Zechariah 4:6, 2 Corinthians 4:7, and 12:9-10.
- When you feel weak, do you rely upon the power of God or on yourself? How does human weakness magnify God's power? Do you let your weakness stop you from serving God? If so, what does that reveal about what you think about God's power? How can you respond the next time you feel weak, and how can you encourage others when they feel weak?
- What does it mean to positively respond to God's Word? How do we identify what the cross is beckoning us to do in every sermon? When you feel like there is no way you can do what the pastor is teaching, why is that a good place to start?
- People with always put their faith in what they feel is most important (presentation, engaging speaking, message of God, etc). When you listen to preaching, what is most important to you? Do you let anything rise above the message of the gospel?
- Why should we resist the Christian "rock star" culture? Do your actions and attitudes promote it? How can we maintain an appropriate respect for and relationship to gifted preachers of God's Word without elevating them above the message itself? How is this culture dangerous for gifted pastors as well?
- How can we better pray for and affirm pastors in the local church? Every week in our Worship Guide and in our Faith Family Worship Guide, we include the name of local church in our area and the name of their senior pastor. Do you pray for these brothers and their congregations every week?
- Are you more likely to come to a worship gathering if you know beforehand a particular pastor is preaching? Read 1 Corinthians 1:11-15. Why is this the wrong way to think about leaders in the church? How does that type of thinking devalue the message of the gospel?
- Faithful pastors and teachers should always be obeyed. Do you seek to obey the teaching of our elders and leaders? Discuss with your small group how they respond during and after the sermon. Do they come as spectators to receive the message, or do they allow the preached Word to transform them from the inside out? What is their attitude as they listen to a sermon? Think of a kitchen sponge. Someone who comes and merely listens to a sermon is like a sponge that continues to absorb moisture. If it is not wrung out, the sponge will begin to mildew and stink because it is meant to be

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squeezed. Christians who absorb more and more knowledge without applying it and making disciples are like saturated sponges who need to be squeezed.

- There is nothing wrong with listening, enjoying, and being taught by other pastors through books or podcasts. Think about other pastors whose books you read or whose sermons you listen to. Why should you not compare those teachers with your own pastor? Why should you not consider a preacher on a podcast to be your pastor (if the podcast preacher is not the pastor of the local church you attend)?