

Small Group Guide

THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN WISDOM

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

May 5, 2013

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

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: Praise God for revealing the gospel to us and granting us understanding. Worship Him for the unfathomable depth of mystery contained within the gospel. Thank God for revealing His wisdom to us through His Spirit. Ask the Spirit to continue guiding you as an individual and us as a church in wisdom. Pray the Spirit will work through our corporate and private times of worship to further interpret for us truths from God. Pray we will respond to the work of God in our lives by living wisely.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for the ministry of Restoration Academy (restorationacademy.org), a K-5 through twelfth grade Christian school in Fairfield that focuses on low income urban children. Many children from other partner ministries like Grace House and The Lovelady Center attend there too. We are also praying for Oak Mountain Presbyterian Church and Bob Flayhart, Pastor.*

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- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for the thirteen individuals being sent out as Mid-Termers this summer. These individuals and families will be serving up to two years in various places around the world including East Asia, Central Asia, Haiti, Southeast Asia, Ecuador, South Korea, and the Middle East. Join us as we pray for God to use these Mid-Termers to make His name known. To find out more information and specific ways to pray for each Mid-Termer, visit globalblog.brookhills.org.*

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

“The Cross and Christian Wisdom”
1 Corinthians 2:6-16

Two Foundational Truths

- The cross of Christ is the pinnacle of wisdom: God purposed to glorify Himself by saving undeserving sinners through the sacrifice of His one and only Son.
 - The cross of Christ represents God’s predetermined affection for sinners.
 - The cross of Christ represents God’s present execution of sinners.
 - Wisdom is not found in devotion to power, prestige, position, possessions, pleasures, and prosperity.
 - Wisdom is found in death to pride.
 - The cross of Christ represents God’s future glorification of sinners.
- Such wisdom is not invented or discovered by man; such wisdom is graciously revealed by God.
 - Only by the mercy of God...
 - Behold the choice of God the Father.
 - Behold the crucifixion of God the Son.
 - Behold the call of God the Spirit.
 - Unquestionably, man is morally accountable.
 - Ultimately, God is sovereignly gracious.
 - We have the mind of Christ.
 - Revealed by the Spirit...
 - Through the Word...
 - To our hearts.

Four Inevitable Exhortations

- Let’s be desperate for the Spirit in order that we might know God’s glory.
 - Only the Spirit of God knows the fullness of the glory of God.
 - If we want to know God, then we need the Spirit to reveal Him to us.
 - Therefore, people who are desperate to know God will be desperate for His Spirit.
 - If we are not desperate for His Spirit, it is a sure indicator that we have grown content with knowing little about God.
 - When we are desperate for His Spirit, we will grow to know God with the very perspective of Christ.

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- Let's seek discernment from the Spirit as we trust God's generosity.
 - The limited wisdom of man...
 - We lack knowledge, perspective, and experience.
 - The limitless wisdom of God...
 - He has perfect knowledge, eternal perspective, and infinite experience.
- Let's live differently by the Spirit as we reflect God's goodness.
 - Worldly wisdom results in selfish living.
 - Godly wisdom results in selfless love.
- Let's go with dependence on the Spirit as we proclaim God's gospel.
 - The wasted life keeps the message of Christ crucified hidden...
 - For fear of rejection.
 - In neglect of the lost.
 - The wise life makes the message of Christ crucified known...
 - With confidence in rejection.
 - No matter what it costs.

Message Summary

This sermon continues

And focuses on the difference between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom. Christian wisdom centers on the cross of Christ. Although it seems absurd to the world, this is the pinnacle of our faith that is graciously revealed to us by God. While the cross of Christ represents God's affection for sinners and His past substitution for sinners, the cross is also the place where we die to ourselves in the present, and it represents God's future glorification of sinners. As a result of these truths, let us be desperate for the Spirit, seek discernment from the Spirit, live differently by the Spirit, and go with dependence on the Spirit as we proclaim God's gospel.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

Begin by asking the group to briefly share in groups of two or three of a time when they felt in over their head, did not know what to do, or felt like they were at the end of themselves. Perhaps someone in the group currently feels that way and needs encouragement and support from the group, so be sensitive to how the group can come alongside them during this time. Highlight how such moments demonstrate our need for wisdom from God.

Ask the group to define wisdom. Wisdom defined is the ability to discern what is good, right, true, and lasting. How does this topic of wisdom fit into Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 1-2 (see 1 Cor. 1:17, 20, 21, 22, 26; 2:1, 4)? Discuss the context of 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. How does the cross of Christ relate to wisdom?

Distinguish between worldly wisdom and godly wisdom using this passage and James 3:13-16. Since we need wisdom so desperately, discuss how godly wisdom is found. What is the role of the Spirit and what is our role in obtaining wisdom? Delineate between Scripture and the world's wisdom regarding the following areas: friendships, dating, marriage, divorce, homosexuality, sex, parenting, work, politics, etc. How does the cross of Christ affect our understanding of wisdom? Do our lives reflect adherence to godly wisdom or to worldly wisdom? Are we marked more by our death to pride or by our devotion to power, prestige, position,

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possessions, pleasures, and prosperity? How is the cross of Christ currently affecting how the people in your group live their lives?

In looking at how the cross of Christ represents God's predetermined affection for sinners and God's past substitution for sinners, take this time with your group to rehearse the gospel. Encourage the people in the group to practice explaining these two concepts to each other. How would they explain Christ's sacrifice and our need for a substitute to someone who is lost, particularly to a child or to someone who did not grow up in the church? Use illustrations such as Aslan and Edmund from *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Ask the group to consider other illustrations that they can use to take an abstract concept like substitution and make it more concrete.

Discuss the implications of the cross of Christ representing God's execution of sinners. Use passages such as Galatians 2:20 and Luke 9:23 to feature how we are to die to ourselves. Ask the group why this is important as well as how this is done. Use personal illustrations of what it has looked like for you to die to yourself. Help the group to understand how dying to self affects their work relationships, their relationships with their parents, spouse, children, friendships, and their interactions with the least of these. Converse about the challenges to dying to self. What are common temptations that we face in attempting to live this way? How do we fight against temptation in this area? What things hinder us from dying to self? What are the roots beliefs, desires, or thoughts that steer us away from dying to self? Encourage the group to reflect on these questions and to repent of any exposed areas of sin.

Having the mind of Christ is a key difference between an unbeliever and a Christ-follower (1 Cor. 2:14-16). Question the group about what it means to have the mind of Christ. Trusting in Christ as Lord and Savior transforms us from the inside out and affects our mind, affections, will, relationships, and purpose. The New Testament emphasizes the need for Christ-followers to renew their minds because of how our sin-twisted thinking leads to sinful emotions and actions (Rom.8:5-8; 12:1-2; Eph. 4; Col. 3). As a group, brainstorm about how we are to renew our minds. Identify and filter thoughts using Philippians 4:8 as a litmus test for what is worthwhile to fill our minds. Ephesians 4 and Colossians 3 teach us to take off the natural man (our sin) and to put on the new self. Ask the group if they have ever gotten a song stuck in their heads. If they want to get rid of the old song, they must replace it with something (like a new song). It is the same with our thoughts. We cannot just eliminate sinful thoughts. We must replace them with upright alternatives such as having a go-to verse or passage that we meditate on, praying, singing a hymn or praise song, or doing something active like running or cleaning. The point is to replace the tempting or sinful thought with something that is Christ-exalting. We cannot do this on our own power. We need the power of the Spirit, and we need to pray for His strength and for wisdom from God in fighting sin in our thoughts.

An important tool in mind renewal is Scripture. We have the mind of Christ revealed by the Spirit through the Word, but how many people in your small group know how to study the Word for themselves? Are they self-feeders, or do they rely on the pastor, on you, or on other Christian writers or teachers to feed truth to them? As you get to know the different people in your small group, discuss with them either individually or in a whole group setting about how each of you studies Scripture. Do they study the Word just to glean information, or do they study it with the purpose of being changed by what they read? Share with the group how you study the Bible. Teach them to ask head, heart, and hands questions when they study. This includes asking:

- (Head) As a result of reading this passage, what does God want me to know.
- (Heart) As a result of reading this passage, what does God want me to desire or not to desire?
- (Hands) As a result of reading this passage, what does God want me to do?

The four inevitable exhortations from this sermon all reference our relationship with the Holy Spirit and can seem overwhelming as we consider how to pursue godly wisdom in our lives. Encourage the group members to choose one of the four exhortations to focus on this week. Help them to think of one practical step they can take in faithfully responding to that exhortation this week. For example, if someone decides that they want to grow in their desperation for the Spirit, one step might be to pray each day this week that God would help them to see their need for the Spirit in their day-to-day life. With living differently by the Spirit, an individual

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might first reflect on the various ways that their life looks more like the world than it does Christ. Help the group to understand that the ultimate goal is to be conformed more and more into the image of Christ, and as they take one step in this process, they can identify the next step towards that goal then the next step. Think about it as a continuum from one to ten. Give each person a sheet of paper. On the paper, ask the group to rate where they are in their relationship with God with one being no relationship to ten being perfect and sinless. Have them list why they gave their relationship with God that particular rating. Ask them if they are content with where they are. Are they content with knowing little about God? (Their answer will give you an indication of where they are spiritually.) Next, have them brainstorm one thing they could do this week or over the course of the next several weeks to improve their relationship with God by one point. I recently did this one-on-one with a college girl in my small group, and one thing she knew she was not doing was studying the Bible consistently. Since this was the reason for the poor rating she gave for her relationship with God, her goal for that next week was to read the Bible each day. So we discussed her schedule and when would be the best time for that to happen each day. Help those in your group to think through practical steps they can take to grow closer to God.

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?).

- How is the cross of Christ the pinnacle of wisdom?
- Define "worldly wisdom." Why does Paul write to the church in Corinth about worldly wisdom? What does worldly wisdom have to say about dating, marriage, divorce, sex, homosexuality, parenting, work, politics, etc.? How do Paul's words relate to us in our context?
- 1 Corinthians 2:7 states that God determined "before the ages" that Christ would be substituted for the sake of sinners. Discuss the implications of this verse and of Ephesians 1:3-8. Why did God do this? Paul also calls this wisdom "secret and hidden" (v. 7). This refers to how the reality of Christ and the cross was hidden in the Old Testament in pictures like the Passover Lamb (Ex. 12) or the sacrifice of atonement (Lev. 16) or in prophecies like in Isaiah 53 or Psalm 22. Choose one of these prophecies or pictures, and discuss how that particular passage pointed to the coming and crucifixion of Christ when God's plan of salvation of sinners was fully revealed.
- Although wisdom is not found in devotion to power, prestige, position, possessions, pleasures, and prosperity, these things have infiltrated the church today. In what ways has the church, your small group, and your life been pervaded by the world's wisdom in these areas? In what areas do you need to confess sin because of how you have allowed the world to influence you?
- Read Galatians 2:20 and Luke 9:23 and discuss how wisdom is found in death to pride. The cross of Christ represents God's present execution of sinners. This means that cross is not only a place where Christ died for sin in the past, the cross is a place where we die to ourselves in the present. What does it mean to die to yourself? In what aspects of your life are you needing to do this? What areas of your life are you struggling to submit to the Lordship of Christ? What is at the root of your struggle?
- What does it mean to have the "mind of Christ" (v. 16)? How do we participate in the Spirit's work of renewing our minds? Do your thoughts align with the standard of Philippians 4:8? In what areas do you struggle with your thought life – worry, lust, bitterness, comparison, self-loathing, etc.? In what ways can you combat temptation and sin in your thoughts? How does the Holy Spirit help us in this task of transforming our minds?
- Do you know the Word? Do you study the Word consistently? Discuss how to study Scripture with the purpose of being transformed by what is read and not just reading it like a social studies textbook. How does the Bible contribute to us having the mind of Christ?
- Knowing the wisdom of God is based on spiritual submission, laying down your pride and submitting your will to God. Why is submission such a struggle for us? In what areas do you struggle to submit

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yourself to God? What are the implications for you not submitting? What could be outcomes of your submission?

- What does it look like to be desperate for the Spirit as a church and in your own life? Are you desperate for the Spirit? If not, why? What are factors that would contribute to a lack of desperation for the Spirit? How can we cultivate dependence and desire for Him?
- Are you content with where you are currently at in your relationship with God? What is one step you can take to go further in your walk with Him? Are you content to know little with God, or are you hungry to know Him more? If you desire to know Him, how are you putting that desire into action in your life?
- Read 1 Corinthians 2:10-14. What is the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of unbelievers and in the lives of believers (see also Jn. 14, 16)? Praise God for how the Spirit gives understanding to the unsaved so that they might understand the gospel. Pray specifically for the lost in your sphere of influence and for the Holy Spirit to convict them of sin and to teach them about Christ.
- Ask the group to provide personal examples of how they lacked knowledge, perspective, or experience in a particular situation. Next, invite them to briefly share a testimony of how God demonstrated perfect knowledge, eternal perspective, or infinite experience in their life. Praise God for these attributes. Read passages like Romans 11:33-36 that describe these attributes of God.
- Why do we depend on ourselves or on other people when we lack perfect wisdom, knowledge, perspective, and experiences? Why do we so often refrain from trusting in the only One who perfectly possesses these qualities? In what ways can we grow in dependence on God rather than on ourselves or other imperfect people?
- Read James 3:13-16. This passage expresses that godly wisdom results in selfless love. In what ways do you express selfless love for others? In contrast, worldly wisdom results in selfish living. In what ways does your lifestyle reflect self-centeredness? How does someone transition from self-centeredness to selflessness? What does the Spirit do and what do we do to contribute to this inside out transformation?
- If the pinnacle of wisdom is Christ crucified, then it is a waste of our lives to keep the message of the cross to ourselves. Do you truly believe this? If so, how is this belief evident in your life? How should this belief be reflected in your life?