

Small Group Guide THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN MISSION

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

August 4, 2013

1 Corinthians 9

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 those who fulfilled His mission in your life by proclaiming the gospel to you. Pray we will all obediently embrace our calling to join God on His mission of making disciples of all nations. Ask Him to keep this call always before us but to protect us from tiring of being challenged to answer it. Ask God for wisdom to know how to best prioritize the spread of the gospel in our lives. Pray for God to reveal to us and convict us of where we have elevated our supposed rights or comforts over obedience to Him or the needs of others. Pray for God to use our church to further His kingdom here in Birmingham and around the world.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for the seeds that were sown this past Saturday among 4,000+ children and their families through the Ready Day One initiative coordinated by Mission Birmingham Transformation Strategies with the Birmingham Public Housing Communities, Jefferson County DHR, and several other low-income distribution sites. We are also praying for First Baptist Church Pelham and Mike Shaw, Pastor.*

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- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for our faith family and the Short-Term trip opportunities we will have this year. Our greatest desire is to see all nations praise the name of the one true God. We know that we cannot do this apart from His power and guidance. We simply have to be obedient to what He has called us to do. Join us and pray this week as we release the first quarter trips for the year 2014. Pray for God to guide our faith family and to show us where He wants to use us this upcoming year to make disciples of all nations. We are also praying for our Short-Term Teams serving in Central Asia.*

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

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1 Corinthians 9

Are you a follower of Jesus?

**If you are a follower of Jesus, you have been saved for a purpose:
the enjoyment of God in the spread of the gospel from where you live to the ends of the earth.**

- Let's relinquish our rights for the sake of the gospel.
 - See the example of Paul...
 - He had a right to financial support from the church at Corinth.
 - Common Practice
 - Biblical Precedent
 - Universal Pattern
 - Jewish Custom
 - Christ's Command
 - He surrendered this right for the sake of the gospel in Corinth.
 - Hear the exhortation to you...
 - You have rights in Birmingham and the world around you...
 - To live, friends, marriage, family, safety, security, health, and happiness.
 - To eat, drink, watch, wear, read, study, listen to, and say whatever you want.
 - To organize your schedule, spend your time, choose your career, make your money, use your money, take your vacation, and plan your retirement.
 - To do what you want to do, go where you want to go, and live how you want to live.
 - The cross compels you to surrender your rights for the sake of the gospel in Birmingham and the world around you.
- Let's rearrange our lives for the spread of the gospel.
 - We are free to be slaves of God.
 - We are obligated to obey.
 - God's gracious conversion of us creates a gospel compulsion in us.
 - We are free to be slaves of others.
 - We willingly commit our lives, our families, and our church to this mission...
 - In our culture.
 - Across other cultures.
 - We wisely contextualize the gospel in this mission.
 - We remove all obstacles to the gospel...

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- But we never remove the offense of the gospel.
- We lay aside all of our comforts...
 - But we never lay aside any of Christ's commands.
- Let's run this race together for the glory of our God.
 - The requirements in this race...
 - Sacrificial self-denial.
 - Stringent self-discipline.
 - Single-minded devotion.
 - The rewards of this race...
 - Others will experience the eternal joy of salvation.
 - We will fulfill the earthly purpose of salvation.

**If you are not a follower of Jesus, be saved today for a purpose:
the enjoyment of God in the spread of the gospel from where you live to the ends of the earth.**

Message Summary

Followers of Jesus have been saved to enjoy God and to spread the gospel. Because this is our purpose and because we are motivated by the cross of Christ, we should relinquish our rights and rearrange our lives in order for the gospel to spread through us. As Christ-followers, we are slaves to God, which does not involve reluctant obedience. Instead, the overwhelming grace of God in our lives compels us to deny ourselves, to discipline ourselves, and to devote ourselves to Him and to His mission. As we follow Him, we serve and share the gospel with others, which includes removing all obstacles to the gospel without altering the gospel message.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

As you begin, have those in the group turn to the two or three people sitting next to them and to describe what they have coming up over the next 2-3 weeks (vacations, sporting events, getting kids ready for school, weddings, visiting family, etc.). Next, have them either jot down or describe to each other the various things they do in a typical day. What filled their schedules this past week? While most of these things are not bad in themselves, all of the activities described can quickly consume us. Bombarded by the temporal and trivial, we can easily forget the eternal. Have you gotten so caught up in the dailyness of living that you forgot the purpose for which you were saved? How many of us wake up thinking about whom we can share the gospel with that day? Unfortunately, most of the time it's not even an afterthought when we go to bed at night. Ask how we can guard against this as Christ-followers. Ask for practical action points with regard to how we can guard against focusing on the temporal instead of the eternal.

Discuss the context of 1 Corinthians 9 and how Paul's discussion of his rights and proclaiming the gospel fit with the preceding chapter. Explain that the Corinthians had missed their purpose, and Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 9 serves as a wake-up call to the Corinthian church.

In the beginning of the sermon, Pastor David distinguishes between a "follower of a Jesus" and a "Christian." Have the group differentiate between these two terms, and ask them why it is important to make the distinction between these two words, especially in the Bible belt. Explain that all kinds of people today claim to be Christians but are not actually following Jesus. As you talk about these terms, don't take for granted that everyone in your group is actually a Christ-follower. Ask the group to describe what a Christ-follower looks like. Ask how they know whether or not they are truly followers of Jesus. Based on people's responses, it

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might be helpful to follow up individually with different people in the group with regards to whether or not they have trusted in Christ as their Lord and Savior.

“Why am I here?” is one of the existential questions of the universe. As humans, why has God created us? As Christians, what has God saved us from and why? What is our purpose? What has God instructed us to do? How has He instructed us to spend our time on earth? Read Matthew 28:18-20. If this is our purpose, what would cause you to miss your purpose and to not fulfill the Great Commission God has given to you? Do you live as though there is nothing greater than God and His gospel? Do you live as though there is nothing more urgent than the gospel? If you are not faithfully fulfilling this purpose, what does it indicate about your relationship with God?

As you start a new school year with new schedules and activities, how can you prayerfully and thoughtfully arrange your life around God’s mission? What would this specifically look like in your life? What rights should you relinquish for the sake of the gospel? What things do you need to surrender to Christ’s lordship? Is there anything in your life that could affect your witness? Who are the lost around you? Do you even know lost people? How can you rearrange your schedule and relinquish rights in order to make it a priority to engage the lost and to make disciples? Also, point out that we make time for what we want to make time for and for what we consider important, and if Christ and His mission is important to us, we will arrange our schedules to reflect this priority.

Throughout the New Testament, Paul calls himself a slave of Christ (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Tit. 1:1), and he expresses a deep sense of conviction and obligation about preaching the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16-17). However, Paul did not feel a reluctant obligation about this task. He was driven by the overwhelming display of God’s grace in his life. Describe this grace. What does this term even mean? How have you experienced God’s grace in your life? What Christ has done and how He blesses us with more than we deserve should compel us to tell others about Him. As people who are saved by grace through faith in Christ, Christ owns us; therefore, we owe Christ to the world. We are under divine obligation to spread the gospel because we have experienced firsthand the goodness of God in saving us. Discuss different motivations we can have for obedience to God (fear, obey because we’re supposed to, don’t want the consequences of disobedience, etc.). How do we get to a place where our motivation for proclaiming the gospel and making disciples is a heart of gratitude towards God and a desire for God’s glory to spread? What alterations need to happen in our thoughts, our affections, and in our time with God for this change of motivation to take place?

In the sermon, sacrificial self-denial, stringent self-discipline, and single-minded devotion are all requirements for running this race well (1 Cor. 9:24-27). In what ways do we need to deny ourselves in order to be more faithful followers of Christ? In what areas do we need to practice greater discipline in our lives (time management, care of our body, what we think about, our possessions, our emotions, work, money, etc.)? These things in themselves do not need to consume us, but discipline in time management, for example, can free up more time for us to invest in other people. With regard to spiritual disciplines (studying Scripture, prayer, fasting, serving, solitude, simplicity, confession, worship, etc.), how can you practice and grow in any of these areas this week? The purpose of spiritual disciplines is to draw you closer to Christ, to conform you more into the image of Christ, and, in doing so, to point others to Christ through you. Would you describe yourself by saying that you have a “single-minded devotion” to God? If not, why? If so, why? How can you grow in greater awe and adoration of Him? Why is this important?

For those at The Church at Brook Hills, short-term mission trips for January-March 2014 were released this week. Pray for how God desires to use you here for His glory, and pray for how He wants to use you to make disciples of all nations. For more information about these short-term trips, visit brookhills.org/global.

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

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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?).

- Describe the difference between the terms “follower of Christ” and “Christian.”
- What is the purpose for which you have been saved? How *should* that purpose affect how you live? How *is* that purpose playing out in your life? What in your life needs to change in order to reflect this purpose?
- What fills our thoughts and our schedules that distracts us from the purpose for which God created and saved us?
- Seven times in 1 Corinthians 9 (vv. 4, 5, 6, 12, 15, 18), Paul mentions his “rights.” What rights was Paul referencing? List the various things that you are entitled to (or at least feel entitled to). What is the purpose of Paul’s discussion about his rights? How does this relate to readers in our context?
- Is your life about your rights or about the gospel? With where you live and where you are right now, what would it look like for your life to be about the gospel instead of about the pursuit of happiness, pleasure, and security? With where you are at in life right now, what would it look like to relinquish your rights for the sake of the gospel? Looking at the rights discussed in the previous question, do any of these things hinder you from faithfully and intentionally sharing the gospel and making disciples? What do you need to relinquish for the sake of the spread of the gospel through your own life? What steps of obedience can you take this week to relinquish those rights?
- Discuss motivations for holding on to certain rights instead of relinquishing them. What prevents you from giving God a blank check with your life? What does Scripture say about the motivations identified? How can we encourage each other to die to self?
- How does your life look different from the world in the areas listed below? In what ways does it look the same? How should your life look different? What changes need to be made for you to better reflect Christ in each of the areas listed below?
 - In your relationships with your friends, family, co-workers, and neighbors
 - In what you eat, drink, watch, wear, read, study, listen to, and say
 - In how you organize your schedule, spend your time, choose your career, make your money, use your money, take your vacation, and plan your retirement
- Examine your schedule from this past week. What filled your calendar? How can you rearrange your schedule and your life for the sake of the gospel? Practically, what would this include in your life? What changes need to be made in the way you manage time in order to free up more time for relationship building, for even meeting lost people, for discipling your children or the people God has placed in your life, for connecting with your neighbors or co-workers on a personal level, for engaging the poor, the widows, the internationals, and the broken in our own community?
- Describe the images and thoughts that come to mind when you hear the words “slave” or “servant.” As Christ-followers, what type of slavery have we been free *from*? As Christ-followers, what have you been freed *for*? How does your life reflect that you are a slave to God?
- In 1 Corinthians 9:19, Paul labels himself as a servant or slave of *all people*. What does Paul mean by this? How did this mindset show itself in his life? What was Paul’s purpose in becoming “a servant to all”? How would your relationship with your spouse, children, parents, siblings, co-workers, boss, friends, neighbors, and complete strangers look different if you truly considered yourself to be a servant to all? What would need to change in your thinking and attitude to make this shift? Pick one of the relationships mentioned above where the person is not a Christian (or if you’re unsure of the person’s salvation). What is one thing you could do this week to serve the person in that relationship for the sake of the gospel? What should be your motivation in doing so?
- Read 1 Corinthians 9:19-24. What does it mean to contextualize the gospel? Simply put, it is communicating the gospel in a manner and with language where it would be clearly understood by the person who is hearing it. Identify someone who is unsaved in your life, or consider that you are sharing with a Muslim, a Hindu, a Mormon, someone who is New Age, a feminist, an individual who believes in the prosperity gospel, etc. As you share, you want to remove any barriers that would cause someone to shut you down before you even tell the gospel story. What words, actions, or

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- attitudes would be a turn-off and would prevent this person from even wanting to hear what you have to say? How could you remove these obstacles to the gospel without minimizing the gospel itself?
- Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Running this race requires self-denial, self-discipline, and devotion. In what areas do you need to practice self-denial? In what areas do you need greater discipline? What steps can you take to become more disciplined in these areas? How can you grow in your devotion to God?