

Small Group Guide

THE CROSS AND THE CHRISTIAN'S SPORTS

The Church at Brook Hills

David Platt

August 18, 2013

1 Corinthians 10:31

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 His good gifts with which He blesses us. Ask Him to keep us from the temptation to elevate His good gifts to too high a place in our lives so that they become idols. Pray for God to lead each of us to examine our selves to see if any idolatry exists. Repent of any idolatry in your life. Pray for God to help each of us to find our ultimate pleasure and satisfaction in Him. Ask Him to help you maximize any opportunity, whether at work or play, to advance His gospel to your friends and neighbors both here in Birmingham and around the world.
- *Pray for Our City:* This week we continue to pray for our students, their families, and their school leaders as the new school year begins across the Birmingham area. We are also praying for Double Oak Community Church and Adam Robinson, Pastor.
- *Pray for Our World:* This week we are praying for a Brook Hills Member Organization, OneWay Ministries. OneWay is led by Brook Hills members JT and Sheryl Turner. Their goal is to reach impoverished, desperate, and forgotten people groups with the gospel. Through short-term trips and long-term partners, they are

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able to come alongside churches and other local ministries to make disciples and serve impoverished communities for the sake of Christ. Join us this week as we pray for OneWay Ministries. To find out more about OneWay, visit 1wayministries.org.

MAIN TRUTH

The Cross and the Christian's Sports 1 Corinthians 8-10

Summarizing 1 Corinthians 8-10...

- A clear command: Flee idolatry.
 - It is inconsistent with the gospel.
 - It is an offense against God.
- An all-encompassing exhortation: Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
 - We glorify God when we live for the good of others.
 - Those in the church.
 - Those without Christ.
 - We glorify God when we realize this is good for ourselves.

Sports and 1 Corinthians 10:31...

- Biblical Foundations...
 - Sports are a good gift from a gracious God given to us for the glory of God.
 - Sin includes taking that which is good and turning it into a god.
 - Good gifts make lousy gods.
 - Idols always disappoint.
 - Idols ultimately destroy.
- Personal Examination...
 - Examine your heart.
 - Examine your mind.
 - Examine your emotions.
 - Examine your conversations.
 - Examine your use of money.
 - Examine your use of time.
 - Examine your perspective.
- Practical Application...
 - Use sports to draw attention to God's greatness.
 - Maximize sports for their intended purpose (as a way to worship God).
 - Keep sports in their proper place (far behind your family and your church...and a host of other things).
 - Use sports to express appreciation for God's grace.
 - Intentionally and continually offer thanks to God.
 - Let the enjoyment of sports lead to ever-increasing affection for God.
 - Use sports to grow in sanctification.
 - Cultivate humility.
 - Demonstrate honor.
 - Develop self-discipline.
 - Maintain self-control.
 - Model self-sacrifice.
 - Value growth in godliness over athletic achievement.
 - Prioritize what really matters in eternity over what seems to matter on earth.

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- Use sports to lead others to salvation.
- Final Invitation...
 - Repent of idolatry (including any and every hint of it).
 - Rest in Christ (who has paid the price for all your sin).
 - Rejoice in God...
 - He is the only One who is worthy of your worship.
 - He is the only One who can satisfy your soul.

Message Summary

In conjunction with the previous three sermons in this series, this sermon revolves around the theme of idolatry. As the Corinthian believers learned to follow Christ in a culture full of idols, believers today must learn how to live faithfully in light of a potential and pervasive idol in American culture – sports. If Christ-followers are to do all things for the glory of God, then they must understand that sports are a good gift from a gracious God but that sin takes what is good and turns it into a god, which ultimately destroys. Discernment regarding whether or not you have made sports an idol includes examining your heart, thoughts, conversations, emotions, money, time, and perspective for any hint of idolatry. Instead of cultivating an unhealthy perspective towards sports, use sports to draw attention to God's greatness, to express appreciation for God's grace, to grow in sanctification, and to lead others to salvation.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

Remind learners that today's passage comes near the end of Paul's discourse on liberty and responsibility regarding the consumption of meat sacrificed to idols. Point out that Paul rightly admitted that idols aren't God and are not "real" except for the physical item representing their identity; basically, they are just a piece of wood or metal. Yet, idolatry was rampant among the Corinthian culture, and new believers in the Corinthian church were struggling to know how to live in a way that clearly demonstrated their liberty as believers in Christ who had been freed from the power of sin but that also clearly demonstrated the gospel in love to fellow believers and unbelievers. Note that Paul, then, admonished the Corinthians to consider their liberties in light of weaker believers and to the overall sake of the gospel. Invite learners to discuss how our liberties as Christians must not be considered "rights" as we seek to live for the sake of the gospel.

Point out that Paul rounds out his discussion of idolatry and liberties by telling them that in all things they do, the underlying principle of every action is to glorify God. How can this truth help to drive us to live in a way that pleases God? How can this truth prove to be a system of measurement against how we make decisions? How is it different from questions such as "Is this action a sin?"; "Is this permissible?"; or "Why should I give up freedoms when they aren't sins?"

Invite learners to discuss why Paul's teachings on idols and idolatry can often seem so distant to us that we downplay the importance of the heart of his teaching. How can idolatry be more dangerous in our culture when we can't as easily identify idols that aren't wooden statues taking up residence in a pagan temple?

Describe how the unequal elevation of athletic prowess in our culture equips the building of sports idols. Be aware that there may be some learners in your group who have no interest in sports, or at least do not worship sports as an idol. Emphasize that we can substitute any word for "sports" and address idols in our lives. In a church-rich culture such as Birmingham, Alabama—and within the church culture across the world—Christians often have areas of holiness that we require of others while considering many sins to be acceptable. What are some of these "pet sins" that we consider acceptable, and how do they relate to good gifts that God has given? Why do we often eliminate "play" or "recreation" from our call to holy living?

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For small groups consisting of people who are parents, encourage discussion regarding how to make decisions as families and to lead their children well with regard to having a God-honoring perspective towards sports. What are practical things parents can do or say to teach this to their children?

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?).

- Paul admonished the Corinthian church to flee from idolatry in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. When teaching about eating food sacrificed to idols in temples, he told the church to avoid even the appearance of idolatry. Why is idolatry—the worship of anything other than God—so detrimental to one's relationship with God and to the gospel?
- Paul closed out his teaching about idolatry with the final encouragement to do everything for the glory of God. How does this goal for living shed light on the sinfulness of compartmentalizing the gospel and God's call to holiness in our lives?
- How is the compartmentalization of the effects of the gospel in our lives a revelation of the boundaries that we have placed on the Holy Spirit?
- How can the attention and affection of our hearts and minds reveal what we are treating as a god in our lives?
- In what ways does our culture often compete with God and, thus, pursue idolatry? In our churches? In our lives?
- The world belongs to God and is for the purpose of His glory. However, Romans 1 clearly identifies humanity's tendency to worship the creation instead of the Creator. How have we often used recreation such as sports as an idol to worship instead of as an avenue for glory?
- Our culture is quick to dismiss the idolatry of sports as simply overt fanaticism. Romans 1 notes that sin also includes allowing that which is good to become a god. How do we encourage or support the sinfulness of sports idolatry in our culture under the guise of entertainment, recreation, or being a supportive fan?
- How should we consider sports (or other interests) in light of the truth that God gives good gifts, even recreation? How does an attitude toward viewing sports as gifts help to ensure that we live with them in their proper eternal perspective?
- How can personal examination as encouraged in 2 Corinthians 13:5 help us to continually evaluate traps of idolatry in our lives? Why are these times of regular examination essential for holy and missional living? How can we facilitate an honest and open time of examination within our community? In our families?
- How do you react to the statement that the goal of sports is not winning but worship? What does your reaction reveal about thoughts that need to change regarding the purpose of sports in your life? If sports aren't a big object of your affection, substitute "sports" for other interests in your life.
- Christians are to continually seek to become more like Jesus. Scripture is full of sanctifying qualities such as humility, honor, sacrifice, and the fruits of the Spirit. (James 4:6, Galatians 5). How will our approach to sports differ when we see them as an avenue for sanctification? How can we use the numerous opportunities presented by sports to teach younger generations about a life of godly character?
- God is worthy of the worship of all peoples, including those within your influence through the platform of sports. What opportunities have you been entrusted with in which you can share the gospel with others—through coaching, being a spectator, hosting parties, being a parent, etc.?
- What does repentance for our idolatry toward sports (or any other idol) look like, and what steps do we need to practically take to begin the process of eliminating this idol?