

## Small Group Guide THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN GIVING

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

October 20, 2013

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

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 the resources, both financial and otherwise, with which He has blessed you. Thank Him for the opportunity to bless others through our giving. Pray we will all see our responsibility to care for the poor and needy. Ask God to help us reach beyond any seeming barriers that might exist between us to offer help to those in need. Thank God for those in your life who have provided for your needs when you were in want. Pray for God to help us develop a reputation for our giving.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for the ministry of Central Alabama Fellowship of Christian Athletes and Brook Hills member, Theresa Chamblee, as she leads out in this ministry making disciples among student athletes in middle schools and high schools in our area. We are also praying for Bethel Baptist Church of Collegetown and Thomas Wilder, Pastor.*
- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for Mollie Tyler, a Brook Hills Mid-Termmer who is serving in England. Mollie is serving alongside a local church as they*

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*do outreach ministry and evangelism in their surrounding community. To learn more about Mollie, visit her blog at [mindingthemustardseed.wordpress.com](http://mindingthemustardseed.wordpress.com). This week we are praying for our Short-Term team serving in Central Asia.*

## MAIN TRUTH

### Message Outline

#### THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN GIVING

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

#### The Cross Compels Us To...

- Give universally.
- Give corporately.
  - Giving reflects commitment to the church.
  - Giving promotes unity in the church (both locally and globally).
- Give regularly.
- Give proportionately.
- Give responsibly.

#### What About Tithing?

- In the Old Testament...
  - Tithes (totaling about 23% per year) were given to support the people of God (Lev. 27:30; Num. 18:21-24; Deut. 14:22-23, 28-29).
  - Firstfruit offerings were given to present the best before God (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 19:23-25; Num. 15:20-21).
  - Freewill offerings were given to offer excess to God (Ex. 35:29; 36:3-7; Deut. 12:5-7).
  - Tithes and offerings were...
    - Reminders of God's ownership of all things.
    - Reflections of God's provision for all His people.
    - Reasons to celebrate God's blessing toward on His people.
- In the New Testament...
  - There is no specific command to tithe...
  - Yet there are many examples of giving that go beyond the tithe (Lk. 12:32-34; 18:18-19:10; Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37).
  - And there are many reasons why giving might begin with a tithe.
    - Tithing honors a biblical principle that the Old Testament explains and Jesus endorses (Luke 11:41-42).
    - Tithing reinforces the reality of God's ownership (1 Cor. 4:7; 2 Cor. 9:9-10).
    - Tithing reminds us of the responsibility of our stewardship (Mt. 25:14-46).
    - Tithing helps us in our constant battle with materialism (1 Tim. 6:6-10, 17-19).
    - Tithing aids us in our efforts to combat greed in our hearts (Mt. 6:19-24).
- In the church today...
  - Potentially start your giving with 10% to the church (this is the "floor" of giving).
  - Continually expand your giving with greater percentages according to your excess (there is no "ceiling" on giving).

#### How Do We Help Those In Need Without Hurting Those In Need?

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- Helping the needy is the inevitable overflow of faith in Christ and love in the church (Jms. 2:14-26; 1 Jn. 3:17).
- Give intentionally: Prioritize the church and evangelize the lost.
- Give wisely: Supplement the responsible instead of subsidizing the irresponsible.
- Give relationally: Let personal attention, consistent accountability, and long-term commitment accompany your giving.
- Acknowledge diversity: People are in need for different reasons, so help those in need in different ways.
- Avoid excuses...
  - “I’m not doing anything to hurt the poor.”
  - “But I’m just one person; what can I do?”
  - “I’m only responsible for helping people close to me.”

**“We will give cheerfully and generously to the support of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the gospel through all nations.”**

### Message Summary

As Paul concludes his letter to the Corinthian church, he mentions an offering that he is collecting from the church in Corinth for the church in Jerusalem, and his approach to the subject of giving indicates that all believers are to give corporately, regularly, proportionately, and responsibly. While there is no specific command in the New Testament to tithe, we see many examples of giving in the New Testament that go beyond what was required in the Old Testament as well as an expectation of believers to give to the church and to the poor. Such giving should flow from our faith in Christ and our love for Him. As we give to those in need, we must consider how to avoid hurting those in need, which involves giving intentionally, wisely, and relationally while acknowledging diversity and avoiding excuses. As we study this passage, we must consider how we can honor God with the resources He has given to us.

## WHY IT MATTERS

### Digging Deeper

As a small group leader, this may not be a comfortable topic for you to discuss with the group. Before the small group meeting, take time to process the questions in this guide for yourself. Are you faithful in giving? Can you honestly say to your small group, “Follow me as I follow Christ” with regards to giving? If not, take time to confess this to God and to specifically think through how God want you to grow in this area and what the first action step should be. Discuss this topic with your spouse and children if you have them. What changes need to occur in your family in order for your family to be faithful in giving? Some members of your group may not be faithful in giving. How can you help people understand how to begin giving regularly and what *their* first step should be?

Also, be sensitive to the range of needs and socioeconomic levels represented in the small group. Are you aware of any financial needs within the group? Is there a way that the group can care for each other in this area using the principles given in Scripture and discussed in this sermon? You may or may not discuss this during the group time, but we should consider the different ways our small groups can better care for each other (see Acts 2:42-47).

For those who heard this sermon, ask them to share their response to what they heard from 1 Corinthians 16 about giving. For everyone in the group, what are their initial reactions to hearing a pastor teach on the topic of giving? What preconceptions and prior experiences do the people in the small group have about giving and sermons on giving? What questions do they have about giving and tithing? Ask the group to explain why we

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as Christians should give to the church, to the work of the ministry, and to the poor. Furthermore, what should be our motivations in giving? If we are unwilling to give, what does this reflect about our hearts, our beliefs, and our priorities?

Based on 1 Corinthians 16:2-3, we find five principles for giving: giving universally, corporately, regularly, proportionately, and responsibly. Discuss each of these principles and why they are important. Ask the group members to reflect on whether these principles true in their lives. If these principles are not true in their lives, why? What reasons does the person have for why they are not giving according to these biblical principles? Ask them to contemplate what the cross of Christ compels them to do with the money that they have.

- Are they giving?
- Are they giving as a reflection of their commitment to the church and as a picture of their unity with the church (not only in this faith family but the broader family of believers around the world)?
- Are they giving regularly? Is there systematic intentionality in their giving on a regular basis?
- Are they giving proportionately in a way that reflects all that God has given to them?
- Are they giving responsibly?

How can the group members better *plan* to give? Practically, what does this look like? As an example, consider sharing with the group your strategy or your family's plan for giving. Brainstorm together different ideas about how to plan ahead for giving each month or each year. Ask the group to pray about how much God wants them to give.

In reference to tithing in the Old Testament, we must remember that Israel was unique because they were more than a spiritual community; they were a political nation. So giving for us will look different than what it did for them. However, emphasize how God's people in the Old Testament gave more than their expected tithe. Discuss why it is important that the Old Testament provides a "floor" for giving but not a "ceiling." How does this observation connect to New Testament saints? In case questions arise about the 23% of tithes that the Israelites gave, the breakdown includes: 10% given annually of all the produce of one's land and flocks (to support the priests and Levites), 10% given annually to support the religious festivals and celebrations of the people, and 10% given every three years to distribute to the poor and to the Levites (spread over three years, this comes to about 3% a year).

When discussing how to help those in need, a helpful resource for you as well as to recommend to the group is *When Helping Hurts* by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert. As a group, think through how our financial gifts can potentially hurt the very people we are trying to help. Urge the group to check their own attitude as they give to the poor. We are not to act like saviors swooping in to save people from their urgent physical need or to think that we know exactly what they should do with what we give. Why are such attitudes wrong for us and unhelpful for them?

Also, identify excuses we make for not giving to the poor. What thoughts are at the root of such excuses? How do we address such roots of sin our lives? Why do we not give to the poor intentionally and relationally? Flesh out the six principles listed in the sermon outline of how to help those in need without hurting them. How are you helping those in need, or how can you apply these principles to help those in need?

For those at The Church at Brook Hills, please share the following information with your small group. In the sermon, Pastor David mentioned a new ministry opportunity called WorkFaith Birmingham. If you are interested in learning more about this ministry and how you can be involved, there will be two informational meetings: November 3 and December 1 at 5:00pm in the Student Center. Small group members can also follow WorkFaith Birmingham on Twitter at @WorkFaithBHM.

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### **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?).

- Read 1 Corinthians 16:3. In this verse, the word for gift in the original language of the New Testament is the same word as "grace." How should this picture affect our understanding of giving? How should this understanding influence our motivation for giving?
- 1 Corinthians 16:1-2 presents the expectation that every believer is supposed to give. For students or for those who struggle financially, it would be easy to hide behind economic difficulty as a reason not to give, but what beliefs or thoughts lay behind such an excuse? Why is it important that every believer contribute financially?
- How does giving in the church reflect a commitment to the church and build unity in the church?
- How do we guard against giving becoming an obligation instead of a grace?
- Read Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:21-24; Deuteronomy 14:22-23, 28-29. What was the purpose of tithing in the Old Testament? How much did Old Testament Israelites tithe?
- How should tithing and giving affect our perception of money and possessions? Why do we need to be reminded of God's ownership of all things?
- While there is no *specific* command to tithe in the New Testament, there are many examples of giving that go beyond the tithe. Read each of the following passages: Luke 12:32-34; 18:18-10:10; Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-37. With each passage, discuss what takeaways can be gleaned from it. What were the believers' motivations for giving?
- Why might giving begin with a tithe? Why should we view Old Testament giving practices as a starting point rather than as a goal for what our giving should look like?
- Read Matthew 25:14-26. Tithing reminds us of the responsibility of our stewardship. What does it mean to be a faithful steward? How should the perspective of being a steward affect how you view your personal finances and what you do with God has given to you?
- Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10, 17-19. Tithing helps us in our constant battle with materialism. How can we combat materialism? What are its deadly effects on our life and on our culture? How does tithing help us fight against materialism? Where is your money going? What does your bank account say about where your heart is? Are you capping your lifestyle? What would it look like for you to set a cap on how you live and how much money you spend? What are areas in which you could cut back on your spending? Suggest such ways as a small group, and encourage couples or families to brainstorm these things together. Also, if you are to cap your lifestyle, what should you do with the additional money?
- With regard to giving to the poor, how can we potentially hurt people in need with our financial gifts even if our motivation is to help them?
- What excuses do we offer for not giving to the poor (in addition to the three listed in the sermon notes)? Why are our excuses unacceptable?
- How will you put conviction into practice? How will you apply what you have learned about giving?