

## Small Group Guide THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

November 17, 2013

2 Corinthians 5:11-6:10

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 reconciling us to Himself through Christ's sacrificial death on the cross. Ask God to develop in us the perspective of others He possesses. Pray we will all understand our responsibilities as ambassadors of Christ. Pray we will work together as ministers of reconciliation. Pray we will all proclaim the gospel through and with our lives with boldness and urgency. Rejoice for the ministry God has entrusted to you and the fruit He produces through you.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for the delivery of hundreds of Thanksgiving meals, provided by Christian Service Mission, through various churches and organizations across the city on Saturday, November 23. Many children go without adequate food in the inner city when school is not in session, and this food helps supplement family needs and encourages family gatherings. Brook Hills is sponsoring 50 such meals. We are also praying for Christ Central Church, Calera, and Jason Seales, Pastor.*

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- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for Brook Hills Mid-Termers, Ania Z. and Sarah R. as they serve among unreached peoples in West Africa. Ania and Sarah are using sports and English lessons as a means to engage unreached people with the gospel. Join us as we are praying for our Short-Term teams serving in India.*

## MAIN TRUTH

### Message Outline

#### THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN MINISTRY

2 Corinthians 5:11-6:10

#### As Members of the Church at Brook Hills...

- May the fear of God captivate us.
- May the love of God control us.
  - Contemplate the immensity of His love for all.
  - Meditate on the intensity of His love for (your name).
- May the gospel of God connect us.
  - In our sin, we were separated from God as His enemies.
  - Through our substitute, we have been reconciled to God as His friends.
    - God is the author of reconciliation.
      - He is the giver of the gospel.
      - He is the gift of the gospel.
      - He is the goal of the gospel.
    - Christ is the agent of reconciliation.
      - He suffered our separation.
      - He secured our salvation.
    - We are the acceptors of reconciliation.
      - We have an entirely new identity.
      - We have an entirely different perspective.
        - Of each other in the church.
        - Of others in the world.
- May the mission of God consume us.
  - We have been authorized to speak for God.
    - To persuade people to be reconciled to God through Christ.
    - To plead for people to be reconciled to God through Christ.
  - We are now privileged to work with God.
    - With Christlike joy in a world of suffering.
    - With Christlike purity in a world of sin.
    - Willing to do whatever we can for people to be saved by His grace.
    - Willing to sacrifice whatever He requires for people to know His glory.

### Message Summary

As Christ-followers, we are engaged in a cosmic battle, and as we join with God in His work, we must be captivated by a fear of God and controlled by the love of God. Because of Christ's work of reconciliation, we have the opportunity to go from being His enemies to being His friends, and in choosing to turn from our sin and trust in Christ, we receive a new identity, a new perspective, and a mission. As Christ-followers and as

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The Church at Brook Hills, may the mission of God consume us, so we plead for people to be reconciled to God through Christ, suffer with Christlike joy, live with purity in a world of sin, and sacrifice whatever for people to know God's glory.

### **WHY IT MATTERS**

#### *Digging Deeper*

As you discuss the fear of the Lord, begin by asking the group how they view God. What do they picture or think about when they hear His name? Does their life reflect that image or understanding of God? Create space where you spend time in praise of God by inviting the group members to read Scripture that describes the nature and character of God. Encourage group members to focus their minds on the truths being read. It might help some to draw or to picture in their minds what is being read. The point is to praise God for who He is. As the group leader, be prepared to go first in reading in case the group needs an example of what this looks like. As you conclude this time, transition by asking the group why it is important for us to regularly remind ourselves of who God is. Encourage the group to incorporate regular times of personal praise in their relationship with God (not just something that is done in corporate gatherings of God's people). Discuss different ways that this can be done in one's personal time with God.

2 Corinthians 5:12-14 references a difference between the heart and outward appearance. With regards to Christian ministry (the ministry of *all* Christians, not just those on a church staff), one's personal worship of God should be central. External actions will change if fear of God truly captivates us. Explain to the group that we must be careful of putting the cart before the horse – of putting ministry for God, good works, and even loving people ahead of personal time with Him. Talk through why this is important as well as how God transforms us from this inside out. Consider taking time to explain various spiritual disciplines (studying Scripture, meditation on the Word, fasting, prayer, etc.), why they are important, and what they look like in the group members' lives.

In 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Paul writes to the Corinthians about reconciliation to God, and such vertical reconciliation should lead us to seek reconciliation with other people. 2 Corinthians 1-2 describes a conflict in the Corinthian church, and there was such conflict in the church because there was conflict between the Corinthian believers and God. Discuss how our relationship with God should affect our relationships with other people (see Matt. 18:21-35). If we harbor bitterness, anger, unforgiveness, envy, or comparison against others, how does this affect our relationship with God? Do our relationships with others reflect that we are reconciled to God? If not, why? If we struggle with any of these things, how can we address such sin in our own hearts?

With the sermon sections focusing on God as the author of reconciliation, Christ as the agent of reconciliation, and us as the acceptors of reconciliation, have your group practice explaining these concepts. This can either be done as a whole group exercise or by splitting into smaller groups. How would they explain these truths to an unbeliever? Use this time to also differentiate between justification and reconciliation. Ask why it is important that God not only justify us but also reconcile Himself to us. Provided below is a helpful quote that Pastor David shared discussing the difference between these two terms, but allow the group to define these terms first before reading this or any other definitions.

“Justification is a judicial term used in the law courts. A judge may acquit an accused person without ever entering into any personal relationship with him or her. He just announces the verdict, not guilty. The accused hardly expects to be invited over for dinner by the judge, and probably hopes that he will never see him again. [But here] the judge enters into a personal relationship with the accused. This is necessary because the judge is the one who has been sinned against and is the focus of the personal hostility. God does not simply make a

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bookkeeping alteration by dropping the charges against us. God gives himself to us in friendship.”

### **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 2 Corinthians 5:11. Define the fear of the Lord. What does it mean for fear of God to captivate us? How do we cultivate such awe of God? What should our lives look like if fear of the Lord is what drives us?
- What keeps us from fearing the Lord? How do we ward against treating Him and our relationship with Him as common or casual?
- Why is our fear of God often eclipsed by our fear of man? How do we grow in our fear of God and decrease our fear of the thoughts and opinions of other people?
- How does fear of God lead us to understand the love and grace of God? The love of Christ should lead us to live for Him. What drives or compels you? Is it the love of God? Who are you seeking to please? Is it your aim to please Him? What evidence of this is in your life? If you are seeking to please Christ, what evidence should be present in your life?
- Read John 3:16 and 2 Peter 3:9. God loves all people. You have people in your life whom God loves, and they will one day stand before God. How should God's love for the world and the reality of eternal judgment affect our perspective and interactions with the lost? How do we foster a change in the way we view the people around us in order to see them with this eternal perspective?
- Why is it important to meditate on the intensity of God's love for *(your name)*?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. Contrast justification and reconciliation. Discuss the differences between forgiveness and reconciliation.
- In 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Paul terms Christ-followers as “ministers of reconciliation” and “ambassadors of Christ.” Discuss these roles and the implications they have for how we live.
- Discuss the nuances with regard to the following truths about God: He is the giver of the gospel, the gift of the gospel, and the goal of the gospel. What are the implications of these truths for us and for how we live?
- How should reconciliation with God affect our human relationships, particularly if we struggle with forgiveness, bitterness, anger, envy, and comparison in our relationships with others? How do we begin working towards forgiveness and reconciliation with others?
- Read Galatians 2:20. When we turn from our sins and trust in Christ for salvation, we become a new creation with a new heart, a new identity, new desires, and a new will. What does the world tell us about our identity? What are we tempted to believe regarding what defines us? Do we believe that any of the following things are true: I am defined by my relational status, by how I look, by what I do, by what I make, by my gender or race, by my past? Why *don't* these things define us? What does the New Testament say about who we are as Christ-followers? Do we live as though *these* truths define us? How do we combat the world's influence with regard to our identity?
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:16. As Christ-followers, how should our perspective of others change? What should be our perspective of other Christ-followers and of the world?
- As ambassadors, we are authorized to speak for God (2 Cor. 5:11, 20; 6:2). Why is it important for us to plead with people to be reconciled to God and to plead for people to be reconciled to God? How should this affect how we pray for and talk with people about the gospel? Why would we not persuade and plead?
- Read 2 Corinthians 6:4-10. We work with God with Christlike joy in a world of suffering. How do we possess joy in suffering? How is joy in suffering a witness to the world?

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- Read 2 Corinthians 6:6-7. Why is it important for Christians to demonstrate Christlike purity in a world of sin? How are we striving for purity in our lives? If there are sins we have not confessed or are not willing to seek help in addressing, why? In what ways can we practice purity this week in our thoughts, our desires, our words, and our actions?