

Small Group Guide

THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN GENEROSITY

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

November 24, 2013

2 Corinthians 8-9

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 His generosity toward us. Pray for the Spirit to guide our understanding of giving and generosity. Pray we will give out of joy and love for others. Pray we will avoid drawing attention to ourselves for our giving and generosity. Thank God for the many blessings He has bestowed upon you. Ask Him to reveal to you needs of people He desires you to meet.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for the ministry of the Birmingham Baptist Association. BBA is a voluntary, cooperative effort of some 130 local Southern Baptist Churches working together on specific local mission endeavors, strengthening and equipping one another for the work of ministry, and planting new churches in a way that goes beyond individual church efforts. We are also praying for Gardendale First Baptist Church and Kevin Hamm, Pastor.*
- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for Brook Hills Mid-Termer Patrick K. who is serving in East Asia. Patrick has been studying language at a local university*

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and serving in East Asia for the past year. Join us this week as we pray for Patrick. This week we are also praying for our Short-Term team serving in India.

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

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2 Corinthians 8-9

Where We're Going in the Word...

- December: Celebrating Christ together through Advent
 - Resource: "The Expected One" by Scott James
 - Download the book/app.
 - Use it in personal/family worship.
 - We will walk together each Sunday through selected texts from the advent guide.
- 2014-2015: Reading through the Bible together as a Family
 - Resource: "For the Love of God" (Volume 1) by D.A. Carson
 - Download the Bible reading plan.
 - Use the devotional in personal/family worship.
 - We will walk together each Sunday through selected texts from each week's Bible reading.

How We Give in the Church...

As members of the Church at Brook Hills...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.

- We give out of an abundance of grace.
 - We give willingly.
 - We give based upon God's blessing.
 - We give (at least) according to our ability.
 - We give generously.
 - Generous giving to God...
 - Results in greater giving from God.
 - God gives enough for us...
 - And He gives excess for others.
 - We give cheerfully.
 - We are not forced by God to give.
 - We are freed by God to give.
- We give as a demonstration of the gospel.
 - We sacrifice our rights for others.
 - We spend our resources on others.
- We give to promote thanksgiving to God.
 - Giving unites the people of God.
 - We give regularly to the church.
 - The church deals responsibly with our gift.
 - Giving exalts the goodness of God.

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Message Summary

This sermon concludes our series on *The Cross and Christian Community*, and it calls us as individuals and as a church to repent for our hearts' obsession with money, possessions, and greed. Our giving reflects what is inside our hearts, and as Christ-followers, we should live in a way that expresses the connection between God giving His Son to us and our giving for His glory in the world. Compelled to give by the grace of God, we give willingly based upon God's blessing, and we give (at least) according to our ability. As God gives to us, we give generously and cheerfully to others to promote thanksgiving to God and as a demonstration of the gospel.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

For Brook Hills small groups, relay to your group the information regarding *The Expected One* Advent Guide as well as the preview of our sermon series for 2014/2015 where we will read through the Bible together as a faith family. With regard to the Advent Guide, families can visit the Brook Hills website (brookhills.org) for links to the iPhone App, Android App, Apple iBook, and Ebook with the LifeWay Reader. The sermon series for December will focus on specific texts from this Advent Guide, and we encourage families and singles to use this resource in their personal and/or family worship. With regard to the 2014/2015 sermon series, we will use D.A. Carson's adaptation of the M'Cheyne Chart of Daily Bible Readings, and a recommended resource for this sermon series is *For the Love of God* (Volume 1) by D.A. Carson.

This sermon on Christian generosity piggybacks on "The Cross and Christian Giving" sermon that Pastor David preached last month (October 20, 2013). Revisit principles discussed in that sermon, what small group members have learned, and what they have applied. Discuss how this sermon on generosity builds on the October sermon on giving.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:10-11; 6:9-10. Define "greed." Discuss how it includes both covetousness (desiring what you do not have to the point that you will go to great lengths to obtain it), craving more than what you have, and hoarding what you have. Is there evidence of the sin of greed in your life? Are you grieved by this sin, or are you unrepentant?

This sermon occurs as we release our proposed church budget for 2014 (visit brookhills.org/2014budget for more information). While this sermon is not given in order to raise money in the church, statistics from this past year's giving shed light on a heart issue in our faith family. Emphasize to the group that money is not the primary issue of this sermon or the discussion in small group – our hearts are. As Christ-followers, we know that God has given His Son for us, but do we see and live in a way that recognizes the connection between His giving to us and our giving for His glory in the world? How do we need to rearrange our lives and lifestyles for the building up of the church and the spread of the gospel both here and around the world? Are we willing to do this? If not, why? How would our lives look different if our hearts belonged less to stuff and more to Christ?

The statistics that Pastor David shared in the sermon include:

- 25% of Brook Hills members give about 80% of our budget.
- If you take the average median income of Shelby County, about 16% of this church tithes.
- A research project at Stanford indicated that if all church members in America gave at least 10% of their income, in two years they could eliminate global starvation/malnutrition, provide education to every child on earth, and provide universal access to clean water and sanitation. This does not even address the dent that could be made in reaching the 6000+ people groups in the world who do not have access to the gospel.

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Discuss why it is not wrong to get a good job and to make money. Why has God given many of us more than we need? Clarify that God gives generously so we can give extravagantly. Encourage each other to examine and to cut back on any excess in your life. What would it look like if Christ-followers decided how much they needed to live and gave everything above that amount away? What would this look like in your own life? Below is a helpful true story about John Wesley that exemplifies this principle.

In 1731, John Wesley began to limit his expenses so he would have more money to give to the poor. He decided that he needed 28 pounds to live on per year. He recorded that one year that his income was 30 pounds and his living expenses 28, so he had 2 pounds to give away. The next year, his income doubled, but he still lived on 28 pounds and gave 32 pounds away. In the third year, his income jumped to 90 pounds and in the fourth year, 120 pounds. But he continued to live on 28 pounds and gave 92 pounds to the poor. Wesley preached that Christians should not merely tithe but should give away all extra income once the family and creditors were taken care of. He believed that, with increasing income, the Christian's standard of giving should increase, not his standard of living. He began this practice at Oxford, and he continued it throughout his life. Even when his income rose and became thousands of pounds, he lived simply and quickly gave his surplus money away. One year, his income was slightly over 1400 pounds, and he gave away all but 30. He was afraid of laying up treasures on earth, so the money went out in charity as quickly as it came in. When he died in 1791, the only money mentioned in his will was the miscellaneous coins to be found in his pockets and dresser drawers. Most of the 30,000 pounds he had earned in his lifetime he had given away.

As you discuss the application of this sermon with your small group, challenge each individual or couple to carve out time this next week to actually reflect on how God wants them to put truth into action regarding their giving. Encourage group members to pull out their bank statements from the past month or even the past year, to examine where their money has gone, to identify what of their expenditures are necessities and luxuries, to select areas in which they will cut back, and to choose what will happen with that money instead. While we will intend to do such reflection, we often lack follow through, so before the end of small group, provide time for individuals to look at their schedules and identify **when** (day and time) they will reflect on their giving, **where** they will do this, **how** they will do this, and **who** they will share this with for accountability.

Especially with Thanksgiving, Black Friday, Cyber Monday, and the Christmas season quickly approaching, it will be easy for us to get caught up in materialism, greed, and self-absorption. How can we approach the holidays and not get sucked into such a mindset? How can you, your family, and/or your small group emphasize giving, particularly during this time of the year? Ask small group members to share anything that they do or have done to help put the emphasis on Christ and on helping others during the holidays.

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?).

- What type of defenses go up when we talk about giving in the church? Why do we get defensive about this issue?
- Read Matthew 6:21. How does our money signal where our hearts are? What is the relationship between giving and our hearts? Think back on what you have spent this past week or even over the weekend. Where did your money go, and what does that indicate about what is important to you? Where is the disconnect between the truth that we know from Scripture about giving and us not doing anything with that truth? Why do the majority of Christians not give to the church?

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- Unbelievers often give to causes such as world hunger, clean water, disaster relief, etc. How should the giving of Christ-followers differentiate from the giving of unbelievers?
- In the sermon, Pastor David challenged us not to be guilty of selective moral outrage. This means that we often make a big deal about some sins but do not address other sins. What sins do we tend to emphasize or become outraged by? What sins do we allow to occur without confessing or addressing? Examples include greed, anxiety, discontentment, pride, selfishness, anger, jealousy, lack of self-control, insecurity, and sins of the tongue. Why do we focus on “major” sins but avoid addressing “respectable” sins?
- In 2 Corinthians 8:1-9, Paul gives the Corinthians an example of Christian generosity by describing the Macedonian churches. In these verses, what words does Paul use to describe the Macedonians and their motivation for giving? Why should God’s grace motivate us to give? What words or phrases describe your giving, particularly your attitude towards giving to the church? What prevents us from giving sacrificially?
- Read Mark 12:41-44; Acts 2:45; 4:32-37. What hinders Christ-followers from giving generously like the believers in these passages of Scripture? God assesses our giving not by the amount that is given but by the resources of the giver. It is not about giving a particular amount but about giving all you have. How is this different from the way that the world and even many believers think?
- Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. What principles do these verses teach? These verses do *not* teach a prosperity gospel. Discuss how the blessings of God cannot always be physically or materially measured. Invite small group members to relay testimonies of how God has given to them and provided for them.
- Read 1 Timothy 6:6. How do we foster contentment in our lives? In what ways do you struggle with discontentment? What does discontentment indicate about our view of God and ourselves as well as our understanding of the urgency of eternity?
- What of your possessions needs to be shared, sold, or sacrificed for the glory of Christ? As a small group, brainstorm what luxuries can be minimized in your lives and what can be done with that money instead.
- Read 2 Corinthians 9:7. Describe a “cheerful” giver. How can we become cheerful and glad about giving?
- How is Christian giving a demonstration of the gospel?
- How does giving promote thanksgiving to God? How does giving exalt the goodness of God?