

## Small Group Guide CHRIST AND CHILDREN IN A CULTURE OF DEATH

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*David Platt*

*January 19, 2014*

*Matthew 19:13-15*

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***

#### *Before Small Group*

*Weekly Readings for January 13-19*

<u><b>Monday</b></u>	<u><b>Tuesday</b></u>	<u><b>Wednesday</b></u>	<u><b>Thursday</b></u>	<u><b>Friday</b></u>	<u><b>Saturday</b></u>	<u><b>Sunday</b></u>
<i>Genesis 14</i>	<i>Genesis 15</i>	<i>Genesis 16</i>	<i>Genesis 17</i>	<i>Genesis 18</i>	<i>Genesis 19</i>	<i>Genesis 20</i>
<i>Matthew 13</i>	<i>Matthew 14</i>	<i>Matthew 15</i>	<i>Matthew 16</i>	<i>Matthew 17</i>	<i>Matthew 18</i>	<i>Matthew 19</i>

#### *Where We Are In The Story ~ Old Testament (Genesis)*

As the first book of the Bible, Genesis explains that God is the all-powerful Creator who cares about His creation, and it teaches that God takes evil and transforms it for His glory (Gen. 50:20). Written by Moses when Israel was wandering in the wilderness, Genesis also provides the history of God's covenant with Israel by telling about Adam and his descendants, which include Noah and Abraham. This week's readings explore the waiting period between God's calling of Abraham and the fulfillment of His promise to make him the father of numerous descendants and a great nation through a son. God's mercy and compassion despite the sin and faithless behavior of His people is evident through these chapters. The events of these chapters illustrate that God's character is not based upon the behavior of His people but, rather, upon the very nature of Himself. Abram's decision to make an heir with Hagar, Abram's dishonesty about Sarai's identity, and Lot's incessant pushing for compromise all amount to disobedience before God. Yet, because of His great name and sovereign plan, He intervened and showed unwavering amounts of mercy and grace. The revelation of such a compassionate and relational God sets Yahweh apart from any idol at the time and depicts the coming salvation toward which He is working.

Genesis 14, 18, and 19 relay Abraham's interactions with Sodom and Gomorrah. In Genesis 14, Abraham and the men in his household rescue Lot and the residents of Sodom and Gomorrah from an enemy who had captured them. This chapter demonstrates God fulfilling His promise to bless those who blessed Abraham and to curse those who cursed him (Gen. 12:1-3). Genesis 18--19 indicate that the King of Sodom was a wicked man, and in contrast, the King of Salem stands as a king and as a priest of God. The writer of Hebrews draws on this dual role of Melchizedek in describing Jesus as both king and priest (Heb. 5; 7). The focus of this chapter is whether Abraham would resist the world's opportunity for blessing or depend on what God would provide.

Although God's plan for Abraham included a political and cultural nation, God's instructions for circumcision illustrate that this nation was to reach all nations for the glory of God. God commanded Abraham to mark his covenant with God by having all males circumcised, regardless of their heritage of nationality. Abraham obeyed and included those in his household who were not his descendants and were of a different ethnicity.

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In Chapters 15 and 17, God promised Abraham an heir of his own bloodline. Specifically, in Chapter 17, God promised Abraham that this heir would come from Sarah, his wife. Whereas Chapter 14 saw Abraham express complete dependence and utter trust in God before the king of Sodom, Abraham did not always display such a profound faith in God. Elapsed time after God's call and promise caused Abraham to remind God that he still had no descendants. God mercifully assured Abraham and made a covenant with him, promising a son and land. Further elapsed time again brought doubt, and Abraham conceded to Sarah's plan to make an heir through Hagar, causing much strife in the household. Thirteen more years elapsed, and God promised Abraham that Isaac would be born. Abraham's doubt caused him to laugh at the thought. Yet, he obeyed God and continued to develop his relationship with God.

God's grace and mercy were evident in the way that He dealt with Abraham and Lot in these chapters. Yet, His holiness and justice were evident in the events of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham's intercession called upon God's grace to the righteous, and in doing so, he called upon God's just character. Unfortunately, not even ten righteous people could be found, and God destroyed those cities. This event notes God's serious judgments upon evil, as well as His ability and right to judge.

**Structure:** Genesis is organized into ten sections (Gen. 2:4-4:26; 5:1-6:8; 6:9-9:29; 10:1-11:9; 11:10-26; 11:27-25:11; 25:12-18; 25:19-35:29; 36:1-37:1; 37:2-50:26), and each section opens with the phrase "these are the generations of" and serves as the beginning of a genealogy. The first person mentioned in the genealogy ("these are the generations of Adam") describes the subject of the following narrative section. Genesis 14-20 focuses on Abraham and his son Isaac.

#### *Where We Are In The Story ~ New Testament (Matthew)*

Matthew is the first of four Gospels that tell about the life of Christ. As one of the twelve disciples (Matt. 9:9-13), Matthew focuses on demonstrating how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament promises concerning the Messiah. Chapter 13 contains Jesus' teachings known as the parabolic discourse. Jesus often taught using object lessons, illustrations, personal experiences, and parables. Immediately following a time when Jesus noted that His family was whoever did the will of His Father, Jesus then proceeded to teach His "family" (the disciples) and the great crowds that followed them truths about the kingdom of God. When questioned why he was using parables, Jesus told them that the parables allowed those who believed Him to know truth while protecting the truth from those who rejected God. Matthew pointed out in 13:14-15 that Jesus' use of parables was also a fulfillment of prophecy concerning the Messiah. Matthew also alludes to Isaiah's prophecy of how the Messiah would make the lame to walk and the blind to see in order to demonstrate how Jesus is the Promised Messiah (Matt. 15:29-31; Isa. 35).

In the midst of performing signs and miracles, Jesus taught with authority, even expounding upon the Old Testament's teaching about divorce and explaining the relationship between sinful actions and a sinful heart. Jesus also showed authority concerning salvation when He clearly taught the way to eternal life and who could live eternally with him. This authority was what incensed the religious leaders of the day and also gave further proof of His Messianic identity.

Matthew included Peter's acknowledgement of Jesus' identity as the Messiah in the midst of authoritative teachings and miracles. Those around Jesus had heard His teachings and witnessed His miracles, and many still did not believe. Jesus pointed out that it wasn't Peter's time with Jesus, being a living witness of all that He taught and did, that led to the confession that Jesus was the Christ. Rather, it was God's revelation to Peter. God had opened Peter's eyes to belief in Jesus as the Messiah. It was not, therefore, simple witness to His life that would cause belief, but the revelation of God. This truth points back to Jesus' use of parables and His statement that not all could understand them although all could hear His words.

Jesus began to foretell His death and resurrection to His disciples in the verses following Peter's confession in 16:13-20. His death as the Messiah was not what the Jewish people had expected in the promised one. Yet, Jesus began to show His followers that being His disciple was not about miracles and signs but about

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following Him unto persecution and death. He wanted His followers to know the cost of following Him.

**Structure:** Matthew includes five collections of Jesus' teaching (Matt. 5-7; 10; 13; 18; 24-25), and each of these sections concludes with a statement saying, "And when Jesus finished these sayings..." Matthew 13 includes the third collection of Jesus' teachings, which consists of seven parables (earthly stories with heavenly meanings) that teach about the kingdom of heaven. The opening parable about the sower and the seed sets the stage for the rest of the parables in the passage, for it highlights four different responses that people have to the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 18 contains the fourth collection of Jesus' teachings and focuses on the theme of relationships with an emphasis on forgiveness and how to deal with conflict.

#### *During Small Group*

**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 gift of children. Pray right now that women across the world would choose life for their precious baby rather than death. Pray that the eyes of abortion doctors would be opened to the value and sanctity of every human life. Pray we would be a church and a country that values life no matter how small, old, or even functional. Pray that those in our church family who have either had an abortion or supported an abortion would run to Christ and find overwhelming forgiveness and mercy that is available in the glorious cross. Ask God to help us as a faith family to demonstrate His love, mercy, and grace to a lost and hurting world.
- **Pray for Our City:** This week we are praying for the ministries in our city that seek to promote and support a biblical pro-life view related to the unborn. Join us as we pray for the ministries of Sav-A-Life Vestavia, Sav-A-Life Shelby, Her Choice, Alabama Physicians for Life, Catholic Family Services, and United for Life Foundation. We are also praying for First Baptist Church of Alabaster and Steve Andrews, Pastor.
- **Pray for Our World:** This week we are praying for long-term missionary, Sharron Schafer, as she serves at Casa de Aleluya, an orphanage in Guatemala. Sharron uses her expertise in sewing to serve the children living there and teaches young ladies the skill of sewing for sustainable income. Sharron is currently in the U.S. and will return to Guatemala at the end of January. For more information about Sharron, visit her blog at [sharronsmeditations.blogspot.com](http://sharronsmeditations.blogspot.com). This week we are praying also for our short-term teams serving in the Middle East and India and for the Northern Pashtun of Afghanistan, a predominantly Islamic people group. For more information and ways to pray visit [brookhills.org/thisweek](http://brookhills.org/thisweek).

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### **Main Truth**

#### Message Outline

##### **The Simple Reality...**

- Christ cherishes children.

##### **The Devastating Realization...**

- Our culture (and our country) murders children.

##### **God and a Culture of Death... (Ps. 139:13-16)**

- Abortion is an affront to God's sovereign authority as Creator (Is. 40:28).
  - He is the Giver of life (Job 12:9-10; 33:4).
  - He is the Taker of life (Deut. 32:39; Job 1:21).
- Abortion is an assault on God's glorious work in creation (Ps. 104:24).
  - The way God creates people compels praise (Ps. 104:27-34).
    - The womb contains a person formed in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28).
      - If the unborn is not human, no justification for abortion is necessary.
      - If the unborn is human, no justification for abortion is adequate.
    - Though the unborn is visibly hidden from man, he/she is never hidden from God (Job 10:8-13).
  - All of God's works are wonderful.
    - Even (or especially) in the case of disability (John 9:1-3).
    - Even (or especially) in the midst of difficulty (Gen. 50:20; Rom. 8:28).
- Abortion is an attack on God's intimate relationship with the unborn.
  - He fashions them (Job 31:15) and values them (Exodus 21:22-25).
  - He knows them (Jeremiah 1:5) and relates to them (Psalm 22:9-10).
  - He calls them (Galatians 1:15), names them (Isaiah 49:1), and anoints them (Luke 1:15, 44).

##### **The Gospel in a Culture of Death... (Titus 3:3-7)**

- God is the Judge of sinners (Gen. 18:25; Ps. 139:17-24; Rom. 2:6-8).
  - Mothers who have aborted babies, fathers who have encouraged abortion, grandparents who have supported abortion, and friends who have recommended abortion.
  - Doctors who have performed abortion.
  - Leaders who have permitted abortion (Rom. 13:1-4).
    - Government is given by God for the good of people.
    - Government is given by God for the legislation of morality.
  - Christians who have done nothing about abortion.
- God is the Savior of sinners.
  - He was born to save us from ourselves.
  - He died so that we might have life.
    - He forgives entirely (Ps. 103:11-12; Is. 43:25; 1 Jn. 1:9) and heals deeply (Lk. 7:47-50).
    - He restores completely (Rom. 8:1) and redeems fully (Rom. 8:28).

##### **Our Lives in a Culture of Death... (Eph. 5:7-11; Jms. 1:22-25)**

- Look around...
  - Learn the facts about abortion.

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- See the pictures of abortion.
- Listen to the victims of abortion.
- Step forward...
  - Share your burdens from the past with brothers and/or sisters.
  - Share your struggles in the present with brothers and/or sisters.
- Speak up...
  - Before God.
  - Before the government.
- Reach out...
  - Through giving to pro-life causes and ministries.
  - Through serving unwed and under-age mothers.
  - Through volunteering at pregnancy centers.
  - Through supporting abortion alternatives.
  - Through adopting unwanted children.

### *Message Summary*

At a time when the Twelve saw children as a nuisance to the ministry and life of Christ, Jesus rebuked their attitude and welcomed the children to Him, demonstrating His love and value for each little child. The way that Jesus acted toward these children was a reflection of their value to God. As the sole authority over life and death, God is the Creator who knits each person together in His image as they are continually growing in the womb. God knows each person as He is forming them; He treasures them as one who displays His handiwork and His image.

Because each person, whether born or unborn, bears this image of God and reflects the wonderful works of God, abortion is an affront to Him. The Bible is clear that God creates and values all human life; from the very beginning He forms, knows, and values each person. Abortion attacks the intrinsic value of humanity as it seeks to end the life of innocent human beings. Therefore, Christians cannot take a neutral stand on the issue of abortion. They are called to stand up against evil and to promote healing among those who have wrongly participated in or supported abortion in the past. God is the Judge for those who support or passively support abortion, but He is the Savior for those who seek forgiveness and redemption in Him.

## ***Why It Matters***

### *Digging Deeper*

This message is a topic that can be impersonally debated among friends and enemies alike. While we must unapologetically approach the topic biblically, we must be sensitive to the truth that there are likely people in our small group or in our circle of influence who have had an abortion or supported/encouraged abortions in the past. Repentance may have already happened or may need to happen, but this topic requires compassion. It is not impersonal because, as we will discuss, the entire discussion surrounds the truth that unborn children are persons who are created and valued by God, as are their mothers and fathers.

When leading your small group to discuss abortion, try to avoid political accusations or distracting debates. Rather, focus on the biblical truths of God's creation of human beings, His care for them from their very beginning, and the value of unborn babies that He displays in His Word. Help your small group to navigate these waters, being mindful that one's view of abortion can also be part of discipleship. We must know God's Word and believe it before we can allow Him to use it to transform our thoughts and attitudes toward

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something that is such an explosive subject in our culture. Nevertheless, God has spoken about this subject with clarity in His Word.

Within the church, this argument from the Bible is more easily stated. For those outside of the church, the approach can seem more daunting. Despite a difference in worldview, though, we are still fueled by the truth that the baby is a full person. Even secular proponents of abortion admit that the practice takes the life of another human. The argument that an embryo is a nothing but a bunch of cells is increasingly debunked in favor of an argument for the “rights” of a mother over the “rights” of the baby inside her. Help your small group to see that this argument readily admits that abortion is killing a person in favor of the convenience or ease of another. Inherently, then, taken to its full argument, killing anybody for the convenience or ease of another is acceptable. Help your small group understand that if the unborn is human, no justification is adequate to make this practice acceptable.

Explore the idea that speaking out against abortion must be accompanied by reaching out. How can we be vocal about the problem as well as being active about a solution? For example, how can we advocate for adoption as an option for mothers in an unexpected pregnancy but decline to assist with adoption in some manner? How can we condemn abortion because of financial hardship and yet not be a part of ministering to those in poverty?

If anyone in your group has had an abortion, Brook Hills regularly offers *Surrendering the Secret*, a nine-week study that utilizes the *Surrendering the Secret* curriculum. There will be another group starting this spring, and if anyone in your group would like more information about this upcoming group or would like to have a private conversation with another woman whose story includes abortion, encourage them to contact [sts@brookhills.org](mailto:sts@brookhills.org). If they would like to preview what they can expect when coming to a *Surrendering the Secret* group, share the following video link with them, for it portrays a typical group meeting as well what to expect at the first meeting ([knocktv.com/surrenderthesecret/preview/](http://knocktv.com/surrenderthesecret/preview/)).

The previous two Small Group Guides also focused on guiding your group through discussions about the personal disciple-making plan that was introduced in the January 5 sermon. If you haven't already, discuss these questions in your group or one-on-one with group members. In what areas do group members need to grow? What steps are they taking to grow? How can fellow brothers and sisters come alongside them to help them grow in their relationship with God?

Prepare your group that at the next meeting there will be discussion about how to study the Bible, and we will be using the REAP acronym (Read, Examine, Apply, Pray) that was explained in the Guide for Personal Worship that was included in the handouts from the January 5 sermon. If anyone in the group is unfamiliar with that resource, encourage them to download it and read through it before next week. The handout can be found at [brookhills.org](http://brookhills.org) under the “2014 Bible Reading Plan” rotating feature. Are the people in the small group studying Scripture on their own? Are they participating in the Bible reading plan? What hindrances are they facing in studying Scripture consistently? Begin asking these questions, and inform group members that these issues will be addressed more thoroughly over the next several weeks of small group.

## ***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 does Jesus' actions towards children in this passage reveal about God's value of children?
- The Ten Commandments contain a specific command to individuals not to commit murder. The Levitical laws go into further detail about protecting innocent human life and condemning child sacrifices (Lev. 20:1-5). Considering these provisions for protection in conjunction with passages that reveal God's

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intimate care in creating and knowing each person before he or she is born (Psalm 139, Jeremiah 1:5), how does God view the value and personhood of each unborn child?

- After conception, a baby has his or her own specific and unique DNA and can be identified as a human scientifically. As believers, how do we allow Scripture to speak into the value of this human being?
- How does our culture, our churches, and our families often demonstrate an attitude toward children that is not biblical? How can we as a church demonstrate that we value children in our lives?
- Many people attempt to justify abortion on the basis of disability or hardship, and in some cases, even gender. What does this argument indicate about our culture's (or our own) valuation system when it comes to life, including the elderly, incapacitated, disabled, and marginalized?
- How does our belief in God's sovereignty and wisdom speak to the beauty that can come from imperfect health, disabilities, and challenges?
- How does abortion for the sake of convenience speak to our culture's prideful idolatry of self while also seeking to eliminate natural consequences of our actions?
- When we value children, including the unborn, biblically how must we view abortion? Why can we not stand morally neutral on this subject anymore than we cannot stand morally neutral on infanticide?
- God is the ultimate Judge, and He will not allow the sacrifice of children to go without effect. How should this influence our effort to stop abortion as well as our compassion toward those who have experienced it?
- How should our knowledge of Jesus as Savior and Healer lead us to offer hope to those who have experienced or supported abortion in the past?
- What are some practical ways that you can become involved in ministering to those who have been a part of the abortion industry and speaking out against abortion? What gifts and spheres of influence do you have that allow you to speak up for God's love of children and His value of life?
- If we speak out against abortion but do nothing to help those who are in crisis, what are we saying about the value of that life as well?