

Small Group Guide THE WISE COUNSEL OF GOD'S GRACE

The Church at Brook Hills

Jim Shaddix

March 9, 2014

Exodus 18:13-27

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

Readings for March 10-16

Exodus 21-27

Luke 24 & John 1-6

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

Background of Exodus: The title “exodus” comes from the Greek word meaning “going out” or “departure” and describes the major event that occurs in the book. Exodus opens where Genesis leaves off – the descendants of Abraham are living in Egypt instead of in the Promised Land. The events in Exodus occur approximately four hundred years after Jacob’s family moved to Egypt, and as prophesied in Genesis 15, Abraham’s descendants became slaves. While Genesis highlights God as Creator, Exodus focuses on God as the Deliverer of His people, for He keeps His promise to free His people and to bring them back to the land of promise.

Structure of Exodus:

- Exodus 1-18 focuses on the deliverance of the people Israel from Egypt and God’s provision for His people.
- Exodus 18-24 explains God’s covenant with Israel.
- Exodus 25-31 provides instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle and explanation for the priestly role.
- Exodus 32-34 describes God’s response to His people’s idolatry.
- Exodus 35-40 highlights the nation’s obedience in building the Tabernacle.

This Week in the Old Testament: Exodus 21-23 continues with the giving of the Law, and it concludes case laws, which are representative types of rulings for things that the people would likely face. Exodus 24 records the first official worship service in the Bible where people gathering for the purpose of hearing from God and honoring Him, so the chapter includes a call to worship (Ex. 24:1-2), a proclamation of the Word (Ex. 24:3-4), a commitment of the people to obey the Word (Ex. 24:3-4), an offering of sacrifices (Ex. 24:4-8), and a communal meal that is eaten in God’s presence (Ex. 24:9-11). Exodus 24 presents the establishment of the “old covenant” or “Mosaic covenant” because it is when God officially sets Israel apart to be His people. It is the natural culmination of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In Exodus 25-31, God gives Moses instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle and for the role of the priests. In Exodus 25:8-9, God tells Moses to make a sanctuary for Him to dwell with the people. While God is everywhere at all times, the Tabernacle provided a way for sinful people to approach a holy God, and the

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sacrifices and the regulations for worship were necessary because of the sinfulness of the people. In the context of salvation history, Genesis 1-2 tells of an unhindered relationship between God and His people, which was altered in Genesis 3. In Exodus, God reveals a plan to reside among His people via the Tabernacle, but there was still separation in that the people could not enter the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could enter once a year, and this continued for 1400+ years until Christ came. Then, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (Jn. 1:14). No longer was it a high priest who entered God's presence once a year, but the presence of God, God in the flesh, could be seen walking down the street (Col. 1:19; Heb. 1:3)! After Christ's resurrection and ascension, the Holy Spirit came, and the New Testament describes *Christ-followers* as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19; Col. 1:27). Not only can believers access the presence of God, *He resides in us!*

The structure of the Tabernacle was a long rectangle that was a little over 1/3 of a football field long and 1/2 the width of a football field. It included an outer court, the Holy Place, and the Holy of Holies (the innermost room). Why is it important to spend so many chapters in the Bible describing the Tabernacle? The details are important because of what the place represents and because of *Who* would reside there. Exodus 25 describes the Ark of the Covenant, which was the only furniture in the Holy of Holies, and this room was separated from the Holy Place by a curtain. It is no mistake that God leads out the instructions for the Tabernacle with the part that symbolized His presence with His people (Ex. 25:22). The mercy seat (the lid of the Ark) was where the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled once a year (the Day of Atonement – see Lev. 16). The mercy seat and the Day of Atonement taught the people about their need to have guilt for sin removed through a sacrifice. The Ark contained the 10 Commandments, Aaron's budding rod, and a pot of manna. So as God looked down on the Ark, He saw the Law (the 10 Commandments), knowing that His people could not keep the law perfectly, but God saw the Law through the splattered blood of the sacrifice. All of this points to how God can look upon us as sinners and have a relationship with us – through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Rom. 3:23-24; Heb. 10:19-20).

The Holy Place (not to be confused with the Holy of Holies) contained three pieces of furniture: the Table of the Bread for Presence, the Lampstand, and the Altar of Incense (Ex. 25:23-40). Only the priests could enter this room, and they had to purify themselves before they could enter to burn the incense, to add oil to the lampstand or to replace the bread on the table. The Table for the Bread of Presence was changed on the Sabbath with incense being poured over it. This reminded the nation of God's provision for His people as well as how His people should provide constant thanksgiving to Him, and it also represented the people's communion with God. The Lampstand had a practical purpose of lighting the room, but it also illuminated the way to God's presence.

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

Background of John: John 20:31 gives the thesis of this Gospel: "but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." John stands distinct from Matthew, Mark, and Luke in his emphasis on eternal life and how it refers to both duration but also the quality of life that God designed us to have in Him. From John 1, this book establishes that Jesus *is* God in the flesh. He is fully God and fully human at the same time. Written by John who was one of Jesus' disciples, this Gospel does not follow Jesus' life chronologically. Instead, John 1-12 looks at the eight "I AM" statements of Jesus and at seven of His miracles in order to demonstrate by words and actions that Jesus is God, and it spends the remaining nine chapters on the night of Last Supper through Jesus' ascension.

This Week in the New Testament: The last chapter in Luke's Gospel features the resurrection of Jesus and some of His post-resurrection appearances to His followers. This fits with Luke's stated intention in writing the book – for his friend Theophilus (and for us) to have certainty regarding the identity of Jesus. In Jesus' interaction with His followers after His resurrection, Luke emphasizes how Jesus fulfilled the Scriptures and how the writings of Moses and the Prophets all pointed to Him, and He explains that His sacrifice and the repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed to all nations (Lk. 24:25-27, 44-49). Luke concludes

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this Gospel by reminding Christ-followers of their purpose in light of what Christ accomplished and by telling them of the Holy Spirit who would empower them (Lk. 24:49).

John 1 opens with a description of Jesus as both God *and* the Son of God. He is not a Son in the same way that male human beings are, for He has always existed and was never made (Jn. 1:1-3). John 1 also explains why He came to earth and how John the Baptist was sent to point people to Christ (Jn. 1:6-16). John the Baptist clearly identifies Jesus as the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29) and as the One who existed before him (Jn. 1:30), for he understood that Jesus is both Messiah and God. In John 3, John the Baptist provides further clarification that Jesus came from heaven and is above all and that eternal life only comes from believing in Him (Jn. 3:31-36). In contrast, the religious leaders expected the Messiah to be either a great prophet like Moses, a great king like David, or some combination of the two. Their expectations about the Messiah did not make room for what God intended.

In John 1:35-2:12, Jesus calls four of His disciples (Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael) and performs His miracle – turning the water into wine at a wedding. This sign revealed His glory and resulted in the disciples trusting in Him (Jn. 2:11), for His actions confirmed His words. John 2's record of Jesus cleansing the Temple is not a different event from what the other Gospels say happened during Passover Week; John just organizes this Gospel differently than the other Gospels. John 2:23-25 clarifies that Jesus performed many signs during His last week, and this is when Nicodemus approached him because he knew that Jesus' signs indicated that God was with Him (Jn. 3:2).

John 4-6 contains four more signs of Jesus: the healing of the official's son (Jn. 4:46-54), the healing of the invalid at Bethesda (Jn. 5:1-17), the feeding of the 5000 (Jn. 6:1-15), and Jesus walking on water (Jn. 6:16-21). Based on Jesus' supernatural knowledge of the Samaritan woman's life, she perceived that Jesus is a prophet, learned that He is the Messiah, and brought many to Jesus (Jn. 4:39-42). While the Jesus rebukes the official and the crowd for their lack of faith apart from His signs, He chooses to heal the official's son, which results in the man and his household trusting in Jesus (Jn. 4:46-54). Because of His miracle in feeding the 5000, the people determine that Jesus is a prophet (Jn. 6:14), and Jesus follows this miracle with the bread and the fish by revealing that *He* is the Bread of Life, the One who gives life to the world (Jn. 6:22-59).

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)

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- *Pray for Our Lives: Praise God for His grace lavished upon us in so many ways. Thank Him specifically for the redemption made possible through the gracious sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Ask God for His continued grace in our lives as we seek to be transformed more and more into His image. Ask the Spirit to reveal to us the great grace of God found in the pages of His Word and to guide us into greater understanding of His grace. Ask God to make us ever more gracious toward those around us. Pray our treasuring of grace will not be at the expense of obedience but will be to the glory of God.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for outreach to internationals in our city. Over the last decade, Birmingham's international population has become the second-fastest growing in the U.S. With over 40,000 foreign-born individuals in Jefferson and Shelby county, we have a great opportunity to reach the nations with the gospel every day. We are also praying for Renovate Church and Andy Adkison, Pastor.*
- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for our Brook Hills Church Planting Team to Central Asia. Ryan and Bethany serve with their two boys in Central Asia engaging unreached people groups with the desire to see the church established among them. Together with Matt, a Brook Hills Mid-termer, their team is currently working and living in Central Asia actively learning language and sharing the gospel with those who have never heard of Christ. Join us this week as we pray for our Central Asia Church Planting Team. This week we are also praying for the Baloch people group. For more information and ways to pray visit brookhills.org/weeklyresources.*

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

"The Wise Counsel of God's Grace" Exodus 18:13-27

Common Grace

The grace God makes available to all people, without distinction between one person and another, believers or unbelievers

God gives grace to...

- Share the work. (18,22)
 - Enlist the leaders. (21)
 - Organize the people. (21)
- 
- Leaders that last (23)
 - People at peace (23)

Special Grace

The grace God makes available to redeem, sanctify and glorify His people

God gives grace through...

- The spoken Word.
(Ex. 18:19-20; cf. 2 Tim. 4:1-5)
- The written Word.
(Ex. 24:3-4,12; cf. Dt. 31:9; Josh. 24:26; Ps. 19:7-9; 119; 2 Tim. 3:14-17)

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- The learned Word.
(Dt. 6:6-9; cf. Dt. 11:18; 30:14; Ps. 37:31; 40:8; 119:11; 2 Tim. 2:14-15)
- The incarnate Word.
(Jn 1:1-18; cf. Heb. 1:1-2)
- The indwelling Word.
(Rom. 8:1-11; cf. Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:1-13)

Applied Grace

1. Confess Jesus as Savior & Lord.
2. Nurture your relationship with Him.
3. Consume the Bible regularly.
4. Invest in a healthy small group.

Message Summary

The account of Moses' interaction with his father-in-law, Jethro, in Exodus 18 provides a practical description of God's common grace to all people and how such grace ultimately points us to God's redemption of His people through His special grace. God's common grace is available to all people and is seen in ways such as general morality, beauty and function of creation, and even common sense in how we relate with one another. Jethro shared some wise insight with Moses through God's common grace, which allowed Moses to organize the Israelites in a way that would prevent Moses and the people from great frustration and exhaustion. Primarily, though, incorporating common grace into their lives enabled Moses to continue to make the Word of God a priority. It is the Word of God that is special grace that leads to redemption through salvation. Therefore, its primacy in our lives is imperative.

God's special revelation of His Word began with the spoken word—from Himself and His chosen prophets—and built upon the foundation that God's revelation is His Word. Building upon the spoken Word, God revealed Himself through the written Word, learning the Word, the incarnate Word Jesus, and the indwelling Word. Although God's special revelation in His Word is made available to all people, much like His common grace, only those who repent of their sins and place their faith in Christ can experience the Word dwelling inside them.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

As the leader, there are at least three directions the small group can take in light of the current Bible reading plan. Knowing the people in the group, prayerfully consider what would be the best route to help those in your group grow. The group's meetings could also vary with each week, so if one week's sermon prompts a lot of thought and discussion, option one could be what the group does that week while the next week could be different. As the leader, feel the freedom to take all or just some of the content in this guide and do what is best for your group.

- *Using the discussion questions below, the small group time can focus on discussing the sermon and how to apply it.*

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- The group can discuss the Bible readings from the past week. If choosing this route, ensure that the group does not simply discuss information but also focuses on how to apply what they have learned from the Bible readings. The information in the "Where We Are in the Story" section can assist the leader in knowing the background and context for the readings.
- Using the REAP (read, examine, apply, pray) outline for studying Scripture, the group can take one or both passages from that day's readings and discuss them. So if the group meets on Monday, then you could pick one or both of the passages for Monday. This also helps those who are new to studying the Bible or who struggle with reading it learn how to do so. To assist the group with REAP questions, download the Guide to Personal Worship from brookhills.org.

When we look at the world, we see "good" people all around us. We see crops grow and produce from adequate sunshine and rain. We see everyday heroes. We see brilliant and kind atheists making discoveries about science and space that Galileo could have only dreamed of. We visit unbelieving doctors who save lives with their skill. Although there are definitely times when we question God's wisdom in allowing evil to happen, we also see reflections of His beauty and character in even the most unlikely places and people. That is God's common grace to all people. It is from these observations that many people develop the belief that all people are basically "good," even if it's way deep down. It is easy to want to believe that all people are intrinsically "good." Why do we want to believe this? How does it affect the way that we view the gospel? Why does it leave us so dangerously close to a place of complacency in sharing the gospel with others?

The reality of common grace is that, although it allows us to see and even live out reflections of God, that grace is not enough to bring salvation. Common grace allows us to live in a world in which God is in control and He offers this grace to all people, even those who have never heard of His special grace. But common grace does not save. It still leaves sinful people in a state of lostness. **Discuss the truth with your small group that Scripture is clear that all people were made in the image of God and can, therefore, reflect His morality in their lives but that all people are sinful and in need of Christ.**

Jethro's reasoning behind instructing Moses to delegate and organize the Israelites was to prevent burnout and frustration. Yet, the purpose was not to simply avoid personal burnout and exhaustion. It was to protect the teaching and learning of God's Word. **Read Acts 6:1-7. Compare the account of Moses and the selection of the first deacons in Acts.** If we do not view these passages with humility, a first glance, we may become defensive in the fact that no one person is greater than another in the church. Although a true sentiment, what we must see is that we all have different callings and strengths according to the spiritual gifts that God has given us. In light of that truth, what do these accounts indicate about the importance of studying and teaching God's Word among God's people? What do they indicate about our need to utilize our gifts in God's family?

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?).

- Why did Jethro believe that Moses' unending hours and days of counsel for the Israelites were "not good"? Practically speaking, why was Jethro's advice helpful?
- In what ways does the practicality of Jethro's advice to Moses apply to ministry and churches today? Why are we so resistant to making efforts to be part of a small group? How is this actually resistance to God's grace?
- Define grace. Explain the differences between common grace and special grace.

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- God's common grace is available to all people, even through avenues such as common sense in the way we help others to skillfully organize people. How does this type of grace reflect the character of God in our everyday lives?
- How do we use and see God's common grace every day?
- The orderliness of God is reflected in Moses' organization of the Israelites, and it was also incredibly practical. But this organization also preserved God's communication with His people as it freed up Moses to be the mouthpiece of God to His people. What does this fact tell us about the importance of God's Word in the lives of His people?
- What does this account of Moses indicate about the need for all of God's people to be faithful to use their giftedness among His people?
- How can we let God's common grace drive us to know Him more deeply through His special grace in His Word?
- God has chosen to reveal Himself to use through His Word. Describe how that is different from other beliefs or religions.
- Considering that we have the entire canon of Scripture and also have the Word dwelling inside us (if we are believers), why are we prone to take God's special grace for granted? How would we be similar to the religious leaders of Jesus' day who took the incarnate Word for granted?
- Special grace affects believers in a way that common grace never can. How can our lives boldly proclaim God's special grace in our conversations and lives with others?
- Jesus stated that He did not come to abolish the Law, and the same is true for God's revelation. With the indwelling Word, the written and learned words are not negated. How do they work together to nurture our relationship with God?
- How is a small group a place where God's common grace and special grace intersect?
- What can we do to make our small group a place of learning? Do we need to begin more small groups so that ministry is better achieved? How can we make the Word a primary part of our small group?
- Does my family need to find a small group? Why are we waiting? What step can we take today or this week to get connected?