

Small Group Guide GRACE UNPLUGGED

The Church at Brook Hills

Jim Shaddix

March 16, 2014

Exodus 24:1-18; John 1:1-18

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 17-March 23, 2014

Exodus 28-34

John 7-13

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

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: In Exodus 28-29, God gives Moses instructions specifically about the priests’ clothing and dedication. Because the priests were involved in the work of mediation between a sinful people and a holy God, God determined that Aaron and his descendants should have garments appropriate and symbolic of their work. Therefore, their breast piece had twelve jewels – one for each tribe of Israel, and the two onyx stones on the shoulder of their ephod would each be engraved with six of the tribes. They represented the whole nation of Israel when they entered the Tabernacle. As the priests performed sacrifices for the nation, they also needed to purify and to make sacrifices for themselves before they carried out their duties in the sanctuary. Exodus 29 details the sacrifices that were to take place in a ceremony as Aaron and his sons were set aside for the Lord’s work in the Tabernacle.

The priests of Israel had four specific roles: teach the people about God and His Word, make intercession for the people, facilitate the offering of sacrifices, and take care of the holy things in the Tabernacle. In Exodus 19:5-6, God communicates that the entire nation of Israel was to be a “kingdom of priests,” for they were to do

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for the world what the priests did for the people of Israel. Along those lines, 1 Peter 2:9 terms Christ-followers as a “royal priesthood,” and as a royal priesthood, we are to carry out the role of priests for the world. For us, this includes: teaching people about God and His Word, making intercession for others, and introducing people to the work of Christ so they can turn from their sin and trust in Him as Savior and Lord.

Exodus 30:1-10 describes the Altar of Incense, which was the third piece of furniture in the Holy Place along with the Lampstand and the Table of the Bread of Presence. This altar was placed in front of the veil to the Holy of Holies, but it was *not* an altar where animal sacrifices were made. Instead, the priests were to burn incense on this altar twice a day (at morning and twilight). One of the priestly roles included making intercession for the people, and burning incense on this altar was one of the ways this was accomplished. The priest would take coals from the bronze altar in the courtyard (where animal sacrifices were made) and place it on the Altar of Incense, so the prayers would be made on the basis of the sacrifices. Then, the priest would sprinkle incense on the coals, so the prayers would have a pleasing aroma and be pleasing to God. Next, the priest would seize the horns on the altar and pray for the people. Here, in front of the throne (the Ark of the Covenant) – but separated by the veil – was the place of intercession. God designed the sanctuary to be a place where prayer would take place. Hebrews 7:24-25 informs us that Christ is our perfect and ultimate High Priest who makes intercession for us before the Father. Also, the Altar of Incense makes appearances in Revelation 5:8 and 8:3-4 as it depicts the prayers of the saints before the throne of God.

Although the people had agreed to keep the words of the Lord (Ex. 24:3-7), the Israelites quickly turned from faith to doubt and from obedience to rebellion (Ex. 32). While Moses is still on Mt. Sinai, God informs him of what has occurred in the camp and expresses righteous anger about their sin, making plans to destroy the people and to start over through Moses. Moses intercedes for the people, but when he sees their sin for himself, he breaks the two stone tablets on which God had recorded the law, which symbolized how Israel had broken their covenant with God. Yet despite their sin, he continues to intercede for them, for Moses understood that it is Israel’s relationship with God that made them distinct from any other nation. In his communication to God, Moses asks for a sign of God’s presence, and Exodus 34 fulfills this request. Exodus 33:19 and 34:6-7 emphasizes the goodness of God as One who does not forsake His people, even when they are faithless.

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

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: John 7 records the people’s discussion during the Feast of Booths about Jesus’ identity. Some considered Him to be a prophet while others said that He was the Messiah (Jn. 7:40-41), although Jesus Himself plainly told them that He was “from God” (Jn. 7:28-29). After this debate, Jesus explicitly states “I am,” which harks back to the name “Yahweh” (Jn. 8:24, 28, 58). Unless they trusted in Jesus, they would die in their sin (Jn. 8:24), but the Jews in this passage did not believe. Instead, they proclaimed that Jesus blasphemed the name of God, and they sought to stone Him (Jn. 8:59). In contrast the crowd in John 8, the blind man in John 9 moves from speaking of Christ as “the man called Jesus” (Jn. 9:11) to considering Him to be a prophet (Jn. 9:17) to stating that He was from God (Jn. 9:33) to worshiping Jesus as the Son of Man and as Lord (Jn. 9:35-38).

Although Jesus continued to teach about His identity in John 10, the people did not understand His words and were divided (Jn. 10:6, 19-21). They asked Jesus point-blank if He is the Messiah, but when He claimed to be

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the Son of God and to give eternal life, they did not believe Him, even though He explains that His miracles were meant to give evidence of His identity (Jn. 10:32). But once again, the people attempted to stone Him and arrest Him on the charge of blasphemy (Jn. 10:22-42).

In both John 9:3-4 and John 11:4, Jesus explains that both of the man's blindness and Lazarus' illness were meant to glorify the Son of God. By raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus demonstrates His authority to give unending life (see Jn. 11:25-26). As with the previous chapters in John, the people were split in their estimation of Jesus after this miracle (Jn. 11:45-57; 12:9-11). The escalation of the people's response to Jesus reaches a point where the situation becomes volatile for the religious leaders, and they begin to make plans about His death (Jn. 11:53). John 12:36-43 explains how the unbelief of the people fulfilled prophecies made by Isaiah.

The events of John 12-13 takes place during Passion Week. In John 12, the crowd accompanying Him during the Triumphal Entry had seen Him raise Lazarus from the dead, and they spread the word about Jesus' power (Jn. 12:17-18). The crowd and even some Greeks approached Jesus, and in response, Jesus prophesied about His impending death and resurrection (Jn. 12:20-36). John 13 provides the only account of Jesus washing the disciples' feet at the Last Supper. Although Lord of the universe, He chooses to serve them, and He expresses that they are to follow His example in serving others because "a servant is not greater than his master" (Jn. 13:16). After announcing that one of the Twelve would betray Him and instructing Judas to "do quickly" what he was going to do (Jn. 13:27), Jesus gives His disciples the command to love one another (Jn. 13:34-35). Although not a new command for anyone of Jewish origins, Jesus qualifies the command by stating that His followers are to love others as He has loved them. The standard for love is the love of Christ, which emphasizes the humility, service, and self-sacrificial nature of love, and this love should be a distinctive of Christ-followers.

John 8 begins with a note that "the earliest manuscripts do not include John 7:53-8:11" because many respected scholars think that these verses were added centuries after John wrote this Gospel. Nothing in this passage threatens doctrine regarding the identity of Christ. Whether or not this was an actual event in Jesus' life that was circulated and later added to John's Gospel, the point of the story is true; however, we must be careful not to give this story the authority of Scripture.

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.*

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Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- *Pray for Our Lives: Praise God for His unlimited grace made available through the gift of His Son, Jesus Christ. Pray for those you know who have not experienced God's grace through salvation from their sins. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict them regarding their sin and for God to call them into relationship with Him. Thank God for making us His children through His grace. Ask Him to enable and empower us to display His grace and goodness to the world around us. Pray we will avoid distortions of His grace that leads to abuse of His kindness and mercy but would instead strive to live in reverence and obedience for His glory.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for 4,000+ children who live in public housing and foster care homes in Birmingham who will be touched by churches through the Ready Day One initiative coordinated by Mission Alabama. Ready Day One is an effort to bring urban and suburban churches together to address physical and spiritual poverty as children in need start school. Resources have to be raised in the spring to pay for the summer event. We are also praying for Mt. Mariah Baptist Church and Darryl Lee, Pastor.*
- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for Brook Hills Mid-Termer Matt B. serving on our Central Asia Church Planting Team. Matt B. is currently helping with the development of a sustainable business plan for our Church Planters as well as living, working, and trying to engage unreached peoples with the gospel in Central Asia. Join us this week as we pray for Matt B. and our Central Asia Church Planting Team. This week we are also praying for the Rajput peoples of Pakistan. For more information and ways to pray, visit brookhills.org/weeklyresources.*

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

Grace Unplugged Exodus 24:1-18; John 1:1-18

The limited grace of God in the Mosaic law...

- The access to God was for the elite. (Exodus 24:1-2)
- The salvation of God was a religious symbol. (Exodus 24:3-8)
- The view of God was partial. (Exodus 24:9-11)
- The Word of God was about rules. (Exodus 24:12-14)
- The glory of God shows His greatness. (Exodus 24:15-18)

The unlimited grace of God in Jesus Christ...

- The access to God is for everyone. (John 1:14)
- The salvation of God is a righteous sacrifice. (John 1:14; cf. John 1:29; 6:51-56; Romans 8:3; Hebrews 10:19-20)

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- The view of God is personal. (John 1:14,18)
- The Word of God is about relationship. (John 1:15-17)
- The glory of God shows His goodness. (John 1:14,17-18)

The available grace of God for you...

¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God.

John 1:11–12

Message Summary

The account in Exodus 24 parallels with the beginning of John 1 in regard to the grace of God toward His people. The grace from God revealed in the Mosaic Law was limited in that only the elite, such as Moses, could access His presence and bring it back down to the people. God gave a picture of salvation through pillars, animals, and blood, but any view of God by the people was partial since it went no higher than His feet. Israel's teacher was God Himself who gave the people personal rules on tablets, namely the Ten Commandments, to follow like a king would give his people.

In contrast, there is a complete and limitless grace in the New Testament through the New Covenant of Jesus Christ that can be seen in the beginning of John 1. The Word came and "dwelt among us." Whereas Moses had to go up the mountain to access God, Christ came down to where all men and women live. In Jesus Christ, the Word became flesh and was a righteous sacrifice for all. In Jesus Christ, the view of God is personal instead of partial. God the Father sacrificed His one and only beloved Son, and we can now see His glory in Jesus and have access to a personal relationship with Him. In Jesus Christ, we see the fullness of grace in truth that is not only God's greatness but His goodness as well. In Jesus Christ, the grace of God is available to all who believe, receive Him, and become children of God.

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.*
- *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*

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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.

Write out on a white board and/or read aloud these two verses below for your small group to reflect on:

¹¹He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.

¹²But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God.

John 1:11–12

What an amazing truth of God’s grace to rejoice in that all those who receive Jesus Christ and believe in His name now can be called children of God. We do not deserve this, and we cannot earn it. It is only through Christ alone that we can have full access to a personal relationship with God. It grows out of the goodness of God. Those who receive this kind of “grace unplugged” from God are the ones who get adopted into the His family.

Pastor Jim extended the invitation during the service to those who are separated from God to acknowledge the sin in their heart, to cry out to Him for salvation, and to surrender their lives to Him. He also invited them to take the next step as a new believer and to tell someone and to get connected. This is a wonderful opportunity as a Small Group Leader to inquire of your group as to where they are in those verses in John 1:11-12. Have they fully surrendered their lives to Christ? Are they struggling as a new believer? Do they need someone to walk with them one step at a time through the decision they have made to follow Christ. Are they a mature believer who needs to start walking with someone else in a personal discipleship relationship?

Talk about these verses with your group to see where they are. Then if time allows, discuss where others who are in your sphere of influence are at and how you can share with them about the amazing grace and truth that is found in Jesus Christ.

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 is the greatest gift you have ever received? Why was it so great? Did you receive it through a relationship? Is it important to have a relationship with the giver of the gift? Why or why not?
- Read **John 1:14-18**. In verse 14 it says, “And we have seen his glory.” Talk about the difference between the “seen” used in this verse describing Jesus and what Israel “saw” of God in Exodus 24 (read **Ex. 24:1-18** if you need to for clarification).
- John 1:16 uses the phrase “grace upon grace” or, literally, “grace that replaces grace.” How was the Old Testament law evidence of God’s grace? What kind of grace do we as believers have now?
- Read Hebrews 4:16. Discuss the implications of what it means to worship God from far away with rules verses worshipping through a personal relationship where you can approach the throne of grace freely.

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- John 1:14 says that the “Word became flesh.” John refers a real life person. Why? Why did Christ have to be fully human?
- Read John 1:1-5, 9-11. The “Word” is the unlimited grace of God in Jesus Christ. How can knowing that affect the way you read God’s Word and pray?
- John the Baptist said that Jesus is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn. 1:29). Discuss what it means to “take away” the sins of the world verses the “covering” of sins that happened through the sacrifice of animals in the Old Testament.
- What does the truth discussed in these passages and in this sermon teach us about the character of God (read Ex. 34:6 in particular)? How have you seen Him demonstrate these characteristics to you in your own life? How should knowledge of God’s character affect how you live your daily life? Are you faithful in telling people these things about God? Take time to praise God for Who He is.
- Read John 6:51-56. Jesus claimed that His flesh and blood was the only means by which people received eternal life. Why was/is this truth such a hard thing to grasp?
- Read Romans 8:3 and Hebrews 10:19-20. God has done through Jesus what we could not do for ourselves. Why is it important to remember that truth when trying to understand salvation? How would you explain this truth to an unbeliever?
- When we see Jesus, we get the full account of the glory of God. What does it mean to “see” Jesus?
- The view of God is personal and complete in Jesus Christ, the one and only Son of God. This was personal to God, and He makes it personal to us by letting us see God in Jesus. How can we practically make this amazing truth personal in our lives? How should we live in light of this truth?
- Think on what it means for someone to die for you. Are we compelled to make the sacrifice of God known to others through the fullness of God’s grace and truth? Why or why not?
- In Jesus Christ, we get the unlimited fullness of God’s goodness and grace. This grace is available to everyone. You cannot earn it or buy it. You can only receive it. Why is it so hard to simply receive and surrender versus being able to earn or buy?
- Who do you know who is still living in the reality of John 1:11 and are not ready to surrender their lives to Christ? How can you share the love of Christ with this person this week?
- John 1:11-12 teaches that those who believe in Christ can become children of God. What are the benefits of being adopted by God? Why is His offer such a magnanimous blessing? If we are God’s child, how should we live?
- What are some practical ways we can embrace the grace of God as a disciple and walk with others as new disciples of Christ? Who are you discipling? If you are not discipling anyone, why? What are you waiting for? What is hindering you from obedience in this area?