

Small Group Guide

THE MOST ASTOUNDING CLAIM IN ALL OF HISTORY

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

April 20, 2014

John 14:6

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 April 21-27
Leviticus 25-Numbers 4 and Psalm 32-38

Where We Are In The Story (Leviticus)

Background of Leviticus: Everything in Leviticus points to the holiness of God. His perfection and man's sinfulness stands as the reason for all of the sacrifices, laws, and regulations included in this book, for Leviticus explains how a covenant between a righteous God and a sinful people practically plays out in everyday life in the era before Christ's resurrection. Written by Moses as Israel wandered in the wilderness, it contains divine speeches that Moses delivered to the people of Israel about how to worship God and how they should live. Modern readers of Leviticus may tire of reading the many laws and regulations, but for Israelites in the Old Testament era, Leviticus provided relevant information for how they were to go about their day-to-day lives.

Structure of Leviticus:

- Leviticus 1-7 explains the rituals of the different sacrifices.
- Leviticus 8-10 gives instructions for the priests of Israel.
- Leviticus 11-15 instructs the people on cleansing and purification.
- Leviticus 16 details the sacrifice and instructions for the Day of Atonement.
- Leviticus 17-27 provides directions regarding the festivals, the holy days, and how the people should live.

This Week in Leviticus: In addition to the weekly Sabbath, Leviticus 25 instructs the people of Israel to uphold a Sabbath year (every seventh year) and a Year of Jubilee (every fiftieth year). During this time, they were not supposed to work the land, and during the Year of Jubilee, all property was returned to its original owner. These celebrations reminded the people of God's provision, pointing back to God's design for Eden and pointing ahead to what we will experience in eternity, and the Year of Jubilee brought a new beginning to those in debt and to those who had been enslaved. God's instructions about this Year emphasized the temporariness of finances and business, created a system of social justice, and curbed the formulation of an oppressive wealthy class. However, there is little evidence within Scripture that the people upheld Leviticus 25 except in the time of King Hezekiah (2 King. 19:29), for this is one of the reasons why the Israelites were later exiled to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:21). God had instructed them to stake their lives on His promises and to live by faith, but they disobeyed.

The blessings for obedience and the punishment for disobedience in Leviticus 26 were strictly for the Israelites in the Promised Land. These same blessings do not necessarily apply to believers today as some

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prosperity gospel preachers would claim, for these were given to a specific group of people under the Mosaic Covenant while believers today are under the new covenant. While God does bless the obedience of His people, His blessings are not always material or physical, and our motivation for obedience should not be what we physically get out of it.

Leviticus 27 teaches the people about making vows or promises to God that are contingent upon certain things happening in their lives. For example, psalms such as Psalm 22 vow to praise God in the sanctuary after He answers the person's plea. But what happens when a person fails to keep their vow? Leviticus 27 provides instruction on how to redeem a vow that was not upheld for whatever reason, and it both warns people against rashly making promises they cannot keep and emphasizes how seriously God takes people keeping their word. Because God is faithful in following through with what He says, He has that same expectation for His people.

Numbers

Background of Numbers: Within two years of leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrive on the fringes of the Promised Land and enthusiastically send in twelve spies to scout the land, but instead of trusting in God's promises to give them the land, the people fearfully rebelled and made plans to return to Egypt (Num. 14:1-4). Written by Moses, this book contains the record of what happened to the Israelites during the forty years of wilderness wanderings that occurred because of their disobedience and doubt. The English title of Numbers refers to the prominent census accounts in the book that reflect the fulfillment of God's promise that none of the people who had experienced God's deliverance from Egypt would enter into the Promised Land, except for Caleb and Joshua (Num. 14:20-35).

Structure of Numbers:

- Numbers 1:1-10:10 occurs while Israel is still at Mt. Sinai, and it picks up where Exodus leaves off.
- Numbers 10:11-12:16 describes the Israelites' journey from Mt. Sinai to the outskirts of the Promised Land.
- Numbers 13:1-20:13 contains significant accounts of disobedience by the nation, a Sabbath-breaker, Korah, and Moses, and it includes God's response and instruction in light of those events.
- Numbers 20:14-22:1 tell of Israel's military victories against several hostile nations and emphasizes God's preservation of His people.
- Numbers 22:2-36:13 concludes the book with a census of the people, a reiteration of the laws and feasts given by God, and a transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua as the people prepare to enter the Promised Land after their wilderness wanderings.

This Week in Numbers: In light of trusting that *all* Scripture is given by God and profitable for instruction and training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16-17), how are we to approach passages such as the military census in Numbers 1? First of all, ask why this census is included in Scripture. What purpose does it serve? These questions can shed light on why it is important and what we can learn from it. Before leaving Mt. Sinai, God orders a census of all men twenty years of age and older, for as they ventured towards the Promised Land, they would face conflict that would require a military response. With an army of 603,550 men (Num. 1:46), the people themselves were a concrete reminder of how God was upholding His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give them a multitude of descendants (Gen. 13:16; 15:5; 16:10), and the God who had kept His promises thus far could be trusted to give them the Land. The census in Numbers 1 also provides a contrast to the census in Numbers 26. In Numbers 1, the people were quick to obey God (Num. 1:1-2, 16-17), but the second military census occurs because the people disobeyed God, which resulted in judgment and a shift in the nation's population that necessitated an updated census (Num. 26).

Numbers 2-4 relate to the Levites and to the sanctuary. As the people prepared to take the Promised Land, God organized their encampment with the Tabernacle in the middle in order to protect His sanctuary (see the graphic below). This arrangement enabled efficient travel, and it reminded the people that God is their source and their priority. Exempt from military service, the Levites performed the priestly duties and guarded the sanctuary (Lev. 3), and because God set aside a whole tribe for His service instead of the firstborn of each

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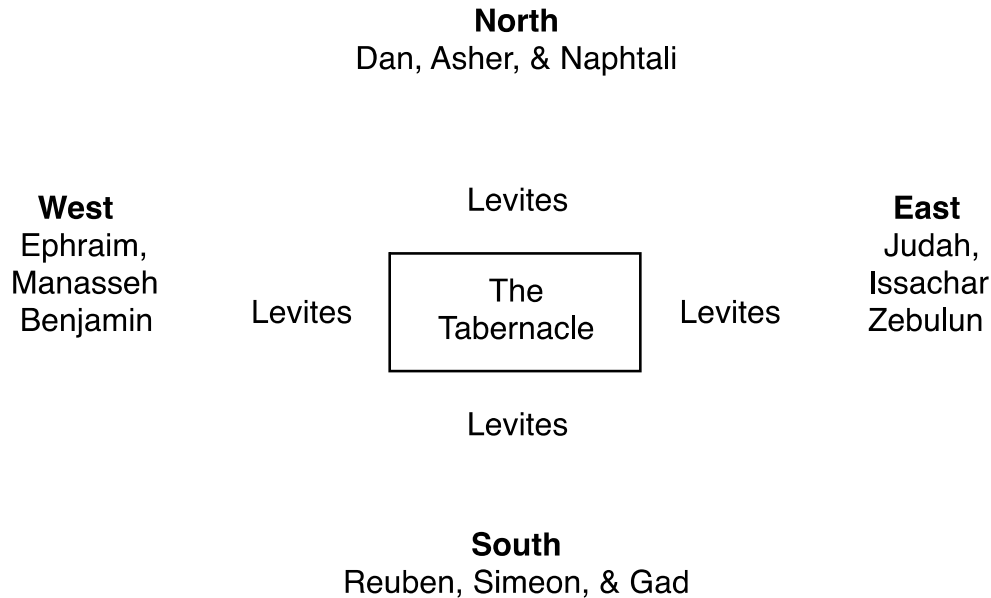
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family, each family would redeem their firstborn (Lev. 3:40-51). Numbers 4 contains instructions for the Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites. These were groups within the tribe of Levi whom God tasked with specific responsibilities related to the emptying, packing, and carrying of the Tabernacle's components as the people traveled.



Psalms

Background & Structure of Psalms: God used many different writers to write Psalms: David, Moses, the sons of Korah, Asaph, etc. The book is arranged in five parts, and this arrangement occurred after the people of Israel returned to the land after the Babylonian exile. A doxology concludes each book or arrangement of psalms (Psalm 41:13 for Book 1, Psalm 72:18-19 for Book 2, Psalm 89:52 for Book 3, Psalm 106:48 for Book 4, and Psalm 150:6 for Book 5), and the entire book of Psalms climactically ends with a grand doxology of several psalms (Ps. 146-150).

- Book 1: Psalms 1-41
- Book 2: Psalms 42-72
- Book 3: Psalms 73-89
- Book 4: Psalms 90-106
- Book 5: Psalms 107-150

This Week in Psalms:

- Psalm 32 is a penitential psalm (Ps. 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143). In it, King David expresses relief and praise about God's forgiveness, and he urges others to avoid his mistakes and to learn from his negative example.
- As a thanksgiving or declarative praise psalm, Psalm 33 begins with commands to praise (vv. 1-3), a report of why He should be praised (vv. 4-17), and the conclusion (vv. 20-22). Psalm 33 gives four reasons for why God should be praised: His true word, his faithful works, His character, and His role as Creator.
- The context for Psalm 34 is found in 1 Samuel 21:12-15 (the king's name is both Achish and Abimelech) when David changed his appearance and pretended to be insane in order for the king to release him, and all of this occurred while he was fleeing from King Saul who was trying to kill him.

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Psalm 34 contains his praise to God for protecting Him. The composition of the psalm is divided into two parts: declarative praise when David calls the people to praise God and declares what the Lord has done (vv. 1-10) and descriptive praise when he exhorts others to trust the Lord (vv. 11-22).

- While we do not know what event in David's life prompted the composition of Psalm 35, he often found himself in dangerous situations with enemies who wanted to destroy him. This particular psalm contains three laments. The first focuses on deliverance from his enemies and a plea for their destruction (vv. 1-10), the second involves a description of David's suffering at their hands (vv. 11-18), and the third contains David's petition for vindication (vv. 19-28). Psalms such as Psalm 35 remind us that we can and should pray for God to protect us and to vindicate us when others persecute and falsely accuse us.
- Psalm 36 contrasts the wickedness of humanity (vv. 1-4) with the faithfulness and righteousness of God (vv. 5-9), and it concludes with a prayer for God to continue to demonstrate steadfast love to His people and to preserve His people from the wicked (vv. 10-12).
- While Psalm 37 is most known for verse four's instruction to "delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart," this psalm is actually a wisdom psalm that instructs God's people how to live in a world that is full of evildoers. They are to trust the Lord (v. 3), do good (v. 3), delight in God (v. 4), commit their way to God (v. 4), wait for Him (v. 7), and refrain from anger, wrath, and anxiety (v. 8). God's people can comport themselves in this manner because they trust in God and in the future He has planned, a future in which the wicked will be destroyed and the righteous will live in peace.
- In Psalm 38, King David is ill (v. 3), his friends and family are avoiding him because of his illness (v. 11), and his enemies are using David's illness as an opportunity to subvert his authority (v. 12). At such a time, David recognizes that his only recourse is to plead and hope in the Lord (vv. 13-22). The superscription of the psalm states that it is "for the memorial offering." This likely means that the psalm would have been quoted or sung in the Temple when the worshipper offered a portion of the offering as the memorial (see Lev. 2).

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 Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross, which made the way for us to be reconciled to Him. Confess and repent of your own sin in your*

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life, and ask and thank God for His forgiveness. Praise Him for Jesus' resurrection, which demonstrates His power over sin and death. Thank God for the faith He grants us through His grace so we might be saved from our sins. Ask God to sustain us all to the day of Jesus' return. In the meantime, pray for the role you have to play in accomplishing God's mission of making disciples of all nations.

- *Pray for Our City: This week, we are praying for the different ministries that are part of Local Missions at Brook Hills. Currently, over 300 members of our Faith Family are serving with various ministries in and around Birmingham. To find out how you can be involved, visit brookhills.org/localmissions. We are also praying for Double Oak Community Church and Adam Robinson, Pastor.*
- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for Brook Hills Mid-Termer, Mandy L., serving in East Asia. Mandy L. is a teacher at a local school where she is able to teach and live among unreached people groups. Join us this week as we pray for Mandy L. This week we are also praying for our Short-Term team serving in Liberia and the Chamar peoples of India. For more information and ways to pray, visit brookhills.org/weeklyresources.*

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

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*"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."
John 14:6*

In a world of many ways, Jesus claims to be the way.

*"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him."
John 3:36*

Amidst a culture that questions truth, Jesus claims to be the truth.

*So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
John 8:31-32*

To all who long for peace and joy in life, Jesus claims to be the life.

*Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."
John 4:13-14*

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Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

John 6:35

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

John 8:12

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."

John 10:10

An important question: "Do you believe His claims?"

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

John 11:25-26

A more important question: "Will you receive His love?"

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

John 3:16

The most important question: "Will you call Him Lord?"

Jesus said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John 20:27-28

Message Summary

In John 14:6, Jesus makes the outrageous claim of being "the way, the truth, and the life." He declared to be the only way to God the Father. Because of sin, all people have turned away from God, and it is only by His grace that He even creates a way for people to know and trust Him. Yet, the world alleges that there are many ways to God and that religion is a matter of taste or tradition. But Christ asserts that *He* is truth. All religions cannot be true at the same time, so someone has to be wrong. Either we believe the claims of Jesus, or we believe that everything He did and said is a lie. Therefore, every person must decide whether or not to believe His claims, to receive His love, and to call Him Lord.

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.

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- 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 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 doing so learn how to study it. To assist the group with REAP questions, download the Guide to Personal Worship from brookhills.org.

While Pastor David directed this Easter sermon towards unbelievers, it can be helpful for believers to consider the discussion questions in light of how to engage with unbelievers. If you do have unbelievers in your small group, rephrase the questions below to guide the discussion in a way that allows the group to discuss the claims of Christianity and why salvation by grace through faith in Christ is the only way to God.

If everyone in the group is a Christ-follower, have them get into groups of 2-4 people. Begin by asking those in the group to name the lost people God has placed in their lives. Next, have them identify what those people believe about God, man, Jesus, faith, and eternity. Are the unbelievers Muslims, atheists, Mormons, cultural Christians, etc.? If they do not know what those lost people believe, encourage them to ask questions these next few weeks and to learn. If they do know what the lost people in their lives believe, have them consider the discussion questions in light of how they would share these truths with those particular people. Spend time in prayer as a group for these lost family, friends, and acquaintances. Also, pray for the unbelievers who attended Easter services this past weekend, and ask God to convict them of their sin, to give them understanding about what they heard, and to draw them to Himself.

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 claims did Jesus make about Himself in the Gospels? If someone did not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, what would they think of His claims? How would you share the gospel with someone who does not believe that Jesus is who He says is and can do what He says He can do?
- In John 14:6, Jesus claims to be *the way*. In a culture that advocates tolerance, the claims of Christianity can often be viewed as offensive because of their exclusivity. Why can’t all religions or paths to be God all be true at the same time?
- How can Christ-followers humbly respond when an unbeliever labels them as “intolerant”?
- How would you explain to an unbeliever that *Jesus* is the way to God? How is *He* the way and not good works, keeping the five pillars of Islam, or reaching Nirvana?
- Read John 8:31-32. How do Christ-followers know that Christianity is true and that all other religions are false?
- In John 14:6, Jesus also claims to be *the life*. Because He *is* life (Jn. 1:4; 5:26; 11:25; 1 Jn. 5:20), He can give eternal life. He demonstrated His power over death by His resurrection. How can we respond when encountering someone who does not believe in Christ’s resurrection? How do we know that the resurrection actually occurred?
- What did Christ’s death accomplish? What did Christ’s resurrection accomplish? Read Romans 4:24-25 and 1 Corinthians 15:12-23.

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- Read John 4:13-14; 6:35; 8:12; 10:10. As Jesus encountered individuals who longed for peace, joy, and meaning in life, He claimed to be the life. For those who follow Christ, what meaning or purpose does life have because of Him? What does true peace and joy look like? How would you explain these things to an unbeliever?
- Read John 14:6. Why would God make only one way to Himself? What does this tell us about God's character?
- Why would someone choose *not* to receive God's love? What holds someone back from receiving God's love?
- How would you describe the difference between someone who knows about God (knowledge or intellectual assent) and someone who is a Christ-follower? What does it mean to trust Christ as your Lord?