

## Small Group Guide GOD KNOWS

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*Dennis Blythe*

*July 13, 2014*

*Psalm 139:1-6*

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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 July 14-20*  
Joshua 20-24, Judges 1-3, and Acts 1-7

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

**Background of Joshua:** While authorship of this book is unknown, the book's name derives from the name of its main character, Joshua, who was Moses' successor in leading the people of Israel. His name means "Yahweh delivers" or "Yahweh saves," which is an apt title of the book since it describes God's work in defeating the nations of the Promised Land and giving the land to His people. Joshua presents the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to give their descendants the land of Canaan, and it describes the military conquests that brought this to pass. Written as a historical book for Israel, Joshua also emphasizes God's sovereignty, omnipotence, and faithfulness to His word, and Joshua 21:43-45 provides a fitting summary of God's character as One who keeps *all* of His promises.

### **Structure of Joshua:**

- Joshua 1-5 describes Israel's preparations before taking the Promised Land.
- Joshua 6-12 depicts the military conquests of the nation.
- Joshua 13-21 explains the distribution of the land among the tribes, highlighting the fulfillment of God's promises to His people.
- Joshua 22-24 records Joshua's final instructions and exhortations to the nation before his death.

**This Week in Joshua:** Joshua 20-21 describes how Israel kept the Lord's instructions regarding the cities of refuge and the cities and pasturelands allotted to the Levites (see Ex. 21:12-14; Num. 35:1-29; Deut. 4:41-43; 19:1-10). Forty-eight cities were set aside for the Levites, and six of these were also cities of refuge. Teaching the people about God was one function of a priest, and this could more easily be accomplished by living among the Israelites throughout the land. Levi also lacked its own tribal allotment of land because of the judgment on Levi in Genesis 49:6-7 for his violence against the Hivites in Genesis 24.

Joshua 21 mentions three groups among the Levites: the Kohathites, the Gershonites, and the Merarites, and while each of these groups were still Levites, they were also the descendants of Levi's sons, Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. At the time that God spoke these words to Joshua, Israel did not yet possess all forty-eight of these cities, but as they conquered, they knew God's prescription for how to divvy out the land. Joshua 21:43-45 presents the fulfillment of God's promises to Joshua in chapter one and His covenant with Israel to give them the Promised Land, and it stands as a testament to God's faithfulness and His power. It rightly credits God for the accomplishment of taking the land and defeating Israel's enemies.

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In Joshua 22, Joshua releases the people of Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh, so they could return to their allotted land since they had faithfully helped the other tribes possess their inheritance. When these tribes arrived in their land, they built an altar to the Lord. When the rest of the nation heard this news, they sent Phinehas and ten tribal chiefs to address the rebellion, for they feared another reprisal of what happened at Baal-peor (Num. 25:1-18) or with Achan after Jericho (Josh. 7:1-26) because God had instructed them to only have one altar for sacrifice (Deut. 12:13-32). However, it was a miscommunication, for the Reubenites, Gadites, and Manassehites built the altar as a memorial that they had fulfilled their commitment to help the other tribes conquer the Promised Land. They did not build it as a place to worship or sacrifice offerings in replacement of doing so in the Lord's sanctuary. Therefore, the Reubenites and the Gadites called the altar "Witness," for it represented their unity with the other tribes. Because the Jordan River formed a natural boundary line between the eastern tribes (Reubenites, Gadites, and Manassehites) and the rest of the nation, they worried that future generations would either cease to worship the Lord in His sanctuary or that the western tribes would reject the eastern tribes as heirs of the promises to Israel.

Joshua 23-24 fast-forwards an indefinite amount of time (possibly 25 years) when Joshua makes his farewell and gives a charge to Israel's leaders and to the nation. As God had urged him to heed His Law in Joshua 1, Joshua urges Israel's leaders to do the same (Josh. 23:6-8). He reminded the people of God's promises, of God's faithfulness to give them the Promised Land, and of the blessings and curses associated with the covenant. The book concludes with a covenant renewal ceremony in which the Israelites affirm their fidelity to their covenant with God, and it describes the death of Joshua and Eleazar the priest (Aaron's son) as well as the burial of Joseph's bones per his instructions (Gen. 50:25).

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

**Background of Judges:** While authorship of Judges is traditionally assigned to Samuel, we do not know who wrote this book. Judges presents Israel's cycle of idolatry, judgment, repentance, and deliverance that occurred between the death of Joshua and the establishment of Israel's monarchy (Josh. 2:11-19).

Throughout this book, God remains faithful to His covenant, but Israel receives judgment that comes as a result of God's promises to *punish* His people for their disobedience. However, Israel's depravity emphasizes the scandal and the greatness of God's mercy and forgiveness. While God raises up twelve men and women during this time period to lead His people, *He* remains the ultimate Judge and Savior of Israel.

#### **Structure of Judges:**

- Judges 1:1-3:6 introduces the reader to the circumstances after Joshua's death and gives an overview of the cycle Israel would follow as God raised up judges to deliver and to lead His people.
- Judges 3:7-16:31 provides accounts of twelve judges in Israel's history.
- Judges 17-21 describes the moral descent of Israel and how the nation demonstrated little difference from their pagan neighbors.

**This Week in Judges:** Unlike after the death of Moses, when Joshua died there was no named successor set in place to lead the people of Israel. The people began with an encouraging start, for they "inquired of the LORD" as to who should lead them to fight against the Canaanites (1:1). But their fidelity to the Lord quickly dissipated. At the time of Joshua's death, several other nations still inhabited the Promised Land, and Joshua 1 describes the tribes of Judah and Simeon assisting each other in defeating some of these inhabitants, including the king of Jerusalem. At the same time, the tribe of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites from the city (1:21), and Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali also "did not drive out the inhabitants" of the land (1:27-33). Their inability to conquer these nations would later lead to them being influenced by their pagan neighbors and drawn into idolatry.

Judges 1:19 mentions Israel's inability to drive out the inhabitants of the plain because of their chariots of iron, but Judges 2:1-5 clarifies that the real reason for their failure was the Israelites' idolatry (Judg. 2:1-5). Because of their sin, God judged the nation of Israel by making the Canaanite inhabitants a proverbial thorn in their side who would entice them to sin (2:3).

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Joshua 2:6-10 reiterates the death of Joshua, the distribution of land to the tribes of Israel, and the birth of a generation who had not experienced God's provision in the wilderness or faithfulness in battle. Observe the contrast between the descriptions of the different generations of Israelites in Judges 2:6-9 and 11-15:

### **Judges 2:6-9**

They "went" to take possession of their inheritance (2:6).

They "served the LORD" (2:7).

They "buried" Joshua in his land (2:9).

### **Judges 2:11-15**

They "did what was evil in the sight of the LORD" (2:11).

They "served the Baals" (2:11).

They "abandoned the LORD" (2:12).

They "went after other gods" (2:12).

They "bowed down to them" (2:12).

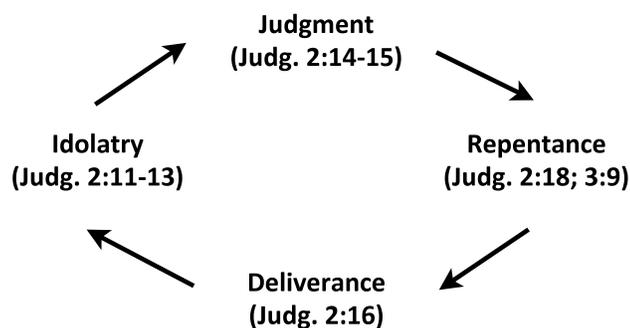
They "provoked the LORD to anger" (2:12).

They "abandoned the LORD" (2:13).

They "served the Baals and the Ashteroth" (2:13).

While they had not experienced God's miraculous guidance firsthand as their parents and grandparents had, this younger generation was not ignorant of His acts; however, they lived as though they were unaware of His greatness and power. As Pastor Timothy Keller states in *Judges for You*, "when a whole generation turns away, we have to expect that the parents have failed to model real faith and disciple their children" (33).

The term "judge" implies a judicial role, and while Deborah seems to have acted in this role, the judges in this book act more as military leaders and as individuals who instruct the people in the way of the Lord. Judges 2:16-23 describes the cycle that is depicted in the graphic below, and the book as a whole describes the "Canaanization" of Israel. Instead of being a kingdom of priests who witness to the surrounding nations, Israel acts just like them. Because of Israel's habitual idolatry, God determined to test Israel by leaving the remaining Canaanite nations in the land (2:20-3:6). Would Israel choose to follow God even when tempted by their neighbors to worship other gods? Anytime God tests His people, it is for their benefit, not His. He knows their hearts and the future. But when He tests us, we learn more about our own strengths and weaknesses, and we come face-to-face with the status of our functional faith in God.



Judges 3 lists three judges in Israel's history: Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar. God would use the judges to conquer remaining nations in the land while He also allowed these nations to bring His judgment on His people for their idolatry. Othniel, a nephew of Caleb (3:9), prevailed over the king of Mesopotamia (3:7-12), and Ehud defeated the king of Moab and subdued the nation (3:12-20), which inhabited the region on the southeastern border of the Dead Sea. Shamgar led the nation against the Philistines (3:31), and while he freed Israel from them, he did not completely eradicate this nation.

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

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**Background of Acts:** As with the Luke's Gospel, Luke wrote Acts to a man named Theophilus to describe the events that occurred after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, and Luke 1:1-4 states the purpose of both Luke and Acts: to provide a narrative of the truth from eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word. Acts details the thirty years following the resurrection of Christ and describes the spread of the gospel throughout Asia and Europe.

#### **Structure of Acts:**

- Acts 1-5 describes the advent of the church.
- Acts 6:1-9:31 portrays the persecution and the growth of the church.
- Acts 9:32-12:24 details the inclusion of the Gentiles into the faith.
- Acts 13:1-19:20 follows the missionary journeys of Paul.
- Acts 19:21-28:31 chronicles Paul's journey to Jerusalem where he is arrested, tried, and sent to Rome for an audience with Caesar.

**This Week in Acts:** In the forty days after His resurrection, Jesus taught His followers about the Kingdom of God and instructed them to wait in Jerusalem until they had received the Holy Spirit (1:1-8). The disciples still thought in terms of an earthly king who would free Israel from the Romans, and Jesus directs them to focus on the task given to them by God – to be His witnesses “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of all the earth” (1:8). Acts 1-7 depicts how they fulfilled this call in Jerusalem, Acts 8-11 describes the expansion into Judea and Samaria, and the rest of the book shows how God's people spread the gospel to the nations.

After Jesus' ascension into Heaven, the disciples returned to the Upper Room in Jerusalem (this may or may not be the same room in which they celebrated the Passover with Jesus). The apostles viewed the replacement of Judas Iscariot as a matter of Old Testament prophecy, hence the quotations from Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 in Acts 1. In relation to the selection of a twelfth disciple, F.F. Bruce states in his commentary on Acts, “The total of twelve was significant: it corresponded to the number of the tribes of Israel, and may have marked the apostles out as leaders of the new Israel” (44).

Pentecost occurred fifty days after the Passover and was the feast where the firstfruits of the wheat harvest were brought to God, and it was on this day that God sent the Holy Spirit to indwell in His followers. Acts presents a turning point in salvation history. No longer is God's presence among His people as with the tabernacle or among His people as when Christ walked upon the earth. Now, the presence of God would dwell *in* the believer. Just as the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus during His earthly ministry, this same Spirit would indwell and empower God's people as they ministered in Jesus' name.

Wind and fire accompany the filling of the Spirit, which alludes to Ezekiel 37:9-14 and Luke 3:16-17, and the Spirit led these believers to prophesy and worked through them to where everyone heard them speak in their native language. The speaking of tongues that occurred on Pentecost differs from the type of tongues mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12-14, for the tongues mentioned in Corinthians involves speech where someone with the gift of interpretation has to translate what the speaker uttered.

Peter preaches the first sermon in Acts 2. He begins by refuting the charge of drunkenness (2:12-13), explains that the people were witnessing the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy that God would unleash His Spirit on His people, then delivers the reason for this demonstration of power – the proclamation of Jesus' identity as Messiah and Lord. Peter called the people to repent of their sins and to be baptized (2:37-41), and 3,000 people trusted in Christ as Lord and Savior on that day. Acts 2:42-47 describes the actions of this new community of believers. Based on the teaching of the apostles, they fellowshiped, worshipped, and served together.

Acts 2:43 mentions that “many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles,” and Acts 3 describes one of these miracles – the healing of a lame beggar. This demonstration of power pointed to the authority of the One whose name they invoked – Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and Peter used this miracle to transition into telling the crowd about Christ. Their sermon in the temple did not go unnoticed by the religious

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leaders (keep in mind that these were the same religious leaders who had crucified Jesus only weeks before), but Peter and John used this opportunity to share the gospel with the people who had crucified the Messiah.

In contrast to Barnabas who willingly sold his belongings and gave the money to the apostles (4:32-37), Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and pretended to give all of the proceeds when they had kept a portion for themselves. As a result of their attempt to deceive the apostles and, ultimately, God, they died. They were free to give however much they desired, so it was their deceit that warranted such judgment. This incident demonstrates that even the idyllic early church of Acts 2:42-47 contained imperfect people, and it also reminds God's people of the seriousness of their sin (Rom. 6:23). What we might think of as a simple lie, a "minor" sin, separates us from God and warrants the death of Christ to restore our relationship with Him. Do we as God's people take sin as seriously as He does?

Acts 5-7 depicts the persecution of these early believers by the Jewish religious leaders, and they seized Stephen, who was chosen to assist the apostles and who was performing many miracles among the people. As they had done with Jesus, the religious leaders had invoked the charge of blasphemy against Stephen, utilizing false witnesses to make these claims (6:11-14). Stephen's defense consisted of explaining God's plan of salvation from Abraham to Solomon and how His presence is not confined to a building (specifically the temple), and Stephen pointed out how the Israelites had historically persecuted the prophets and even the Messiah Himself. As a result of His assertion of Christ as the Messiah (which they deemed blasphemy), they stoned and killed Stephen. But despite the persecution of Stephen and other believers, God's church continued to grow.

### *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 omniscience, His perfect and complete knowledge of all things. Ask God to grant us wisdom to know where He is guiding us and the strength to follow. Thank God for surrounding us with His comfort and protection. Ask God to reveal to us our sins and call us to repentance. Pray for Him to grow us in the knowledge of His Word. Pray we will all trust in God's knowledge to lead us in the way everlasting.
- **Pray for Our City:** This week we are praying for our urban Rock the Block being held this week in Marks Village. We are partnering with Ambassadors for Christ Church next door to Marks Village

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Public Housing Community to connect children and their families to the gospel and to a local faith family. We are also praying for Zion Springs Baptist Church, Avondale, and Adam Mixon, Pastor.

- **Pray for Our World:** This week we are praying for Brook Hills Field Partner, Compassion International. Compassion is a long-time partner with The Church at Brook Hills that helps to release children from the cycle of poverty in Jesus' name. The Church at Brook Hills has partnered and sponsored twelve Child Survival Programs through Compassion International since 2009. Eleven of the twelve programs are in the unreached areas of North India, the other in Ethiopia. This week, one of our Short-Term teams is serving with Compassion International in the Dominican Republic, visiting children in the program and serving needs at specific projects there. Join us this week as we pray for our partner Compassion International and the children who are part of their projects around the world. This week we are also praying for our Short-Term teams serving in Uganda and the Dominican Republic.

## MAIN TRUTH

**"God Knows"**  
**Psalm 139:1-6**

The primary theme threaded throughout Psalm 139 is the **omniscience** of God.

- Omniscience: God's perfect **knowledge** of **all** things

Key Question: Does God really know everything...and if he does, how should that affect the way I live?

### 3 Things to Know About the Knowledge of God...

- God's knowledge is both **intuitive** and **immense**.  
(Isaiah 40:13-14; Matthew 10:30; Psalm 147:4; Proverbs 15:3; Psalm 50:11; Acts 15:18; Psalm 139:12; Psalm 90:8; Matthew 11:21)
  - All knowledge past, **present** and **future** resides in him.
  - God's knowledge is not confined to the things on this **earth**.
  - **Nothing** can be hidden from him!
  - God not only knows what "is" – he also knows what "**could have** been."
- God's knowledge is both **intimate** and **infinite**.
  - God knows everything about **me**. (v. 1)
  - God knows when I **move**. (v. 2a)
  - God knows what I **think**. (v. 2b)
  - God knows where I **go**. (v. 3)
  - God knows what I **say**. (v. 4)
  - God has me **surrounded**. (v. 5)
- God's knowledge has **implications** for my life.
  - It should fuel my **worship**. (v. 6)
  - It should drive me to the **Word**.
  - It should eliminate my **worry**.
  - It should transform my **walk**.

### *Message Summary*

God's omniscience—His perfect knowledge of all things—is a characteristic we should celebrate. In Psalm 139, King David beautifully prays in accordance with this quality of God and rejoices in the truths that flow from it. God has knowledge that is intuitive and immense, for He knows all things past, present, and future, completely and exhaustively. All the details of our lives and of the world God created are totally known by God, so we can rest in Him. His knowledge is intimate and infinite, as Psalm 139:1-5 reveals. God is acutely aware of every moment, whether mundane or life changing, and He constantly surrounds us on every side, making His presence inescapable. Because He knows everything at all times, including the past and future, He knew our need for a Savior and sent His Son, Jesus, to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins and to secure our eternal destiny in God's eternal Kingdom. His knowledge has implications for our lives as it fuels our worship, drives us to the Word, frees us from worry and fear, and changes the way we walk with God. The peace and hope we gain from His omniscience builds our confidence in Him and spurs us to obey Him as the One who searches us and knows us and loves us perfectly.

## **WHY IT MATTERS**

### *Digging Deeper*

*Consider at least three directions your small group can take in light of the current Bible reading plan. Knowing the people in the group, prayerfully think about what would be the best route to help those in your group grow. The group's meeting style could also vary each week, so, feel the freedom to take all or some of the content in this guide to do what you feel 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 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. If the group meets on Monday, 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](http://brookhills.org).*

Because of the focus of this sermon, there are two directions you can take during small group. One option involves meditating on the omniscience of God. Invite your group to spend several minutes reading through Psalm 139 individually, praying that God will open their minds and hearts more deeply to His all knowing nature and journaling as they do. When they finish, answer the last three discussion questions below and the REAP principles discussed on the Guide to Personal Worship (download at [brookhills.org](http://brookhills.org) under the 2014 Bible Reading Plan rotating feature).

The other option for small group is to focus on the topic of today's sermon, which is God's omniscience and how this reality affects the way we live. Utilize the discussion questions below to guide time together and spend time praying for each other and praising God for His vast, perfect knowledge.

## **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 is it important for us to celebrate God's omniscience? What happens when we fail to remember this attribute of God?
- How can our society's easy access to vast information undermine the fact that we truly know so little? Why is an understanding of God's omniscience connected to humility in His people?
- Pastor Dennis defines *omniscience* as "God's perfect knowledge of all things." While most Christians would likely claim to believe this truth, in what ways are we tempted to doubt it? Why?
- Because God is omniscient, all the details of our lives are totally known to Him. Has the way you feel about this truth—how you value it—changed as you have grown in your faith? If so, how?
- Pastor Dennis reminded us that God knows what could have been in all things—that He knows our potential history. How does that fact help you rest in what actually is?
- Read through the list of "God knows . . ." statements below the second point of the outline. Which truth about God's knowledge of you gives you most joy or comfort in your life right now? Why?
- How does God's vast knowledge of all things past, present, and future remove our worry and give us peace (Ps. 139:3-5)? Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 6:31-34. What worries do you need to submit to God's omniscience?
- King David prayed about God's intimate knowledge of his own heart as bookends to Psalm 139. At the beginning, he stated God's knowledge, and he closed his prayer by asking God to search and know him. If God already knows us, why do we need to ask Him to search us and know us? Read Jeremiah 17:9 and answer the question it poses. Can you share about a time when you thought you knew your own heart, but God showed you that you had been deceiving yourself?
- Does God lead us "in the way everlasting" when we cling to sin and are resistant to being fully known by Him? Why not?
- As you've walked with Christ, can you name specific ways that God's perfect knowledge of you has fueled your worship? Caused you to value His Word more deeply? Taken away your worries? Transformed your walk?
- What specific actions does God want you to take this week as you remember His vast, complete knowledge of all things? How does your walk need to change—in the sinful things you put away from your life and in obedient steps of service you add to your life?