

Small Group Guide LOVE THAT TURNS THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

The Church at Brook Hills

Tate Cockrell

August 3, 2014

Acts 17:1-9; 1 Thess. 2:1-20

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 disciplinarians, 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 August 4-10
Judges 18-21, Ruth 1-4, and Acts 22-28

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: The phrase "there was no king in Israel" signifies a critical issue for the nation in Judges 18-21 (18:1; 19:1; 21:25), especially as we read about the idolatry of the people, the immorality of a priest, the homosexual tendencies of the Gibeonites, the rape and death of the priest's concubine, the civil war with the tribe of Benjamin, and the abduction of the women of Shiloh. In fact, Judges 19's similarity to Genesis 19:1-11 compares the immorality of the Israelites to that of the men of Sodom and Gomorrah, demonstrating the need for divine judgment. At this point in Judges, God provides no commentary regarding the people's actions, but this does not mean that He approves in any form or fashion. Israel's flagrant violation of God's laws is one reason why so many Israelites died in the civil war against Benjamin. While the people did come to Him about whether or not to attack Benjamin, they only sought God when they wanted something from Him. Even then, God did not abandon Israel. He remained present and faithful but gave them over to their sinful desires. The nation's leadership crisis – no prophet, judge, or king – must be rectified if the nation is to continue.

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Where We Are In The Story (Ruth)

Background of Ruth: Ruth 1:1 identifies the events of the book as occurring during the era of the judges in Israel. As Judges definitively ends by stating that there was no king in Israel, Ruth provides the lineage for Israel's impending royal line, and the genealogy of Matthew 1 lists her as an ancestor of King David and Jesus. While we do not know the author of this book, the Hebrew Bible (the Tanak) places Ruth between Proverbs and Song of Solomon instead of after Judges, which would mean that a reader would see the description of the Proverbs 31 woman then read about a female ancestor of the Messiah. This book emphasizes both the mercy of God and His sovereignty in working all situations according to His purpose.

This Week in Ruth: Ruth 1 introduces the reader to the main characters of this book and to the challenge that they face. Contrary to the book's title, *Naomi* is actually the central figure of the story whose bitterness turns to hope and joy, and the book demonstrates how she experiences the loss of her family and how God cares and provides for her through Ruth and Boaz. While Naomi felt rejected by God when she became a needy widow, this book clearly shows that God cares for both Naomi and Ruth, even though they had no idea at the time that He was orchestrating their deliverance, even in how He used a famine to send them back to Bethlehem where Ruth would just "happen" to glean in the fields of Boaz, their extended relative (Ruth 1:6; 2:3, 20).

In *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth*, Robert Chisholm notes the pattern of an individual asking for God to reward a particular individual for their kindness or faithfulness, then God answering that prayer (pp. 564-566). This pattern indirectly demonstrates God's activity in the lives of Boaz, Ruth, and Naomi, and how He hears the prayers of His people and responds according to His will.

- In Ruth 1:8-9, Naomi prays a blessing over her daughters-in-law who were attempting to return with Naomi to Israel. While we do not have any further mention of Orpah after this chapter, Ruth marries Boaz in Ruth 4.
- In Ruth 2:12, Boaz asks that God reward Ruth for her care of Naomi, and he ends up being the one to provide for her as his wife.
- Ruth 2:19-20 tells how Naomi issues a blessing on Boaz for his care of his extended family, and God provides for Boaz both a wife and descendants (Ruth 3:11; 4:13).
- Boaz blesses Ruth again in Ruth 3:10 for following the custom and law of the Israelites in seeking out a kinsman redeemer to continue her husband's legacy instead of seeking other men, and God does bless her with a husband and children.
- In Ruth 4:11-12, the people of the city pray a blessing on Ruth and for Naomi's descendants to be prosperous and successful. Ruth and Boaz have a child, Obed, who was the grandfather of King David and an ancestor of the Messiah.

Ruth 2:20 identifies Boaz as a kinsman redeemer for Ruth and Naomi. Leviticus 25:25-49 describes such a redeemer as one from the family who would recover family property or family members who had been sold to pay off debt, and Deuteronomy 25:5-10 provides laws concerning a levirate marriage, which is when a male family member would marry the childless widow and produce offspring with her who would carry on the name of her deceased husband. This was "to perpetuate the brother's name in Israel" (Dt. 25:7). So this male family member had the right to purchase or acquire the property that had belonged to the family, to continue the family name, and to care for the widow. The concept of a kinsman redeemer ultimately finds its fulfillment in Christ, for He has the right and the power to redeem us from our sin and despair (Eph. 1:7-8).

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

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

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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: Acts 22-28 details the events that occur after Paul's arrest in Jerusalem, and it demonstrates how God provided unique opportunities for government and religious leaders to hear the gospel. As prophesied, these trials did lead to Paul's eventual death, although he is still alive and awaiting an audience with Caesar in Rome as Acts closes. Acts 22 picks up with Paul's address to the crowd who had protested for his arrest, and he uses this opportunity to tell about Jesus' appearance to him and his conversion on the Damascus road and to explain how God had called him to witness to the Gentiles. At this, the crowd called for his death. The tribune called for Paul to be flogged and questioned about the crowd's claims and desire to kill him, but Paul questioned the tribune's ability to arrest and flog him since he was a *Roman citizen*. Legally, Roman citizens were exempt from being flogged by a flagellum, which was had a leather thong attached to a wooden handle, and at the end of the leather were pieces of bone and metal. This instrument would cripple and often kill its victims. Paul had been beaten before with rods but not with this instrument of torture. Paul's citizenship brought his release, but the tribune ordered that he appear before the council, the Sanhedrin (the same group who had brought Jesus to Pilate to be crucified), to account for the grievances against him.

Because of the demographic present at his appearance before the Sanhedrin, Paul changes his approach and identifies himself as a Pharisee. The Sanhedrin consisted of a minority of Pharisees (religious leaders who believed in the resurrection of the dead and a majority of Sadducees (rich, elitist religious leaders who maintained the Temple and who rejected belief in there being a resurrection of the dead). By identifying himself as a Pharisee, Paul gained support from that portion of the Sanhedrin and caused a disagreement among those present regarding what happens after death. Because of the violent dissension this caused, the tribune sent Paul to the barracks, and when a plot to kill Paul was unearthed, the tribune sent Paul to Felix the Governor. The high priest, Ananias, brought a charge against Paul before Felix, and when Paul gave his defense, he distinguishes between what he believes ("the Way") and Judaism and explains that he stands before Felix because of a doctrinal difference regarding the resurrection of the dead (Acts 24:21). Felix and his third wife Drusilla interacted often with Paul and heard him explain Christianity during his two years in custody, and Felix left Paul in prison to mollify the Jews and in hopes that Paul would offer him a bribe. But Paul outlasted Felix who was succeeded by Festus and who reexamined Paul's case, and during this reopening of the case, Paul appealed to Caesar instead of risking going back to trial in Jerusalem.

Before being taken from Caesarea to Rome, King Agrippa and his sister Bernice visited Festus who relayed to them the particulars of Paul's case, and Paul shared his testimony with them, asked King Agrippa whether or not he believed in Christ (Acts 26:27-29), and expressed his desire that all who heard the good news would believe. If he had not appealed to Caesar, Agrippa and Festus would have released him, but Paul legally had to be sent to Rome. Although shipwrecked on the island of Malta on the journey to Rome, Paul arrived and spent two years waiting to appear before Caesar, but during this time, he testified about Christ to Jews and to Gentiles with many trusting in Christ for salvation. His arrest enabled him to share the gospel in Rome. In Acts 1:8, Jesus had instructed His followers to testify about Him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth, and Acts 28 describes how the gospel spread beyond Israel throughout the Roman Empire.

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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 the gift of Christian community we find through our mutual love for Him and each other. Ask God to help us all walk with Him in a manner worthy of His calling on our lives. Pray we will learn to act gently and lovingly toward one another and toward all those with whom we share the gospel. Pray people around us who do not know God will see us conduct our lives holy and righteously as a testimony to the power of the gospel in our lives. Pray that those who hear the gospel from us will respond by accepting it as the word of God. Ask God to help us all to love with abandon and action.
- *Pray for Our City:* This week we are praying for the ministry of Discovery Clubs of Alabama (jimmiehalemission.com/discoveryclubs). Discovery Clubs, a ministry of Jimmie Hale Mission, are weekly after-school Bible clubs held in elementary schools across the Birmingham area. At each club, children enjoy a Bible story time, singing together, practicing memory verses, and mentoring relationships with caring adults for an hour a week. We are also praying for Ardent Church, Glen Iris and Steven Castello, Pastor.
- *Pray for Our World:* This week we are praying for Brook Hills' mid-termer Kyndal as she serves in North Africa. Kyndal is serving with our Brook Hills Church Planting team there and helping them implement many of the ministry engagement projects already in motion. Join us this week as we pray for Kyndal and our North Africa Church Planting Team.

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

Four Expressions of Our Love for God...

- Love for God's Word
 - In our conversation (Acts 17:2)
 - In its completeness (Acts 17:2)
 - In our confidence (Acts 17:3)

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- Love for God's Gospel
 - The simplicity of the message (Acts 17:3)
 - The supremacy of the message (Acts 17:4)
- Love for God's Purpose
 - Focused on the praise of Christ (Acts 17:6)
 - Filled by the power of Christ (1 Thess. 2:2)
 - Fueled by the pleasure of Christ (1 Thess. 2:4, 6)
- Love for God's People
 - Gentle in our conduct (1 Thess. 2:7)
 - Genuine in our connection (1 Thess. 2:8)
 - Generous in our care (1 Thess. 2:7-8)
 - Gracious in our confrontation (1 Thess. 2:11-12)
 - Grateful for our community (1 Thess. 2:17-20)

Three Exhortations as We Love...

- Love with Abandon (Mark 12:30)
- Love with Assurance (1 John 4:7-12)
- Love with Action (1 John 3:18)

Message Summary

In Acts, Luke records the problems Paul encountered in Thessalonica. He was chased out of the city by an angry mob of Jews and others they had recruited to help their cause. This mob accused Paul and Silas, as Christians, of turning "the world upside down." Paul's affection and work in the Thessalonian church is more thoroughly fleshed out in his letter to them in 1 Thessalonians 2. While Paul was a bold orator and a trained theologian, it was not a winsome personality or popularity of character that led to his reputation of turning the world upside down; it was the power of the gospel working in his life, revealed by his love and devotion for God and people who needed to hear the gospel. Paul's life demonstrated God's transforming work in his life through his love for God's Word, His people, and His relentless pursuit of God's purpose in his life to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

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*

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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 reading it learn how to do so. To assist the group with REAP questions, download the Guide to Personal Worship from brookhills.org.*

Our love for God is expressed in how we live. Read John 14:15 aloud. Jesus stated that if we love Him we will obey His commandments. Discuss with your small group how we know what Christ's commandments and expectations for His followers are. How does time spent in God's Word lead to a love for God's Word and vice versa? When we are immersed with God's Word, our lives begin to reflect Christ in all that we do, whether in seemingly "small" ways or seemingly "big" ways.

Tate mentioned the rippling effect of Etta Budd's encouragement of a young George Washington Carver to attend college and her stand to allow him, as a black man, to eat in the cafeteria with other students at Iowa State. Carver's influence ultimately extended to Norman Borlaug who won the 1970 Nobel Prize for his work in hybrid wheat and corn, which saved many from hunger during times of great famine, particularly in arid climates. Etta Budd did not set out to change the world by living out her convictions, but God used her life in a way that ultimately made a tremendous impact on billions of lives. Discuss how the decisions and actions we make every day have the opportunity to impact lives for the gospel in ways that we could never comprehend. How does this perspective affect the way that we view opportunities all around us? How does this perspective affect the way we are involved with the next generation? How does it impact the way we view the day ahead of us when faced with tasks like laundry, lunch, or mentoring? How can we intentionally use even the smallest parts of our days and nights to begin to pour our lives into others as we obey Christ's commandments in every area of life?

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?).

- Paul wanted others to hear the gospel. His vocation as a tent maker allowed him to travel and work as he shared the gospel, but what was his purpose in traveling and speaking? Did he allow the example of his life to overshadow what he spoke or to support it? What is the difference? How does this apply to how you live and work?
- There is a popular quote from Francis of Assisi about living our lives in such a way that we do not even have to verbalize the gospel. Why is this idea faulty? What is the difference between a "good person" and a Christ-follower?
- Although our lives must reflect the message that we are speaking, why does love for God's Word and His gospel necessitate that we articulate why we live in a manner worthy of His calling?
- What does our lack of intentionality to share the gospel reveal about our view of the gospel's power? What does it reveal about our attitude toward those whom we refuse to share with?
- Paul was well-versed in the truths of the Old Testament, which is the Scripture that was available to him at that time. He quoted the Old Testament often, but he also preached the truth of the New Covenant, which was Jesus' fulfillment of the Old Testament regulations and the promises of God.

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Why are we so prone to skip parts of Scripture when sharing about our faith? Why do we feel the need to apologize for truths such as God's wrath toward sin? Why is the whole counsel of Scripture valuable and necessary for the gospel?

- Paul spelled out his purpose to take the gospel to the Gentiles in Romans 15:14-21. That purpose led to beatings, being stoned, imprisoned, and falsely accused. How was his love for God expressed in the way he continued in his called purpose? While we may not be persecuted for our faith as Paul was, how do we express our love for God on a daily basis?
- When our circumstances become difficult, we often question God's calling in our lives. What does this indicate about our attitudes toward obeying God and what His peace in the midst of obedience means? What does it look like to walk faithfully in difficult circumstances?
- Paul wanted to do more than offer truth to the Thessalonians; he wanted to invest his life and share his heart with them. What kind of an impact on discipleship did this make to the doctrinal stability and mission of the church there? How does this apply to you?
- Paul considered that showing love to others involved confronting people graciously in their sin. How is that different than what our culture often believes today?
- Paul's affection for the church in Thessalonica is evident in his letters to them. What role did their sense of community have for Paul's encouragement and his mission? How can we foster that kind of community in our small group? In our church?
- How was Paul's love for the Thessalonians evident through the efforts, actions, and sacrifices that he made for them? How is that kind of sacrifice reflective of Christ's love? How do you express love towards those whom you are investing in?
- Why are we so often reluctant to invest our lives in others? What needs to change in our attitudes toward sharing our lives with others so that we will see the eternal value in it? How can we practically help on another in making time and action to share our lives?
- What actions do we need to take to become part of a community centered on the gospel?
- How would our families and world change if we sought God to use the power of the gospel in our lives to love others with abandon?