

Small Group Guide

OUR OBLIGATION TO THE UNREACHED

The Church at Brook Hills

David Platt

August 17, 2014

Romans 1-3

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 August 18-24

1 Samuel 10-16 and Romans 8-14

Where We Are In The Story ~ Old Testament (1 Samuel)

Background of 1 Samuel: Originally, 1 and 2 Samuel were one book but were divided into two books (probably because of length) in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament. 1 Samuel spans Israel's history from the era of the judges to the establishment of a monarchy in Israel, and Samuel, Saul, and David stand as the main characters in this book. While we do not know who wrote 1 and 2 Samuel, one common conjecture assigns 1 Samuel 1-24 to Samuel and the rest to Nathan and Gad who were two prophets and contemporaries of King David.

Structure of 1 Samuel:

- 1 Samuel 1-7 describes the life of Samuel, the last judge of Israel.
- 1 Samuel 8-12 expresses the establishment of a monarchy in Israel with Saul as the first king.
- 1 Samuel 13-15 records the circumstances that led God to reject Saul and his line as rulers in Israel.
- 1 Samuel 16-31 chronicles the life of David beginning when God appointed him as the next king of Israel and concluding with the death of Saul when David assumed the throne.

This Week in 1 Samuel: 1 Samuel 10-16 follows the rise and fall of Saul's kingship in Israel, which presented a dismal start to Israel's monarchy. Within seven chapters, Saul went from being the Lord's anointed to being rejected by the Lord and being tormented by evil spirits. 1 Samuel 13-15 presents three scenes that exemplify Saul's failure as a ruler and what led to his rejection:

- Instead of waiting for Samuel to arrive and offer the burnt offerings and peace offerings, Saul rushed ahead and offered them himself because of the trembling of his people before a battle (1 Sam. 13:1-13). He overstepped his bounds and God's design by doing a task that was specifically for priests. As a result, God sought another to rule His people, and Saul's kingdom would not be eternal in the sense that the Messiah would not come from his line (1 Sam. 13:13-14).

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- Saul made a regrettable, rash vow that neither he nor his army would eat until they had been avenged (1 Sam. 14). Unaware of his father's vow, Jonathan eats honey and strikes down the Philistines, and the people of Israel had to talk Saul out of killing Jonathan. His impulsiveness and vindictiveness are not desired characteristics of a king of Israel.
- Instead of destroying the Amalekites and all of their possessions as commanded by God, Saul killed the people but spared their king, their livestock, and all that had value (1 Sam. 15:1-9). As a result, God sends Samuel to inform Saul that he has been rejected as king. 1 Samuel 16 continues by describing the selection of this next king who will rule Israel and by telling how he gains experience by first serving in Saul's court. God's selection of David is confirmed when the Holy Spirit comes upon him (1 Sam. 16:13).

This theme of the Lord's anointed repeats throughout Samuel (1 Sam. 16:3, 6, 12-13; 24:6; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sam. 1:14, 16; 3:39; 19:21), which is appropriate for the two books that describe Israel's first three kings. But there is a greater significance to this phrase being used with Israel's earliest monarchs. "Anointed One" also stands as the meaning of Messiah. While 1 and 2 Samuel puts forth human kings who are sinful and imperfect in their rule, there is an ultimate "anointed one" (Jesus Christ) who is a righteous ruler and who will be like David but greater as a King. The royal psalms – many written by King David – describe the rule and the characteristics of this King (Ps. 2; 18; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; 144).

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

Background of Romans: Paul wrote the letter to the church in Rome, which was a church he had not visited prior to writing the letter, to prepare them for his arrival before attempting to take the gospel to Spain. However, Paul did not make it to Rome until he was under house arrest while he appealed to Caesar (Acts 28), and as far as we know, he never made it further west than Rome. The church in Rome contained both Jewish and Gentile Christians, and this mixed community provided opportunity for conflict as seen in Romans 14-15. Romans 1:16-17 marks the thesis of Romans, for it explains the gospel as "the righteousness of God" that is available to all who believe. Romans 1-11 gives an overview of God's plan to redeem humanity, and Romans 12-16 describes how we should live in light of what God has accomplished.

Structure of Romans:

- Romans 1:1-15 contains Paul's greetings to the church at Rome and his tentative travel plans.
- Romans 1:16-4:25 unpacks God's wrath towards sinners and His grace towards those who trust in Christ.
- Romans 5-8 describes the hope and obedience of Christ-followers, despite a continued struggle against sin.
- Romans 9-11 surveys God's plan to save both Jews and Gentiles.
- Romans 12:1-15:13 explains how Christians are to live in light of the gospel.
- Romans 15:14-16:27 includes Paul's concluding remarks to the Roman believers, his upcoming travel plans, and his personal greetings.

This Week in Romans: Having spent chapter seven lamenting his inability to fulfill God's commands even though it was his desire to keep them, Paul closes Romans 7 with a note of despair before turning to the hope and freedom that comes with being in Christ. While Romans 3 teaches that we are condemned because of our sin, Romans 8:1 states that there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." As a result of Christ's death and resurrection, the Spirit sets us free from our slavery to sin and death (Rom. 8:2) and enables us to live in a way that reflects our new position as children of God (Rom. 8:5-15). As Paul transitions from the power of sin to the power of Christ in our lives, he emphasizes the past, present, and future work of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8.

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Romans 1-3

The latter part of Romans 8 presents our future inheritance as outweighing any suffering we experience on this earth, and Paul lifts up creation as support for this position. Although creation suffers from a curse as a result of the Fall (Gen. 3), it will be restored. The Holy Spirit is evidence and a foretaste of what is to come for those who are Christ-followers, and the ability we currently have to communicate with God is a foretaste of the future consummation of the believer (the word “consummation” refers to when God will ultimately complete what He intended with His creation). Because of God’s power and promises, we can have hope and assurance with regards to our future.

The topics of predestination and election can be controversial topics when one studies Romans. Romans 9-11 addresses the issue of Israel’s unbelief. God specifically made the Old Covenant with Israel, but what would happen to “God’s chosen people” who did not trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior? How was their unbelief part of God’s plan? Were the Gentiles replacing them under the New Covenant? With Paul being an apostle to the Gentiles, the contents of Romans 9-11 were no doubt topics that he had to address in his ministry, especially if Jews and Gentiles were to be a unified body of believers.

Paul states his thesis for Romans 9-11 in 9:6: “But it is not as though the word of God has failed...” He denies the belief that any particular group of people has a birthright for salvation, for one’s ethnicity or religious heritage does not grant them salvation. Instead, all who trust in Christ for salvation are descendants of Abraham (9:6-13), and salvation is a work of God and a gift that He offers both to Jews and to Gentiles (9:14-29). Paul uses the examples of Isaac and Ishmael and Jacob and Esau to exemplify these truths. If birthright made one saved, then Ishmael’s descendants and Esau’s descendants would have been included as part of God’s people. God did not base His decisions on Ishmael or Esau’s conduct because He chose Isaac and Jacob before they were even born (see Gen. 25:23). As these verses demonstrate, He can call whomever He wants to be part of His people, despite their social status, conduct, or ethnicity.

In understanding the quotation from Malachi 1:2-3 in Romans 9:13 about God loving Jacob and hating Esau, we must learn the Greek meaning of the word “hate” to fully grasp what this verse is expressing. When we think of hating someone, despising and loathing are the connotations we have in mind, but the context and the word used both point towards the idea of rejection. God rejected Esau in the sense that He did not choose Esau to inherit the blessings promised to Abraham. So hate is not used as an emotion in verse thirteen but as an action that God carries out in how He chose one son of Isaac and rejected the other, for logically, only one son could be chosen to carry out the task of continuing the line of descendants.

Paul uses a question and answer format to address issues that would likely come up because of his argument in Romans 9:1-13:

- “What then shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part?” (9:14)
- “You will say to me then, ‘Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’” (9:19)
- “What shall we say, then?” (9:30)

These questions and Paul’s responses cover issues about God’s character and man’s responsibility, and in order to further understand Romans 9 and the doctrine of election, listen to Pastor David’s sermon “The Marvel of God’s Mercy” from December 2010 on Romans 9.

Romans 9:30-10:21 provides an explanation for why Israel has rejected the gospel, and in *Theology of the New Testament*, Frank Thielman summarizes the reason for their rejection:

Both the law and the gospel...pointed in the same direction – toward a right relationship between God and his people, but God has provided Christ, not the law, as the means by which this relationship will be realized. By their rejection of the gospel and their insistence of living in an era dominated by the Mosaic law, many within Israel have implied that their

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Romans 1-3

own works (9:32) and their own righteousness (10:3) were preferable to the righteous status that comes from God through belief in the gospel (10:3).”

Romans 11:1-32 explains how the Gentiles came to be grafted into God’s chosen people, and after eleven chapters describing God’s incredibly detailed plan of redemption, Paul breaks out into praise of God’s knowledge and wisdom in Romans 11:33-36. In Romans 12, the book transitions into how the gospel affects the daily life of the believer. Whereas Romans 1-11 describes what God has done, Romans 12-16 instructs believers in how to live. Romans 12 begins with instructions to the community of faith then expands to imperatives regarding their interaction in wider society then continues into chapter thirteen with how Christians are to live in relation to the government.

Romans 13:8-14:23 focus on love in action, which was particularly important for the multi-ethnic early church’s interactions with each other and witness to the lost. Romans 14 mentions two specific groups of people in the church – the “stronger” and the “weaker.” While the stronger were theologically correct (14:14, 19; 5:1), they were flaunting their views and freedom and not being considerate of those who had different opinions (14:3, 10, 13), and the weak were judging and condemning those who did not uphold the food laws and other Mosaic requirements. As Paul Achtemeier states in his commentary on Romans, “The question at issue in this passage is the relationship between the *right* of Christians to use their freedom and their commensurate *responsibility* to use that undoubted freedom in a way that is constructive rather than destructive of Christian fellowship” (219). Overall, Paul emphasizes the importance of the stronger and the weaker loving each other, avoiding self-righteousness, and making edification and peace their goal instead of debate and judgment.

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 great gift of the gospel. Pray we will all be burdened with an urgent desire to engage the unreached with the saving message of Jesus Christ. Ask God to reveal to us people groups that live in our city and surrounding areas that are unreached with the gospel. Pray we as a

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Romans 1-3

faith family will be known for our love of all peoples and our boldness in sharing with them the truth of the gospel. Pray for more people throughout the world to have access to Scripture in their own languages. Ask God to call out more people from among us and other local churches to go to unreached peoples to plant churches among them.

- *Pray for Our City:* This week we are praying for various outreach efforts to internationals in Birmingham, especially as classes begin at all local universities. We are also praying for Mountain Brook Community Church and Tim Kallam, Pastor.
- *Pray for Our World:* This week we are praying for the Meredith Family as they join our North America Church Planting Team in New York City. Josh, Rachel, and their three children will be joining the Blake Family to live, work, and engage the unreached Gujarati Indian population living in metro New York. Join us this week as we commission out and pray for the Merediths.

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

OUR OBLIGATION TO THE UNREACHED Romans 1-3

Who Are The Unreached?

- A people group among whom there is no indigenous community of believing Christians able to engage the people group with church planting.
- Technically speaking, the percentage of evangelical Christians in this people group is less than 2 percent.

How Many People Are Unreached?

- Over 6,500 people groups are unreached...
 - Including at least two billion individual people.
- Over 3,000 are also unengaged (meaning there is currently no evangelical church planting strategy under way to reach that people group)...
 - Including around 200 million individual people.

What Does It Mean To Be Unreached?

- Practically...
 - You do not currently have access to the gospel.
 - Unless something changes, you will likely be born, live, and die without ever hearing the gospel.
- Biblically...
 - You have knowledge of God.

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- o You have rejected God.
- o You stand condemned before God.
- o You have never heard the good news about how you can be saved by God.

Why Must We Go To The Unreached?

- Because their knowledge of God is only enough to damn them to hell.
- Because the gospel of God is powerful enough to save them for heaven.
- Because the plan of God warrants the sacrifices of His people.
- Because the Son of God deserves the praises of all peoples.

Message Summary

Paul desired to take the good news of Jesus Christ to those who had not yet heard it (Rom. 15:18-21). Paul spends the first three chapters of Romans describing the state of the lost, which demonstrates their need to hear about Christ. Today, there are over 6,500 unreached people groups (or approximately 2 billion people), who have less than 2% evangelical Christians living among them. Unless something changes, they will be born, live, and die without ever hearing the gospel. They have general knowledge of God, but they will still die and go to hell because they have rejected God. The gospel of God is powerful enough to save all those who hear and believe, and the plan of God is to use His people to bring the message of Christ to those who have never heard it. The mission of the Church today is to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of Christ's name among all nations because he is worthy of all praise from all peoples.

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 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.*

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For many Christ-followers, especially those at Brook Hills, the statistics quoted in this sermon about unreached people groups are quite familiar. As a group, discuss why it is important to hear them. How should we respond to hearing that there are 6,500 unreached people groups (or 2 billion people) in the world who have little to no access to the gospel? How should this knowledge affect how we live here in Birmingham? How should these statistics affect how we pray? How should all of this affect our lives this week?

Take time to pray together for the unreached as a small group. Consider utilizing the Joshua Project or Operation World websites to help you pray for the unreached. How can your small group be more committed to pray for unreached people groups on a regular basis? How will you do this? What types of things can you pray for them about?

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?).

- Read Romans 15:18-25. How is this letter from Paul to the Church in Rome similar to a missionary support letter? Who were the unreached in Paul's day? Who are the unreached in our world today? Who are the unreached here in Birmingham? What does ministering to the unreached in Birmingham look like? How can you engage the unreached where you live? What would reaching the unreached look like?
- As we read Romans this week and next week, what is the intended effect of this book for you as an individual and for us as a faith family? What was Paul's purpose for writing this book to the church at Rome? How does this book apply to us today?
- Read Romans 1:17. What are reasons why some Christians act like they are ashamed of the gospel? How do reach a place where we can, not only verbally claim Romans 1:17, but practically live like we're not ashamed of the gospel? What does it even look like to live as though we are unashamed of the gospel? What does it look like for a believer to act ashamed of the gospel?
- Read Isaiah 40:26. Describe at least one example from creation that proves that everyone has some knowledge of God.
- Read Romans 1:24-32; 3:9-12, 19-20. Why can't people be saved by works? Why does it have to be grace? Why do so many people have a hard time accepting God's grace?
- Read Romans 1:18-20. What happens to people who have never heard the gospel? How does this reality jive with God's character? How can we say that God is loving, gracious, and merciful in light of these verses? Why can't a person who lived and died without ever hearing the gospel go to Heaven?
- Read Philippians 2:9-11 and Revelation 5:9-10. One day, people from every tribe and nation will confess that Jesus is Lord. Why is it so important to remember this picture of what is to come? What hope does it offer? How should it affect how we live and minister?
- It is so easy to go back to our same routine and change nothing for the sake of the lost and unreached. Describe at least one way we can live more simply and give more sacrificially in our lives to spread the gospel this week?
- If there is not a person or people group that is outside the power of the gospel and if the gospel is only good news if it gets there on time, name one way you can share this good news with someone in your sphere of influence this week. If you cannot think of a person or a way to share with them, what step(s) do you first need to take? How can you do that?