

Message Discussion Guide

Guest Speaker: Dr. Wess Stafford, Compassion International

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. Wess Stafford

November 23, 2008

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Connect . . .

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

Option 1

Read the following statistics* concerning children around the world and then ask the following questions:

- Every day, almost 16,000 children die from hunger-related causes--one child every five seconds.
- Pregnant women, new mothers who breastfeed infants, and children are among the most at risk of undernourishment.
- In 2006, about 9.7 million children died before they reached their fifth birthday. Almost all of these deaths occurred in developing countries, 4/5 of them in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the two regions that also suffer from the highest rates of hunger and malnutrition.
- Most of these deaths are attributed, not to outright starvation, but to diseases that move in on vulnerable children whose bodies have been weakened by hunger.
- In the developing world, 26 percent of children under 5 are moderately to severely underweight. 10 percent are severely underweight. 11 percent of children under 5 are moderately to severely "wasted," or seriously below weight for one's height, and an overwhelming 32 percent are moderately to severely "stunted," or seriously below normal height for one's age.

* Statistics taken from Bread for the World's website: <http://www.bread.org/learn/hunger-basics/hunger-facts-international.html>.

Questions:

- If your child was included in these statistics, where would you expect help to come from?
- What would give you hope?
- Would you expect people from around the world to come to your family's aid? Why or why not?
- Why do you think that people hear statistics like this, are broken over hearing these things, yet still never do anything in response?

Read Proverbs 31:8-9 to the group. Explain to the learners that we will be discussing the way that the Bible views children and how we as the church are to respond.

Option 2

Set up a computer that has an internet connection and go to the following website to watch a video by Compassion International - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GjJv7SQ9Wvg>. You can also find this video on Compassion International's website at <http://www.compassion.com/child-advocacy/find-your-voice/videos/default.htm>. This video is approximately 2:20 long. Have the learners watch the video in order to get an understanding of the plight of children around the world.

Read Proverbs 31:8-9 to the group. Explain to the learners that we will be discussing the way that the Bible view children and ways that we can respond to children around the world.

Review the Message . . .

Message Discussion Guide

Guest Speaker: Dr. Wess Stafford, Compassion International

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. Wess Stafford

November 23, 2008

Discussion Questions on Matthew 18:1-6

- Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 18:1-6. What did the disciples ask Jesus?
- What was Jesus' response in v. 4 to the disciples' question? (i.e. the greatest is the one who humbles himself like a child)
- Does it surprise you that Jesus' said the greatest in the kingdom is one who is like a child? Why or why not?
- According to v. 3, what must happen in order to enter the kingdom of heaven?
- We can have a tendency to view children as people who will have value to the world in the future (i.e. phrases like, "Children are our future"). How does v. 5 change the way that we should view children? How important is it for us to recognize and respond to children (Remind the learners how v. 6 shows the seriousness of how we respond to children)? Explain your answers.

Application

- What are ways that we devalue children around the world? How do we devalue even our own children, our neighbor's children, and/or our family's children?
- How can we become more childlike in our relationship to Jesus?
- Dr. Stafford said that children are the ones who pay the most for our sins of omission. In what ways is this true? It may be helpful to remind the learners of some of David's sermons on the poor and needy.
- Read the verses that warn against responding improperly to children – Matt. 18:6, 10. Invite the learners to examine their lives to see if they have neglected or devalued children.

Discussion Questions on Matthew 19:13-15

- Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 19:13-15. What was the disciples' response to people bringing their children to Jesus?
- Why do you think the disciples responded this way?
- What was Jesus' response to the disciples' actions?
- In light of the context, what do you think was Jesus' disposition when He responded?
- In view of Matthew 18:1-6, what do you think Jesus means when He says, "The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these?"

Application

- Do you ever respond to your children, your neighbor's children, or a family member's children in the way that the disciples responded to these children? Explain your answer with specifics.
- In what ways do we view children as a hindrance to the "important things?"
- What are some practical ways to treat our children the way that Jesus treated children?
- Why does it not enrage us to see children oppressed around the world?

Further reading on the Bible's view of children

- Enlist a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 3:1, 10-18. Who did God choose to speak to when visions were rare and infrequent? Why would God use a child for this important message?
- Invite someone to read Psalm 8:1-2. What important role do children play in God's economy?
- Read Matthew 21:15-16. How did God use children in this passage to glorify Jesus? How does Jesus' response to the Pharisees show the importance of the children's actions? (i.e. it fulfilled Scripture)

Application

- What are some practical things that we can do to see, think, feel, and act differently when it comes to the way we view and respond to children?

Message Discussion Guide

Guest Speaker: Dr. Wess Stafford, Compassion International

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. Wess Stafford

November 23, 2008

- What are some practical things that our families can do to help children in Birmingham who are in need during this holiday season?
- What are some practical long-term things that our families can do to help children in the world?
- What step will you take to more actively “speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves?”

Challenge:

1. Challenge each member of the small group to come up with a practical step to help children during the holidays.
2. Challenge each member to pray about his/her family helping a child through Compassion International or some other organization. Explain to the learners that this is not something that every family must do, but that we all should pray about this opportunity.
3. Challenge each member to spend some time this week and brainstorm/research ways that our small group can help children around the world.

Close your time in prayer asking the Lord to reveal to each individual and to the small group ways that they can be a voice for the children of the world.