

## Small Group Guide – Week 1

### GOD WHO CREATES

*The Church at Brook Hills,*

*January 4-10, 2010*

*Genesis 1-3*

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**

Encourage learners to describe a time when they began watching a television show or movie in the middle of the plot. Ask the following question: How did the lack of a background affect the way you understood the storyline or ending? How might a lack of information about the beginning of God's story affect our understand Scripture?

Explain that today we will look at essential background information for understanding Scripture.

#### **Option 2**

Invite learners to name several of the "big" stories of the Old Testament that are often taught to children. Ask: **Have you ever told any of these stories in the context of God's overarching story of redemption?**

Explain that today we will look at how God planned to redeem His people from the beginning.

### ***Review the Message . . .***

#### **God is Creator of All Things**

- **God is pre-existent and eternal.**
- **God is the designer of order and purpose.**
- **God is sovereign.**
- **God brought all things into existence.**
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#### **Discussion**

- Enlist one or more learners to read Genesis 1.
- Looking at Verse 1, who existed before the heavens and the earth?
- If God was the Creator and not part of the creation, He is not a created being. What does this truth indicate about His nature and His character?

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- Instruct learners to briefly list what God created during the six days of creation. What came into being without God's command? What does this indicate about His authority?
- How is God's orderly design of creation portrayed in this account of creation? (For example, verses 11, 20, and 30)
- How does God's complete control over creating the universe demonstrate His sovereignty?

#### **Application . . .**

- When we think about the creation story, are we normally more focused on the Creator or the creation? What does our answer indicate about our view of the purpose of creation?
- Do we tend to think of ourselves as the center of God's purpose for creation or do we think of God as the center? Why?
- How should we react to the truth that God brought everything into being, including us? [Leader Note: God exists completely independent of us; we are completely dependent on Him]
- How does our understanding of God's role as Creator affect how we live each day? How does it affect the way we view our purpose?
- How does God's sovereignty in creation reveal His sovereignty in our lives?
- What comfort and encouragement do we have in God's sovereignty?

#### **God's Authority is Revealed as Creator**

- **As Creator, God has the authority to create.**
  - He creates by His will.
  - He creates for His purpose.
- **As Creator, God has the authority to judge.**
  - Sin mars God's design.
- **As Creator, God has the authority to redeem.**

#### **Discussion**

- What phrases or ideas are repeated throughout the creation account of Genesis 1 each time God creates something new?
- How do the words spoken by God and the subsequent events that follow display the power of God's will to create?
- Enlist a learner to read Genesis 1:28-30. How does God's intentionality in creation demonstrate that His creation was not random but designed with purpose?
- In Genesis 1:31, how is God's creation described?
- Enlist two learners to read Genesis 2:15-17 and 3:1-7. How is God's authority acknowledged and rejected in these events?
- Read Genesis 3:14-23. How was God's perfect design marred by the sin of Adam and Eve?

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- Why did God have to bring judgment to Adam and Eve? How did He show compassion and judgment to them?
- Looking at Genesis 3:14-15, how does God give a picture of His continued authority in creation and His desire to redeem His people?
- How does this need for redemption and God's compassion toward His people set the stage for God's acts throughout history?

#### **Application . . .**

- How does it make us feel to think that God created us by His will?
- How does knowing that God creates with purpose affect how we view our lives?
- Although the sin of Adam and Eve tainted the perfect nature of God's creation, how can we best allow God's design to guide our worldview and even our daily decisions?
- How does North American culture try to convince us that we have no judge?
- How do we think and act as if we are our own judges?
- How does submission to God's authority to judge influence our beliefs about moral and ethical issues?
- How does our understanding of God's intent to redeem His people affect the way that we view all of Scripture?
- What does the Creation account in Scripture reveal to us about the character of God? How should that revelation affect the way we live everyday?
- Why is God's plan to redeem humanity the only one that has the power to work?

## Small Group Guide – Week 2

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### PART 1: REDEMPTION PROMISED TO A NEW COVENANT PEOPLE

#### Chapter 1: Believing God

*The Church at Brook Hills,*

*January 11-17, 2010*

*Genesis 12:1-9*

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**

Invite learners to share about a time when they received a promise that was not fulfilled for a long time. Encourage them to describe their attitude during the time of waiting.

Explain that today we will talk about how Abraham's obedience was immediate even though God's promises were not fulfilled in his lifetime.

#### **Option 2**

Invite learners to discuss a situation in which they were forced to make an important decision without much information. Ask: **How did you feel trying to make this decision? How did you feel about the final decision?**

Explain that today we will talk about Abraham and how he took a risk to obey God.

### ***Review the Message . . .***

**In His holiness, God demonstrates grace to sinners.**

- **God's desire is for redemption.**
- **God's desire is for the nations.**
- **God's desire is to work through His people.**

#### **Discussion**

- Enlist a learner to read Genesis 12:1-9
- What great acts of judgment had God completed prior to Genesis 12? Why were His actions just?
- His most recent act of dispersing people throughout the world helped to accomplish His command to multiply and fill the earth. How is creating a nation for Himself from Abraham actually an act toward redemption of the judged world?
- Did God need Abram in order to build a people for Himself?
- Looking even further into Genesis (Chapter 13, for instance) how did God show grace in continuing to work through Abram?

## Small Group Guide – Week 2

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### PART 1: REDEMPTION PROMISED TO A NEW COVENANT PEOPLE

#### Chapter 1: Believing God

*The Church at Brook Hills,*

*January 11-17, 2010*

*Genesis 12:1-9*

#### Application . . .

- Why do some of us see the God of the Old Testament solely as a judgmental God? Why is this view dangerous?
- Why is it important for us to see God's redemptive nature from the beginning?
- How can we align our lives with God's desires for the world?
- What responsibility do we have to be available for God to work through us? How can we make ourselves more available?

**God calls His people to Himself, that He may bless them.**

- **God's call demands complete dependence upon Him.**
- **God's call demands our obedience in the face of the unknown.**
- **God's call demands we trust in His promises.**
- **God's call is for a global purpose.**

#### Discussion

- How would God's call disrupt Abram's life?
- In what ways did God's call on Abram's life make him rely completely on God? What securities did Abram have to leave behind?
- Describe the directions that God gave to Abram. How much of the details did Abram know before he began to move?
- Read Genesis 11:29-30. How did Abram have to trust God to make a great nation of him if he had no children? If he did not trust this aspect of God's promise, how would the rest of the covenant be affected?
- What was God's ultimate purpose in blessing Abram and calling this nation to Himself as His chosen people?
- How is God's heart for the nations revealed in this covenant?

#### Application . . .

- Why is relying on God so difficult for us? Why is it scary?
- How can our fear to obey illustrate our distrust in God's ability and/or His character?
- How do we often ignore God's calling on our lives under the disguise of not having enough information?
- What things or people are we not willing to leave in order to be obedient to God?
- How do our actions demonstrate our belief or disbelief in God's ability to fulfill His promises?

**God's call requires a response to His invitation.**

- **Our obedience to God's call ensures we will live for His purpose.**
- **Our worship of God rightly gives Him glory.**

## Small Group Guide – Week 2

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### PART 1: REDEMPTION PROMISED TO A NEW COVENANT PEOPLE

#### Chapter 1: Believing God

*The Church at Brook Hills,*

*January 11-17, 2010*

*Genesis 12:1-9*

#### Discussion

- Enlist a learner to read Genesis 12:4-9 again.
- How did Abram demonstrate his trust in God?
- Remind learners that Jesus was ultimately born through the line of Abraham.
- By obeying God completely, how did Abram become a part of God's plan to redeem humanity?
- How did Abram respond to God's covenant as he journeyed through Canaan? How did this worship demonstrate his belief that God was the true God and worthy of the worship of all of the families of the earth?

#### Application . . .

- If God does not need us for His work, why should we want to be a part of it?
- How can we be encouraged that God uses sinners?
- Which areas of life are the most difficult to obey God?
- How does our obedience testify to our relationship with Him?
- Why do we do missions? When can missions become a means to our own glory?
- Why must obedience and worship go hand-in-hand?

## Small Group Guide – Week 3

### GOD WHO SUSTAINS

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*The Church at Brook Hills,*

*January 18-24, 2010*

*Genesis 37-50*

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**

Encourage learners to share about a time when they endured a difficult circumstance and later saw a divine purpose in it. Ask: **How did this experience affect how you viewed other difficulties in your life?**

Explain that today we will look at how God is in control of even the most difficult circumstances in our lives.

#### **Option 2**

Invite learners to describe events that make people question God and His goodness in their lives. Ask: **Why is it easy to question God in these situations?**

Explain that today we will look at how God is intimately involved in our lives, even when it seems otherwise.

### **Review the Message . . .**

#### **Story Review**

**Divide the passage in Genesis into three sections by chapters 37-39, 40-45, and 46-50, and enlist three learners (or more) to summarize the events of Joseph's life in these chapters.**

#### **Discussion**

- Describe Joseph's actions throughout all of these events?
- Did Joseph do anything to deserve or cause His circumstances—good or bad?
- Describe God's role in Joseph's life. How is God's character revealed through these events?

#### **Application . . .**

- Why do we desire to place blame on someone for our circumstances?
- Why are we quick to believe we can work for and deserve good situations but do not deserve unfavorable circumstances?

- How and why do we tend to believe that our obedience to God should result in our safety and comfort?
- Why is our attitude toward God often negative when bad things happen? How should the story of Joseph change our attitude toward God about bad things that happen to us?

**God is sovereign over . . .**

- **People**
  - **His purpose was not dependent on people.**
  - **His purpose was not deterred by people.**

**Discussion**

- Read Genesis 39:2-6 and 21-23. Looking at Joseph's time in Potiphar's house and in prison, did God rely on these men or Joseph's abilities to make him successful in those places?
- How does Joseph's complete lack of control over his life reflect God's ultimate control?
- How did Joseph's faithfulness allow him to be usable by God?
- How did the cupbearer's forgetfulness in Gen. 40:23 affect Joseph's chances to get out of prison? Why is God's independence of him important?
- Think about the decisions of Joseph's brothers, Potiphar's wife, and Potiphar. How do their actions seem to contradict God's plans?
- How does God's independence of people illustrate His sovereignty?

**Application . . .**

- How does it make you feel to know that God is not dependent on you for His purposes?
- How does it make you feel to know that you or anyone else cannot keep God's purposes from being accomplished?
- How can we allow Him to change our hearts so that we become a godly vessel for His purpose?
- How does our belief in these truths affect how we view the world around us, and our own life at this very moment?

- **Circumstances**
  - **God guided the details to sustain Joseph through His protection and through His presence.**
  - **God used and caused events to accomplish His purpose.**

**Discussion**

- Enlist two learners to read Genesis 37:26-27 and 39:20. How did God protect Joseph's life in these situations?
- How was the outcome seemingly horrible and unfair to Joseph even though his life was spared? How did God sustain Joseph in these circumstances?
- Enlist three learners to read Genesis 37:36, 39:20, and 41:15-16. How did God direct what appears to be coincidence in these situations?
- How did Joseph's locations put him in the right places at the right times for God to work through him?

**Application . . .**

- In what ways is it easy to miss God's work in our circumstances?
- What is most often our attitude toward God when our plans are "messed up"?
- How does this illustrate our desire to control our lives and tendency to forget God in our plans and dreams?
- How do our attitudes toward our own plans often interfere with our praise of God for His work in our lives?
- What is our responsibility in being active toward what we believe to be God's plan for our lives?
- How should we view our circumstances when our plans don't turn out like we expected?

- **Outcome**

- **God directed the final outcome.**
- **God directed all the details for His purpose.**

**Discussion**

- Enlist a learner to read Genesis 45:9-11. What was God's purpose in Joseph's life?
- Remind learners that Joseph's family was part of God's chosen people and the beginnings of the nation of Israel.
- Name all of the minute details that God controlled to get Joseph to the place of preserving his family.
- How did God use the sin of Joseph's brothers to bring about their ultimate redemption?
- How is God's love for His people evident through His actions?

**Application . . .**

- Why is it easier to see God's hand in our lives as we look to the past?
- Knowing God has His hand in our lives at all times, why is it difficult to trust His sovereignty in our present situations?
- How is our trust in Him reflected in our faithfulness at all points in our lives?
- How did God use the sin of wicked people to bring about your ultimate redemption?

**Small Group Guide – Week 3**  
**GOD WHO SUSTAINS**

*The Church at Brook Hills,*

*January 18-24, 2010*

*Genesis 37-50*

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- How does God's direction of our lives for His purposes give us hope?

## Small Group Guide – Week 4

### GOD WHO UPHOLDS

*The Church at Brook Hills,*

*January 25-31, 2010*

*Job*

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 . . .**

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#### **Option 1**

Ask: **Is suffering always a negative event in people's lives?** Allow several learners to share their answers. Encourage learners to try to list reasons why suffering or difficulties can be beneficial and to share any personal examples that they would.

Explain that today we will look at Job's life and how suffering brought about great gain in his life.

#### **Option 2**

Invite willing learners to share a time when they experienced suffering. Ask: **What questions did you ask? What was your attitude toward God? Was there any long-term benefit to you through your suffering?**

Explain that today we will look at how Job responded to suffering in his life.

### **Review the Message . . .**

**Suffering is often unexplainable.**

- **Job followed God's commands faithfully.**
- **Job's attention came from his integrity.**
- **Job was unaware of spiritual conflict.**

#### **Discussion**

- Enlist a learner to read Job 1:1-12.
- Describe Job's service to God. How did God describe Job?
- Why did Satan notice Job? Why was God pointing him out to Satan?
- Was Job ever made aware of the spiritual conflict that arose in heaven?

#### **Application . . .**

- What is our first reaction to seeing that God pointed Job out to Satan? What does our answer indicate about our belief in God's sovereignty and goodness?
- Why does our culture often feel that believers who are faithful do not deserve to suffer? Is that a biblical perspective?

- What is the point in serving God faithfully if we may encounter the same, if not greater, hardships as everyone else?
- Would suffering actually be easier if we understood the reason? Why does it matter?

**God is always worthy of worship**

- **God remains in control of all situations.**
- **God's worth is not dependent on circumstances.**

**Discussion**

- Enlist several learners to read Job 1:13-2:13.
- List the categories of loss that Job experienced.
- Looking at Job 2:3, 5-6, who was actually in control of Job's suffering?
- In Job 2:3 God asserts responsibility for Job's first round of sufferings. What does this indicate about God's supreme control in the world?
- In Job 1:12 and 2:5-6, Satan basically asks God for permission to cause harm to Job. What does this indicate about God's control over Satan?
- How did Job respond to these disasters?
- Why did Job praise God?

**Application . . .**

- Why can it make us feel uneasy to know that God gave permission to harm Job?
- What kind of God would He be if He were not in control? Would we rather He be helpless to Satan's desires or in control of His plan? Why?
- How is there comfort in knowing that He is control in the midst of our suffering?
- Why is it often difficult to praise God in our suffering?
- What are we saying about God if we believe that His worth is determined by our circumstances? Would He truly be God if He were dependent upon our lives?

**Suffering is not partial.**

- **Job's suffering was not a product of discipline, sin, or disbelief.**
- **Followers of God are not immune to suffering.**

**Discussion**

- Invite a learner to summarize the basic gist of the interactions between Job and his "friends." (The ESV Study Bible outline in the introduction to the book of Job is thorough in summarizing the content if you wish to go further in depth.) Read Job 5:17-18. What did Job's friends assert about Job?
- What did their assertion assume about God?
- Enlist a learner to read Job 42:7. Why did God rebuke Job's friends? What did God's rebuke of the friends indicate about their beliefs?

**Application . . .**

- How can we be true friends to those who are suffering?
- Why do we often say things contrary to God's word in an effort to comfort or give advice? Why is this so dangerous?
- Why does it scare us to think that believers should be immune from suffering?
- How can suffering in the life of a believer bring glory to God?

**God often reveals Himself during suffering.**

- **God remains supreme at all times.**
- **True understanding of God demands submission.**

**Discussion**

- Enlist several learners to read Job 38-39.
- How did God respond to Job's request for vindication from God?
- Describe the picture that God painted of Himself to Job.
- Enlist a learner to read Job 42:1-6.
- How did Job respond to God's conversation?
- What does Job admit about his knowledge of God's ways?
- How did Job indicate that he had grown in his knowledge of God?
- What role did Job's suffering play in revealing God more deeply to Job more than prosperity could have?

**Application . . .**

- How can it be comforting to rest in the truth that we do not understand God's ways? How can it be scary or unsettling? Why?
- Why should we trust and take comfort in the God who is supreme in all matters?
- Why does suffering often help us to know God more deeply than times of non-suffering?
- What are questions that we often ask during times of suffering? What are questions that we should ask during times of suffering?

## Small Group Guide – Week 5

### GOD WHO HEARS

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*February 1-7, 2010*

*Exodus 1-4*

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 . . .**

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#### **Option 1**

Sometimes circumstances seem to be leading one way, but then God intervenes and everything changes. Ask learners to describe such a time in their lives and then how God acted in it.

Explain that this week we are reading the story of how God acted in a mighty, new way among His people and everything changed.

#### **Option 2**

Ask learners to describe a time in their lives when they thought God was "silent" or had forgotten them. How did it feel? What happened to break the silence? How do they view that time of waiting now? What was God up to?

Explain that this week we are reading the story of God's call to Moses and how God was beginning to fulfill His promises made long before to Abraham.

### **Review the Passage . . .**

**God is always at work and is always in control.**

- **Sometimes God seems silent. He is not defined by our schedule.**
- **But God is always working out His story of redemption in the world.**
- **God's people can be confident that He remains active on their behalf for their good and for the sake of His own glory.**

#### **Discussion**

- Read Exodus 1. (Leaders may need to give a very brief description of the events of Exodus chapters 1-15 if their group is not familiar with the story.)
- Reread 1:1-7, 12, 20. How is God's promise to Abraham being fulfilled?
- Read Exodus 12:40. 430 years is a long time for us. But God was building a nation the entire time. God's plans were on schedule. Read Genesis 15:13-14.
- How do fulfilled promises and prophecies glorify God and His Word?

#### **Application . . .**

- How can God’s trustworthiness give us hope in the midst of difficult circumstances?
- How can God’s faithfulness inspire our patience and trust?
- How can this story teach us to pray in the midst of suffering?
- How can these Scriptures encourage us as we pray, give, and go for the lost of Birmingham and the world, even those who seem unreachable? (i.e., they’ve been followers of another religion for so many years; they’ve personally rejected God for so long, etc.). See Revelation 7:9-10.

**God can use radical obedience to create radical change.**

- **The midwives and Moses’ mother took big risks. God blessed it.**
- **God uses behind-the-scenes people to accomplish His purposes.**
- **God orchestrated everything according to His will.**

**Discussion**

- Read Exodus 2:1-10. Review 1:15-22.
- Why did the midwives risk disobeying the king? (1:17)
- Why do you think Moses’ mother decided to hide Moses?
- Describe all the factors that had to come together for baby Moses to be protected and ultimately saved?
- Who is in control here, God or the pharaoh?
- What role did God use Moses’ mother to play in the deliverance of Israel?

**Application . . .**

- What is the root of radical obedience?
- What are the results of radical obedience in this passage of Scripture and beyond?
- Did God bless this type of obedience? Will God bless radical obedience today? Can this obedience take many forms, “big” or “small”? Does radical obedience always have a happy ending (from an earthly perspective)? Why or why not?
- How can radical obedience create radical change in the world? What kind of radical change do you/does God want to see in the world? What kind of radical obedience will it take?
- How can this Scripture encourage those who work behind-the-scenes?
- How can God’s sovereignty give confidence to our lives?
- What are some ways God has protected you?

**God hears the cries of His people.**

- **God always hears our prayers.**
- **He sees our suffering and cares for us.**
- **God sent a deliverer for Israel. God sent His Son to deliver us.**

**Discussion**

- Enlist several learners to read Exodus 2:11 through Exodus 4 (end).
- Review 2:23-25. Did God hear the people when they cried out earlier (assuming they did)? Why or why not? Why did God not act earlier?
- Does God care about our sufferings?
- Review Exodus 3:7-9. Was God unaware of their sufferings earlier? Did prayer tell God something He didn't know? Who is ultimately the Deliverer of Israel? (verse 8) How does this passage reinforce Job's statements in Job 19:25-27?
- Who is our Deliverer? What has He delivered us from? How is Moses a foreshadowing of Christ?

**Application . . .**

- Why should we keep on praying in the midst of suffering?
- How can God's intimate knowledge of our problems and His care for us give us comfort?
- What has Jesus delivered you from? What is He delivering you from today?
- Give thanks to God for delivering you.

**God is faithful.**

- **God does not give up on His plans.**
- **God does not give up on His people. (See also 2 Timothy 2:13)**
- **God is merciful to us. Our response is worship and obedience.**

**Discussion**

- More than 400 years passed. But God did not forget His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. How does God introduce Himself to Moses? (3:6)
- How does the name "I AM" give us insight into God's view of time? Insight into his greatness?
- Did God give up on Moses after he killed an Egyptian? Did God give up on Moses when he was tending sheep in the wilderness? Did God give up on Moses when he made excuses? Why not? What does this tell us about God?
- What is the proper response to God's Deliverer? (Read 4:31)

**Application . . .**

- Do you believe God has plans for you, to use you? Why or why not? What do you think are some of those plans? What are some of the plans God has revealed in His Word?
- Does God give up on His people when they fail, when they sin? Is God patient with us? What are the results of our disobedience? What are the results of our obedience?
- How does God's faithfulness convict us? How does it encourage us after we sin?

## Small Group Guide – Week 5

### GOD WHO HEARS

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*The Church at Brook Hills*

*February 1-7, 2010*

*Exodus 1-4*

- God mercifully sent His Son to redeem us. What is our response to be?
- Spend some time praising God for His mercies.

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## ***Connect . . .***

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

### **Option 1**

Ask members of your group to share about a time when God led them in a new, radical, or unexpected direction. How did God show them His power and faithfulness? What were their emotions at the beginning of the experience? What did they learn about themselves and about God as they went through this change?

Explain that today we are looking at a defining moment in salvation history: the exodus from slavery in Egypt.

### **Option 2**

Ask members of your group to describe a time when they experienced a serious display of God's power - a hurricane, tornado, flood, lightning storm, etc. How did it make them feel? How did it change their view of their control over life?

Explain that this week we are discussing the story of how God worked powerfully and miraculously to deliver his people from Egypt.

## ***Review the Passage . . .***

### **God is our Deliverer.**

- **God's redemption cannot be hindered by evil.**
- **God's mighty power will always prevail.**
- **God's purposes cannot fail.**
- **God brings freedom from slavery, death and sin.**

### **Discussion**

- Summarize the events of Exodus 7-14.
- Do you think the Israelites ever doubted God's power during the 10 plagues? Why or why not? Did it ever seem like Pharaoh's will was stronger than God's?
- Ultimately why do you think God sent 10 plagues? Couldn't He have shown His superior power in one plague at the very beginning?
- Think of Pharaoh. Why do people rage against God? Why do wicked men continue in wickedness? What is their ultimate end?
- How does God use evil to accomplish His purposes?
- Read 14:31. What is the Israelites' response to God's powerful deliverance?

**Application . . .**

- How can the story of the exodus encourage and comfort His people today?
- How does the story of the exodus relate to Christ's deliverance of us? How did He save us? What were we enslaved by? What have we been freed from? What are we freed to do?
- Read Exodus 15:1-21 together in response to God's great deeds.

**God provides for and preserves His people.**

- **God delivered His people through the Passover.**
- **God preserved His people at the Red Sea.**
- **God supplied His people with manna and quail and water.**
- **God knows His people's needs. They must trust Him.**

**Discussion**

- Read Exodus 12:1-30.
  - How did God provide for His people in the Passover? How is Jesus our Passover Lamb?
  - What are your reactions to this story?
- Read Exodus 14:10-31.
  - In verse 10, of whom are the Israelites terrified? Whom do they fear in verse 31? Why is this significant?
  - In fear, the Israelites cried out to God. Then what did they do? (verses 11-12).
  - What is Moses' response? Does he put the attention on himself or someone else? Who will fight for the people? What do the people need to do?
- Read Exodus 16:11 and 17:6.
  - How did God provide? Did He tire of providing? Why do you think the people kept complaining?
- Read John 6:32, 33, 35, 51; John 7:37-38. How do you see Jesus in Exodus?

**Application . . .**

- Does God know our needs and our circumstances? Why do we fear in trying times?
- What comfort can we draw from these stories of deliverance? What do we need to confess?
- Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. What does the Holy Spirit, writing through Paul, want us to learn from the Israelites' experience?
- How is Jesus the answer to all our needs?
- How can we learn to be still and trust God?

**God acts on behalf of His people for the sake of His glory among the nations.**

- **God will draw people to Himself.**

- **God will send His people out to bless the nations.**
- **God will ensure that all nations see His glory.**

**Discussion**

- Read Exodus 12:26-27. How is God drawing future generations to Himself?
- Is it possible that God drew some Egyptians to Himself through the plagues? (see 9:20 and 12:38).
- Read Exodus 15:14-16. How is God gaining fame among the nations?
- Read Exodus 18:1, 9-12. What is Jethro's response to the exodus?

**Application . . .**

- Does God act for His people only for their sakes?
- Is God's plan of redemption only for some people or for all people?
- How do our testimonies serve as a witness to others?
- How does judgment draw people to God? How does mercy do the same?
- How should God's desire for the nations affect our hearts?
- Why is God worthy of all worship?

**God's laws are good and just.**

- **God does not desire empty obedience.**
- **God desires a heart that loves His law.**
- **God saves His people through Christ.**

**Discussion**

- Read Exodus 20:1-21.
- What strikes you as you read these verses again?
- How do these laws reflect God's perfect character?
- Read Exodus 22:21-27 and 23:1-9. How do these laws reflect God's character?
- Are these laws difficult to follow? Why or why not? Is perfect obedience possible? Why or why not?

**Application . . .**

- Since perfect obedience is not possible, what/Who does the Law drive us to? Who alone has perfectly fulfilled the Law? Who alone can save us and give us His righteousness? (Romans 3:19-26; Philippians 3:8-9)
- How can our hearts be changed to be like Christ's?
- How do these laws relate to contemporary American society?
- How can God's Word affect our business, our politics, our family life, etc?

## Small Group Guide – Week 7 GOD WHO DWELLS WITH US

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*February 15- 21, 2010*

*Exodus 29-40; Leviticus 1-10*

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**

Ask members of your group to share about a time when they felt the presence of God in an especially intimate way. Examples might include: a meaningful worship experience, a time of ministry, a special family event, on a retreat, observing a natural wonder, during prayer, etc. Did they feel humbled, awed, afraid, comforted, loved, blessed, etc?

Explain that this week's study introduces the Tabernacle, which was an expression of God's intimate presence, His dwelling place among His covenant people in the wilderness.

#### **Option 2**

Ask members of your group to share about times when they had to follow directions very carefully in order to succeed. Everything hinged on the details. Ask them to describe the situation and how they felt. Were they able to follow the directions as precisely as necessary? Why or why not?

Explain that this week's study introduces the Tabernacle, which was an expression of God's intimate presence, His dwelling place among His covenant people in the wilderness. God gave very precise details on how it was to be constructed and expected every detail to be followed precisely for a reason.

### **Review the Passage . . .**

#### **God revealed Himself to Moses.**

- **God is merciful. God is just. God is jealous.**
- **God's glory is God's greatest concern.**
- **God gave Moses the desires of his heart.**

#### **Discussion**

- Read Exodus 34:1-14.
- How does God describe Himself in His appearance to Moses? What do those perfections/characteristics mean?
- Why do you think He revealed Himself to Moses this way?
- What are Moses' three requests of the Lord? Why do you think he made these requests?
- What is the Lord's response? What does His response tell us about Him?

## Small Group Guide – Week 7 GOD WHO DWELLS WITH US

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*February 15- 21, 2010*

*Exodus 29-40; Leviticus 1-10*

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- From verses 10 and 14, what do we see as the intent of God's action?

### **Application . . .**

- How do we sometimes misunderstand the mercy of God? How do we sometimes misunderstand the justice of God? Who can we look to in order to properly balance our perspective? (Colossians 1:15)
- How is the awesome work of the Lord shown among the nations today?
- What does it mean for God to be a jealous God? What does it mean for us to be jealous for God's name? How can we esteem Him more?
- Do you think we really God's presence with us, like Moses did?

### **God was with Israel in the Tabernacle.**

- **The Tabernacle was the place where God's mercy and justice met.**
- **The Tabernacle was holy because God is holy. His presence was to be honored.**
- **God's people were led by His presence**

### **Discussion**

- Briefly discuss Exodus 35-39, preparing the Tabernacle. Read Exodus 40. (At least 40:34-38.)
- How was the Tabernacle the place where God's mercy and justice met?
- How was the Tabernacle treated as holy (set apart) by the people? Why do you think God wanted the Tabernacle to be treated in such a special manner? Why so much care in the preparations?
- Read Leviticus 10:1-3 and Hebrews 10:19-22. Can we come before the Lord any way we want? What/Who is the only way we can draw near to God?
- Why do you think God's directing presence was so valued by the Israelites? (40:36-38) Do you think it was comforting? Frightening?
- How is the Tabernacle (God's presence) part of the answer to Moses' request in Exodus 34:9 and 33:18?

### **Application . . .**

- How is God present with us today? Do we respect and honor the presence of God as we should? Why or why not?
- Do we rely on God to lead us today like the Israelites did? How so? How can we sometimes reject the leading of God?
- Do we follow God's commands for worship with the same intensity that the Israelites did? How do we prepare ourselves for worship? Do we worship in spirit and in truth? Do we lift up Christ above all in our worship?

## Small Group Guide – Week 7

### GOD WHO DWELLS WITH US

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*February 15- 21, 2010*

*Exodus 29-40; Leviticus 1-10*

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- God equipped His people to provide everything for the Tabernacle. What parallels can be drawn to the Church today? What parallels can be drawn to our individual lives?
- How is the Church, the new tabernacle, the expression of where God's mercy and justice meet?

#### **The Tabernacle points to Christ and then to the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.**

- **God in Christ came to dwell among us.**
- **The Incarnation is worthy of awe.**
- **The Holy Spirit indwells the children of God.**
- **The Spirit lives in us, guides us, and applies mercy/assurance and conviction to our hearts. This is an amazing truth!**

#### **Discussion**

- Read John 1:14. John is intentionally referring back to the concept of the Tabernacle in his word choice ("dwelt among us" ESV). Also read Colossians 1:19.
- How is Christ's Incarnation similar but superior to the Tabernacle? Read John 1:15-18. What do we see in Jesus that was not as clear before?
- Compare and contrast Luke 2:6-7 with Exodus 40:34-35. What do we see of God's nature in these two accounts?
- Read Hebrews 9:1-15, 23-28. How did Christ's death fulfill everything the Tabernacle (and later Temple) represented?
- Now God dwells in His people, how? Read John 3:3-8.
- Read 1 Corinthians 3:16 (note the "you" is plural; the church) and 1 Corinthians 6:19. Who is God's temple? Where is God's presence? How is this humbling? How is it also challenging?
- Read John 14:16-17; John 16:13; Acts 1:8; Romans 8:26-27; Ephesians 3:16-19; and 1 Thessalonians 1:5. How does the presence of the Holy Spirit within us help and strengthen us? What does He do in our lives?

#### **Application . . .**

- Read Philippians 2:5-11. How should the humility of the Incarnation affect our attitudes?
- Christ died once for sin. Contrast that with the incredible number of sacrifices required of the Israelites (daily, yearly). How should a full grasp of Christ's atoning death affect our view of our sin? How does this increase our gratitude and love for Christ? How does this cut off any possibility of salvation by works? When we are convicted of sin, to whom should we turn? When we feel guilty for already confessed sin, what should our response be?
- If the Church is God's Temple how should we treat each other? If our bodies are God's Temple, how should we treat ourselves?

**Small Group Guide – Week 7**  
**GOD WHO DWELLS WITH US**

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*February 15- 21, 2010*

*Exodus 29-40; Leviticus 1-10*

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- How should the Holy Spirit's presence comfort us? Convict us?
- Why do you think our lives are not always characterized by the power of the Spirit?
- How does the Holy Spirit's presence in us confirm the love of God for us?
- Read Romans 8:26-27 again. How can these verses give us confidence in prayer?

## Small Group Guide – Week 8

### GOD WHO MAKES US HOLY

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*February 22-28, 2010*

*Leviticus 11-27; Numbers 1-5*

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and applying 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**

Ask members of your group to share about a time when someone gave them something good that was unexpected and undeserved. What was it? How did it make them feel? How did it affect their view of the other person?

Explain that today we will be studying the Day of Atonement, how God mercifully provided for the forgiveness of sins before the time of Christ's arrival on earth.

#### **Option 2**

Ask members of your group to share about a time when someone stood up for them, or deflected criticism, or took some "heat" in their place. It could be a parent, a sibling, a spouse, a co-worker, etc. How did the experience make them feel? How did it affect their view of the other person? Why do they think the other person acted the way that they did? What were the consequences of their actions?

Explain that today we will be studying the Day of Atonement. At one point in the ceremony, the sins of the people were placed on a scapegoat that was then driven into the wilderness. This goat represented the removal of sin from the camp.

### **Review the Passage . . .**

**On the Day of Atonement the high priest (as the people's representative) came before the mercy seat of God.**

#### **Discussion**

- Read Leviticus 10:1-3 and Leviticus 16:1-5.
- What was the consequence for entering the presence of God in an inappropriate manner?
- Where did God appear? Is there significance in this location?
- How does God tell Aaron to prepare to enter the Holy Place? What is the emphasis of the preparation? How is purity or holiness represented? (see v. 4)
- In verses 3 and 5, what does Aaron bring with him? (offerings/sacrifices)

#### **Application**

- Read 1 Corinthians 3:16. Remember the "you" is plural. Since the church is the temple of the Holy Spirit, how should this affect our approach to corporate worship?
- How do we prepare or not prepare for corporate worship today?

## Small Group Guide – Week 8

### GOD WHO MAKES US HOLY

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*February 22-28, 2010*

*Leviticus 11-27; Numbers 1-5*

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- What should be the emphasis of our preparation (internal or external or both)?
- What sacrifice paves the way for us to have fellowship with God? (see Romans 3:25, which describes Christ in a way that references the Day of Atonement)
- What offerings can we bring to God in worship as a church and as individuals, not to earn forgiveness, but as a response to forgiveness?

**Aaron had to sacrifice offerings for himself and for the people.**

#### Discussion

- Read Leviticus 16:6-19.
- Who does Aaron sacrifice for first?
- Who does he sacrifice for next? (v. 15)
- What is the scope of the forgiveness offered? (v. 16)
- In verse 13, what is the purpose of the incense? Does Aaron get a full view of the glory of God?

#### Application

- Read Hebrews 7:27 and Hebrews 9:12. Did Jesus need to sacrifice for Himself? Why not? What did Jesus offer instead of the blood of goats and bulls? What is the scope of Jesus' sacrifice?
- Can anyone really atone for his or her sins apart from trusting in the work of Jesus Christ?
- How should Jesus' perfect sacrifice give us perfect assurance of our forgiveness?
- Is any sin beyond the scope of God's forgiveness? Explain.
- Read Hebrews 1:3. How do we see the glory of God? How is it unveiled? How should this focus our worship?
- Read 2 Corinthians 3:18. Who is being transformed into the image of God (reflecting his glory)? How? To what degree? How should this humble us? Encourage us?

**Symbolically, the scapegoat took on and then removed the sins of the people, along with the other sacrifices.**

#### Discussion

- Read Leviticus 16:20-28.
- How many sins does the live goat representatively take on itself?
- How does v. 22 represent the forgiveness and removal of sins? Read Psalm 103:12.
- Once forgiven, does God remember our sin? Explain. (See Isaiah 43:25.)

#### Application

- As forgiven saints, how should we view our past sins?
- Read Hebrews 13:11-13. How does the writer of Hebrews connect Jesus to the burning of the bodies outside the camp?

## Small Group Guide – Week 8

### GOD WHO MAKES US HOLY

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*February 22-28, 2010*

*Leviticus 11-27; Numbers 1-5*

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- Since Christ bore our shame is there any reason we should be ashamed of Him? Nevertheless, in what ways or situations are we sometimes ashamed to identify with Him?
- Read Hebrews 13:14-16. How should we now live in response to Christ's sacrifice? In relation to God? In relation to others?

**The Day of Atonement occurred yearly and was marked by rest and repentance. Christ offers something much better; He sacrificed Himself once for all. Our response is to rest in His work and repent of our sins.**

#### Discussion

- Read Leviticus 16:29-34.
- How often did the Day of Atonement occur?
- How many people were involved? Who was the one person who could enter the Tabernacle before the mercy seat? How is Jesus our High Priest? How is Jesus our Perfect Sacrifice?
- How were the people supposed to observe the Day of Atonement? (v. 31)
- How are repentance and rest connected? In whom were the Israelites to put their faith?

#### Application

- Read Hebrews 9:25-26 and 10:11-14. How is Christ's sacrifice better than all others?
- Is there any way to God except through Christ and His death on our behalf?
- How should we mourn our sin?
- How can we rest in Christ's sacrifice on our behalf?

## Small Group Guide – Week 9

### GOD WHO DISCIPLINES

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*March 1-7, 2010*

*Numbers 13-14*

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...***

Have everyone review their own lives and identify times when they could discern clear leading from God. Times like: looking for a new job, moving, starting a family, choosing a school, or other major life decisions. Have a few briefly share their experience and how they responded (positively or negatively). What short term and what long term effects came of the decisions they made?

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### ***Spies and Their Report***

The land the Spies are sent to see is the land of God's promise. This is not the first time they have heard of it. The promise has been a part of their History since it was promised to Abraham and the land has been in their future longer than the memory of any who are living. God has been moving them toward it by His sovereign direction, constantly remembering His promise.

Read Genesis 15:18-21 and Exodus 3:7-8 and remember God's promises as you study the text.

#### ***Numbers Chapter 13: 1-33***

- The Lord gives instructions to Moses to send out spies. Notice whose name is changed.
- The spies are chosen for a specific task. They go in from the wilderness to witness the whole of the land. Over forty days they journey the land and see all that Moses asked of them.
- They return with a less than objective report for Moses and for the people.

#### ***Discuss***

- What is the significance of the name change seen in v.16?
- What similarities do you see in the report from spies and the land described in Ex 3:7-8?
- What examples of faith and faithlessness are clear in this passage?

#### ***The Response of Israel***

#### ***Numbers Chapter 14:1-10***

## Small Group Guide – Week 9

### GOD WHO DISCIPLINES

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*March 1-7, 2010*

*Numbers 13-14*

- Despite the spark of faith demonstrated by Caleb, the multitudes of Israel are given to faithlessness. They credit the Lord with bringing them so far but dishonor the provision by asserting that he has brought them to die. Their cries resonate with their disbelief when they were trapped between Pharaoh's army and the Red Sea (Ex 14:11) and when they were hungry in the wilderness (Ex 16:3). What does their longing for Egypt communicate?
- Israel goes so far as to call for a new leader. They show no trust in God or His appointed leader Moses.
- Moses and Aaron display their response to the sin of Israel in falling on their faces.
- Joshua and Caleb show their faith in God's plan and plea for Israel to believe in it also. They say to remember the promise of God for a land of milk and honey and that the Lord was with them.
- Because of their faith, they were treated as enemies in v.10 as their own people desired to kill them. However, to show His glory, God protected them.

#### ***Discuss***

- Is it more common in the Scriptures for men and women to stand against the crowds or to follow the behavior of masses? What kinds of people follow the masses? What kinds of people take the stand against them? Give examples from this story and others.
- Think in your own life. Which kind of person do you more often resemble? What makes you act one way or the other?
- What word do Joshua and Caleb use to describe the behavior of the Israelites in v.9? Is this too strong of a word?

#### ***The Response of God***

As children we learn that our disobedience and rebellion against our parents brings consequences. As parents we enforce consequences because we better understand the reason for them. Here we will see the Children of Israel face the consequences of their rebellion against God.

#### ***Numbers Chapter 14:11-45***

- The Lord speaks to Moses using strong words. He says the people "despise" Him. He is ready to "strike" them and "disinherit" them. Why is Moses seemingly exempt from this treatment?
- Then Moses intercedes for God's people. He gives an argument that honors the Lord and the Lord hears him.
- God gives the pardon from His wrath because of the plea of Moses, but the current generation is excluded from entering the land that will be given as the fulfillment of God's Promise to Abraham.
- God sends word to the nation through Moses and Aaron of the consequences of their rebellion. The long-term punishment was promised to the nation and the surety of it enforced in the death of the faithless spies.

## Small Group Guide – Week 9

### GOD WHO DISCIPLINES

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*March 1-7, 2010*

*Numbers 13-14*

- When the people saw the seriousness of the punishment to come they changed their tune. Like a child who does not want to be punished, they sought a way to avoid the consequences coming to them.
- Moses conveyed to them that it was no longer the will of God that they take the land, but they still tried.
- Without the Ark of the Covenant and without Moses, they were defeated and driven out of the land.

#### ***Discuss***

- Moses is revered throughout the history of God's people as a great prophet. Deuteronomy 34:10 claims that there was not yet one greater, but one is promised to be like him in Deuteronomy 18:15. Because of the New Testament we know Jesus is this Prophet. Re-read Numbers 14:13-19. In what ways can you see Moses as a precursor for Jesus Christ?
- At what point in the story did Israel change their tune? What does this say about their motives? Were they trying to avoid punishment or honor God?
- Why did God not take Israel into the land when they decided they would go? What does this say about God's motives? Was His purpose in this story to get them into the land or to be honored in faith?
- When they did not leave the camp, what did the Ark of the Covenant and Moses symbolize?

#### ***Group Discussion . . .***

Begin individually rethinking what you discussed in your connecting activity in light of the text you just studied. Then discuss together using these questions as guide. [Chances are that everyone in the group has experienced the Lord's discipline but may not have consciously identified it as such. Sharing together will help others in identifying their own experiences of discipline.]

- What has been your typical response to the leading of the Lord?
- What has been your response to the Lord's correction?
- Have you thought of the discipline you have received as a negative or positive thing? What is the reason for discipline? Does God purpose to harm you or prosper you?
- Do you feel that God is currently disciplining you?
- What does God chiefly desire from you?
- What can you do to be more prepared or conditioned to respond like Joshua or Caleb? In the little things? In the big things?
- What can you do to be a Joshua or Caleb to the people around you and help them honor God and avoid the need for discipline?

## Small Group Guide – Week 10 GOD WHO GIVES US HIS WORD

The Church at Brook Hills

March 8-14, 2010

Deuteronomy 6

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...***

Encourage learners to share their understanding of the blessing of God. Ask: **How and why does God bless us? What does the blessing of God look like for you? Why do you think you've received God's blessing?**

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### ***The Stakes Involved (Deut. 6:1-3)***

This chapter contains some of the most foundational verses in all of the Old Testament. The *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-5) was a statement of faith in God and a commitment to love Him with all that we have. Devout Jews would repeat this statement at set times during the day as an affirmation of the uniqueness and holiness of their God. In distinction from the pagan nations surrounding them, God called upon Israel to boldly proclaim His existence alone. Jesus quoted the *Shema* in Mark 12:29, declaring this text to be the most concise summary of the entire Law.

For Israel, attached to the upholding of this affirmation in word and deed was the blessing of God. In vv. 1-3, we see that God outlines the stakes involved. If they fear God—keeping his statutes, abstaining from idolatry, etc.—they may be assured that things will go well with them in the land. They will enjoy a productive land and long lives in the land. Although unstated in this particular text, the opposite is implied as well. If they do not obey all that God says and go after foreign gods, they may be assured that the land will not be fruitful and their days will be short in the land.

### ***Discuss***

- Fearing the Lord is shown to be what He commands. Furthermore, the blessing of God is expressly connected with the upholding and doing of His Word in thought and deed. Have you done what He commands in word and deed?

## Small Group Guide – Week 10

### GOD WHO GIVES US HIS WORD

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*March 8-14, 2010*

*Deuteronomy 6*

- If we are honest, we will recognize that there are thousands of ways that we have failed to uphold God's commands in word and deed? If this is so, how is it that we enjoy the blessing of God? Doesn't God bless those who obey His Word?
- In light of the two previous questions, how does this text lead us to Christ? Think about the life of Christ (see Matthew 4:1-11; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 John 3:5). How does His obedience on our behalf relate to the blessing of God upon us?
- Ultimately, we enjoy the blessing of God through the obedience of Another, Jesus Christ. We are blessed "in Him." Does that mean that we no longer need to obey God?
- Why do we obey God (see, for example, Galatians 5:13-23)?

#### ***The Devotion Demanded (Deut. 6:5-6)***

The devotion demanded is expressed in two statements, although careful consideration reveals that verses five and six go hand-in-hand. The Israelites are told in clear terms that their God—revealed as Yahweh—is the only God that exists. All other representations and conceptions of deity apart from Yahweh typify the vain imaginations of men. The God of Israel is the God of the universe and He will permit no rivals to His throne. Indeed, there are none!

In light of the foundational theological truth that God alone is God, the Israelites were commanded to love Him with all their heart, soul, and might. Although we might be tempted to compartmentalize these aspects of love for God, the idea communicated is one of wholehearted devotion. They were to worship and adore God with the totality of their being—intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, physically, etc. If God is indeed the Lord of everything that exists, He is also the Lord of everyone that exists. The truth of absolute Lordship leads quickly and without exception to the command of absolute obedience.

#### ***Discuss***

- The Israelites were to affirm the uniqueness of God in the midst of a pagan culture. Gods were in great supply. How does their situation intersect with our own?
- What did total devotion look like for the Israelites? What does it look like in your life?
- Is total devotion possible for us?

#### ***The Danger Described (Deut. 6:7-25)***

## Small Group Guide – Week 10

### GOD WHO GIVES US HIS WORD

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*March 8-14, 2010*

*Deuteronomy 6*

Given the stakes involved and the devotion demanded, God commanded the constant reinforcement of vv. 4-5. The Israelites were to teach them diligently to their children in the course of everyday life. Morning and evening, on the way and at home, Israelites were instructed future generations of God's holiness and total Lordship in all areas of life. Even the décor of their homes and the members of their bodies were to bear these instructions. The total saturation of God's Word was to match the total demands involved in the command.

Furthermore, God knew the propensity in every Israelite heart toward forgetfulness and idolatry. They stood on the brink of the Promised Land—milk and honey, olive trees and vineyards, stocked homes and full cisterns. And they stood on the brink of forgetting the God who would make all these things a reality. Moreover, they would be tempted to turn to other gods, disobeying the foundational command of vv. 4-5 and thereby kindling the wrath and anger of Almighty God.

The antidote to this inclination was not a redoubling of their effort but a rehearsing of God's story (vv. 21-25). The Exodus was behind them, but it was to be ever before them. They were to recount generation unto generation the mighty hand of God in their deliverance from slavery. God defeated Pharaoh, God brought them up, and God gave them the land. In consequence of these truths, how could they rightfully turn away to other gods?

#### ***Discuss***

- How did the instruction of future generations in Israel proceed? Formally or informally? What does this say about discipleship in our context?
- The tendency of the Israelites was forgetfulness that led to idolatry? Do we see that in our own lives? How does this lead us to Christ? How do we avoid this through the power of Christ?
- How do you rehearse God's grace in your life?

## Small Group Guide – Week 11 GOD WHO STRENGTHENS Part 1

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*March 15-21, 2010*

*Deuteronomy 16-Joshua 2*

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### ***The Book of Deuteronomy...***

After forty years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites were on the eve of entering the promised land. Before they did, it was necessary (lest they forget what God had done and who they were) that they be reminded about all that God had done for them and about God's holy law which was so vital to their ability to remain in the land and function as God's holy nation and as a kingdom of priests to the nations (Deut. 4:1-8). Therefore, shortly before his death Moses preaches three sermons urging the people of Israel to live in faithful obedience to the covenant laws given at Mt. Sinai 40 years earlier.

Moses' three speeches can be divided as follows:

Deuteronomy 1:6-4:43

Through a rehearsal of covenant history, Moses traces Israel's experience with the Lord from Horeb, to Kedesh-barnea, through their wilderness wandering and up to their taking of the land from Beth-peor so that they will remember the character of the Lord and obey Him as they prepare to enter the Land.

Deuteronomy 4:44-26:19

Through a rehearsal of Israel's covenant responsibilities with glimpses of national prophetic history, Moses proclaims obedience as the means by which the Lord will bless the nation in the Land.

Deuteronomy 27:1-30:27

Through a covenant renewal with the nation on the plains of Moab, Moses proclaims the blessing and/or cursing which will come upon the nation depending upon whether they obey or disobey the word of the Lord.

### ***Study the Text...***

In his final words, Moses challenges Israel as he foretells a turbulent future. Moses wants the people to know that their failure to keep the covenant will mean troubled times. However, he does not warn them so that they will live in the knowledge of future doom but so that they will heed the warning and amend their ways. Read Deuteronomy 30.

- What challenge is Moses setting before the nation?
- What is going to happen to Israel in the future?
- What are some of the consequences (positive and negative) of worshipping a God who cares whether you love him or ignore him (vv. 1-2, 8-9, 17-18)?
- How might an Israelite who has yet to enter the land respond to the warnings written here (vv. 11-14)?
- What issues of the heart are woven throughout the passage (vv. 2, 6, 10, 20)?

- How might this chapter be considered a summary of the entire book (vv. 19-20)?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- What did Moses mean when he said “he (referring to the Lord your God) is your life? (v. 20)”
- How is the Lord your God “your life?”
- Count how often the word “Lord” is used in the chapter? In light of the primary context of the chapter why do you think this is important? What does it communicate to the people of Israel? What are the practical implications of this for your life?
- What challenges would the people of Israel face in the future that would make it difficult to keep the covenant and obey the Lord? What about you? What daily challenges are you presented with that make it difficult to serve the Lord and easy to forsake Him?
- Throughout this chapter and the final chapter in Deuteronomy, Moses speaks often about blessings and cursings based upon the people’s disobedience or obedience? How is this teaching the same for believers under the New Covenant? How is this teaching different for believers under the New Covenant?

### ***The Book of Joshua...***

For centuries, the people of Israel had anticipated possessing the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Genesis 12:1-3). At the close of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses and the people of Israel were camped in the hills of Moab, just across the Jordan River from the promised land of Canaan. So Deuteronomy ends with the expectation that soon, these people would cross the river and begin their lives in Canaan. But Moses would not be the one to lead them into this land, instead Joshua would be the new leader of the people.

Therefore, the book of Joshua is the compelling history of the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants. After 400 years of slavery in Egypt and 40 years in the desert, the Israelites finally are able to enter the Promised Land. The long awaited promise to Abraham becomes a reality! However, unlike most military histories, in the book of Joshua the focus is on the commander’s Commander, the Captain of the Lord’s host (5:15). Repeatedly, as Joshua’s name illustrates (*Yahweh saves*), the book demonstrates that Israel’s victories were due to God’s power and intervention. The story is told in four parts:

- Chapters 1:1-5:12 - Israel’s entrance into the land
- Chapters 5:13-12:24 - Israel’s conquest of the land
- Chapters 13-21 - The distribution of the land
- Chapters 22-24 - Israel’s continued loyalty to Yahweh

## ***Study the Text...***

### ***Entrance into the Land***

The generation that refused to trust God's promises is now dead, and the new generation is at Canaan's doorstep. God is about to fulfill His promises to give Israel the land and make it a great nation. The mantle of leadership has passed from Moses to Joshua. Now, Joshua is responsible to lead the people into the Promised Land.

Read Joshua 1:1-18.

- What does God tell Joshua to do in 1:1-9? List all the commands you can find.
- What does God promise Joshua in these verses?
- What role will God have in the conquest of the land He has promised? (notice a repeated idea in Joshua 1:2-3,5,9,11,13-15.)
- What will be Israel's responsibilities in obtaining the land (1:2,7-18)?
- How did the people respond to Joshua's instructions before entering the land (1:16-18)?
- How is the people's response different from that of the previous generation (Numbers 14:1-10)?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

The New Testament uses the story of Israel's journey and entrance into the Promised Land to instruct believers in Christ. The following questions help us think through how the book of Joshua is applicable to us today. Read Hebrews 3:12-4:11

- What rest (or inheritance) has God promised those who have trusted in Christ?
- What caused the people of Israel to come short of God's rest? What does this mean for us today? How can we avoid this?
- According to the passage in Joshua and Hebrews what role does God play in seeing that we inherit His rest and not fall short? Why is this so important to remember?
- According to Hebrews what role does the body of Christ play in seeing that we inherit God's rest and not fall short? How is this lived out in your small group?
- The author of Hebrews instructs his recipients in chapter 4 verse 11 to "be diligent to enter that rest." What does this practically look like in your life?

## Small Group Guide – Week 12 GOD WHO STRENGTHENS Part 2

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*March 22-28, 2010*

*Joshua 4-24*

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### ***Canaanite Destruction***

Through even a cursory reading of Joshua one begins to ask how Israel had any right to conquer the land of Canaan and completely destroy the people living in it. Many may struggle with how God could desire such a thing. Scenes like those described in Joshua have also caused many to believe that God was somehow different in the Old Testament than He is in the New Testament. After all, Jesus Himself in the New Testament instructs God's people to love their enemies and pray for those that persecute them (Matthew 5:44). What's more is that Christ followers today condemn these practices. To question the brutality of the events in Joshua is completely legitimate and it is good to wrestle through the tension they create for the Christ follower.

At the heart of this issue is a firm understanding that the Israelites were acting in obedience to God. They were carrying out God's command to destroy the inhabitants of Canaan. Without God's specific and unique command to them they had absolutely no right to destroy other nations and take their land. It is also very important to note that God's Word in Deuteronomy gives two sets of laws concerning warfare. One set governs wars fought outside the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 20:10-15) and one set governs those fought inside the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 20:16-18). It is only in this second set, those related to wars fought in conquest of the land, that the people are supposed to be devoted to complete destruction. This was for Israel's preservation – so that they would not be led away from God. In fact, despite the strict terms given in the Law regarding the destruction of nations, those in the Promised Land that professed faith in God were allowed to survive (Joshua 2:9; 9:1-27; 11:19).

Though it is disturbing to think of entire people groups being destroyed we must be careful to recognize that it is God's right to judge and take any means necessary to preserve Israel's purity. Israel was never commanded to commit genocide but God's specific command to destroy the nations of the Promised Land was unique and should not be used to support such actions today.

How can Christ's command to "love your enemies" be harmonized with God's command for the Israelites to destroy the nations living in the Promised Land?

## Small Group Guide – Week 12 GOD WHO STRENGTHENS Part 2

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*March 22-28, 2010*

*Joshua 4-24*

### *Study the Text . . .*

#### The Conquest of the Land

After leading the Israelites across the Jordan River, Joshua is now ready to fight his first battle and take the Promised Land. Before he leads the people to victory, however, he encounters a curious figure. Read Joshua 5:13-6:27

- Why was the ground holy where Joshua was standing? (For some possible reasons, see Exodus 3:1-10, Leviticus 25:23, Joshua 1:6)
- Joshua asked what message the man had for him (5:14). What was the man's message from the Lord (5:15, 6:2-5)? What was the significance of this message?
- What was this encounter with the commander of the Lord's army meant to teach Joshua? (God is the One who brings the victory for Joshua and the Israelites, Joshua 6:2, 8:7, 10:8, 11:1, 11:8)

### *Group Discussion . . .*

- What does Joshua's encounter with the commander of the Lord's army teach us about God and His character?
- What relevance does this portrait of God have for our daily lives? What difference should it make on how you approach the biggest struggles and challenges you face today?
- What do we unintentionally communicate to God when we totally neglect this aspect of His character?

### *Study the Text . . .*

#### Israel's continued loyalty to Yahweh

At the end of Joshua the land has been entered, conquered and distributed. The book concludes with a final meeting between Joshua and the people of Israel. It's here that the Mosaic covenant made years earlier with a previous generation is renewed as God reminds Israel of His past faithfulness and the people rededicate themselves. Read Joshua 24.

- What is the significance of Shechem, the geographical location of this meeting? See Genesis 12:1-7, 35:4; Joshua 8:30-35.

## Small Group Guide – Week 12 GOD WHO STRENGTHENS Part 2

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*March 22-28, 2010*

*Joshua 4-24*

- How many times is the personal pronoun “I” used by God in reference to himself in verses 1-13? Why is this significant?
- Why does God recount the people’s history in verses 1-13? What point is He trying to make to the people?
- According to verses 14-15 how should the people respond?
- How many times is the word “serve” used in verses 14-33? In light of what God has done in verses 1-13 why is this the appropriate response?
- Within the context what does it mean for the Israelites to “serve” the Lord?
- According to verses 16-18 why did the Israelites choose to serve the Lord?
- Why do you think Joshua tells the people what he does in verses 19-20 in response to 24:16-18?

### *Group Discussion . . .*

- What challenges would the people of Israel face that would make it difficult to keep the promise they made in verses 16 and 24? What about you? What daily challenges are you presented with that make it difficult to serve the Lord and easy to forsake Him?
- Joshua challenged the people of Israel to make a firm commitment regarding whom they were going to serve (v. 15) - either the one true Lord or the many idols and “gods” in the land. What current day idols or “gods” are you often tempted to serve?
- One reason the people were motivated to continue to serve the one true God, rather than the many gods of the land, is because they remembered God’s past faithfulness to deliver and fight for them. What motivates you to continue to serve God rather than the idols of today?

## Small Group Guide – Week 13

### GOD OF LOVE AND REDEMPTION

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*March 29 - April 4, 2010*

*Ruth*

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### **Connect...**

Define two words together as a group. Give more than just a dictionary meaning. Explore for a few minutes the associations you have with the words *KINDNESS* and *REDEMPTION*. Think of what you mean when you use these words to describe actions that have been shown toward you and/or you have shown toward others. How is LOVE related to your discussion of each of these words?

### **Study the Text . . .**

#### **Remember the Story**

Review the story of the book of Ruth in the group. If someone is willing, have him or her share all they remember from their reading of the book. You may prefer to reconstruct the story as a group. Try not to forget anything and help each other. It will be helpful to have the larger story fresh on your mind as you discuss the more focused parts.

#### **Naomi and Ruth**

When we see Naomi stripped of her husband and sons, she feels the bitterness of life and concludes that God has dealt with her this way because of her sin. She intends to send her daughters-in-law back to their families and hopes for a better life for them. In verse 15, we can see the depth of her frustration as she is sending them back to their people and their gods. Here we see the determination of Ruth to show kindness to Naomi.

#### *Ruth 1:14-18*

- Naomi tries to send Ruth back to her people and her gods.
- Ruth vows that she will go with Naomi wherever she goes, and she claims Naomi's people and God as her own.
- Even within this vow or oath she demonstrates her claim by taking the oath in the name of the LORD (Yahweh).

#### **Discuss**

- What are the ways Ruth demonstrates kindness toward Naomi?
- What do these tell us about the depth of her kindness?

#### **Ruth and Boaz**

Many times in the Old Testament characters embody the picture of Christ in the New Testament. The story of Ruth and Boaz is a beautiful picture of love and redemption all on its own. However, it is even more beautiful when it is considered as displaying the

## Small Group Guide – Week 13

### GOD OF LOVE AND REDEMPTION

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beauty of Christ's relationship to his Bride, the Church.

#### *Ruth 2:1-16*

- By God's providence Ruth "happened" to be gleaning in the field of Boaz.
- Boaz from his first words, "The LORD be with you!" is portrayed as a man of God.
- He shows Ruth favor in blessing her presence in his field.
- Boaz goes beyond the law's requirement to allow gleaning and intentionally blesses Ruth with special rights to glean among the sheaves and even offering her some from the bundles.
- Ruth is blessed by His kindness... v.13 she said, "You have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant."

#### *Ruth 3:6-13, 4:1-12*

- As the story continues Boaz becomes the hope of Ruth and Naomi for restoration from devastation.
- Boaz's kindness was a blessing, but because of his position in the family he has the further ability to choose to redeem and restore Ruth by marrying her.
- The language of this passage is purposefully chosen to remind the reader or hearer of the similarities between Boaz and the LORD as redeemers for Ruth. Ruth asks Boaz to spread his "wings" over her (3:9) as Boaz had already said the LORD had done for her (2:12).
- Also recognize that in blessing and redeeming Ruth there was a cost that had to be paid. Boaz was willing to pay the price that the other redeemer considered too great a sacrifice.

#### ***Discuss***

- Review the early parts of Chapter 2. Why do you think there is so much emphasis placed on the fact that Ruth is a Moabite?
- What was necessary for Ruth and Naomi to be redeemed after the death of their husbands?
- What are the circumstances of our own lives that cause us to need a redeemer?
- How does Ruth model the way we should act towards Christ?

#### ***Looking to the Future***

##### *Ruth 4:17-21*

The end of the book of Ruth obviously points forward in the genealogy that follows after Boaz and Ruth. It specifically reflects on King David. The writer's knowledge of David indicates that this story was most likely recorded after David had come to be king. The writer recognized the significance of God's provision for Ruth in the lineage of David. Now as we read the account we know that David was not the

## Small Group Guide – Week 13

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greatest King to come from this family line. Christ the King ultimately followed the same line, and not only is this story a part of his family history, but a clear mirror and forerunner for the redemption He offers to all people.

#### ***Discuss***

- How does it affect your reading of this story, and all of God's story, knowing that He knew the end of the story when all its parts were being written?
- How can you read the Bible with this perspective? What is the main message of God's Great Story (the whole Bible)?
- How does it affect your relationship with Christ to think of Him as your Kinsman Redeemer?
- How should you incorporate the understanding you gained from this story into your prayer life?
- Read Titus 3:1-8. How can you demonstrate Christ's loving kindness to those around you, not so you are praised, but to glorify the Great Redeemer?

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### *The Book of 1 Samuel . . .*

Israel’s history under the Judges was marked by political, moral, and spiritual anarchy and deterioration. The situation was so pervasive that even the sons of Eli, the high priest at the end of the 12th century, had completely apostatized and had used their priestly office for their own gain and pursuits. Just when it seemed that the nation would cave in on its own immorality, God intervened and in response to godly Hannah’s prayers gave young Samuel to her and the nation.

Samuel’s strong leadership as judge, prophet, and priest provided respite to the people from both internal and external threat. Unfortunately, however, when he became old and a successor was needed, it was evident to all that his own sons were unfit to take his place. This factor, along with the invasion of the Ammonites on the east side of the Jordan River, caused Israel to demand of Samuel that he give them a king “like all the other nations” (1 Sam. 8:5, 20). Though disturbed by this request, which implied the rejection of Yahweh as their King, Samuel granted it and selected Saul to be king, a selection determined and sanctioned by Yahweh Himself. Thus the monarchy was established in Israel. The circumstances and timing of its creation were improper, but the concept of human royalty was part of the plan of God as revealed as early as the time of the patriarchs (Gen. 17:6, 16; 35:11; Deut. 17:14-20).

Finally, with the selection and anointing of David, Israel’s second king, Samuel lived to see the inauguration of the dynastic kingship which God had promised as part of His messianic, redemptive plan (Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:17). The Books of Samuel, then, embrace that critical period of Israel’s history from judgeship to monarchy.

The events described in 1 and 2 Samuel center around the lives of three important figures—Samuel, Saul, and David. First Samuel opens with the narrative of Samuel’s birth, an event which occurred toward the end of the 12th century, about 1120 b.c.

### *Study the Text . . .*

1 Samuel 1-7 focused on the miraculous birth, call and ministry of Samuel, the prophet and judge of Israel. For approximately 30 years the people were content to follow Samuel’s leadership. But when Samuel had grown old and it appeared he would not live much longer, the people expressed the desire for a king. God had such a king in mind, one who would be raised up and identified in His own good time (Deuteronomy 17:14-15), but that time had not yet come. The stage was set for an encounter between Samuel and the people. Read 1 Samuel 8.

- What reasons did the elders of Israel give for wanting a king (8:1-5)?

- Why did they really want a king (8:20)?
- Why was their desire sinful (8:7-8, 10:19, 12:12)?
- What was wrong with being like other nations (8:20)? Also note Deuteronomy 7:6-11.
- How was Israel's king supposed to be different from the pagan kings (Deuteronomy 17:14-20)?
- What did God command Samuel to do about the request for a king (8:7-9, 21-22)?
- How did Israel respond to Samuel's warning (8:19-22)? Also note how Samuel's predictions were fulfilled (1 Kings 12:1-15).

### *Group Discussion . . .*

- In chapter 8 verse 7 the Lord told Samuel that the people "have rejected Me from being king over them." In what ways do you fail to treat God as your King? How do you seek other sources of protection?
- What are the implications of God being your King?
- The Lord says that the people "have forsaken Me and served other gods" (8:8). As you think about your life what current day idols or "gods" are you often tempted to serve? What does this look like?
- What does chapter 8 verse 18 teach you about the character of God? Is this relevant today?

### *Study the Text . . .*

After Saul failed to serve the Lord faithfully as king of Israel, he was told that he and his dynasty had been rejected and that the kingdom had been given to a neighbor, a man after the Lord's heart (13:14; 15:28). Chapter 16 revealed that this neighbor is none other than David. Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13

- Why does Samuel assume that Eliab is God's choice (16:6-7; compare 9:2, 10:23-24)?
- What happened when Samuel anointed David (16:13)? Explain in your own words.
- Why was David an unlikely candidate to serve as king?
- How is God's sovereignty exhibited in these verses?

### *Group Discussion . . .*

- How would you explain 1 Samuel 16:7 in your own words?
- What other verses in Scripture speak to this same truth?
- In what ways do we often focus on the outward appearance of others, rather than their heart?
- Throughout Scripture why does God place such an emphasis on the heart?
- Like David, why was Jesus not the Messiah the world expected? In other words, did his outward appearance fit the Jewish expectation of the Messiah?

***Study the Text . . .***

David has already been anointed king but the story of his encounter with Goliath explains how he comes onto the public stage. When we read the account of David and Goliath, it is indeed tempting to come away with the impression that David was a great man of God, and that because of his greatness, the Israelites were delivered from the Philistines. David did have great faith, and he did show great courage when he went to battle against Goliath. Our text does show that David was the right person to become Israel's king, replacing Saul. But this is not the primary emphasis of the text. The emphasis of the text is on how great God is. The text is written to inform us how big and how well armed Goliath was, and how young and poorly armed David was. Eliab, Saul, and Goliath were agreed on this one thing: David was outmatched or so it appeared, at least.

- How did Goliath's repeated challenges affect Israel's army (17:11, 24)?
- David speaks for the first time in 17:26. How is his attitude toward the situation different from everyone else's? (See also 17:34-37)
- How do Eliab (17:28), Saul (17:33) and Goliath (17:42-44) view David?
- How does what David said to Saul (17:34-37) and Goliath (17:45-47) indicate that he did not look only at the outward appearance?
- What was it about Goliath that most deeply offended David (17:26, 36)?
- What lesson did David say his victory over Goliath would teach (17:46-47)?

***Group Discussion . . .***

- What does the story of David and Goliath teach us about the character of God?
- Why do you think God did not choose someone who was qualified (by worldly standards) to fight Goliath, but instead chose young David?
- Review the contrasting responses of David and Saul in verses 32 and 33. When it comes to difficult or seemingly impossible situations whose response do you most identify with? In those types of circumstances do you find it easy to come up with excuses for why something can't be done and trust in your own strength (like Saul), rather than trust in God and His mighty power?
- If you truly believed God was mighty and strong on your behalf (like He was for David, see 17:37-39) then how would this alter your current lifestyle?

## Small Group Guide – Week 15

### THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND SALVATION

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The Church at Brook Hills

April 12-18, 2010

Psalm 27

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### ***Psalm 27...***

This psalm is ascribed to David, evidently written in a time of danger. It may have been prompted by the help provided by Ahimelech the priest, and the opposition of Doeg the Edomite, who saw David at the tabernacle and later reported him to Saul (cf. [1Sa 21:1-10](#); [22:9](#)). This was also a time when David sought protection for his parents (cf. [1 Sam 22:3](#)) which may have left David feeling abandoned.

The first part of the psalm expresses his confident trust in the LORD for blessings received in the past, and his desire to dwell in the house of the LORD who will protect him in the future (1-6). In the second part David offers an anxious plea for God's mercy and deliverance from his enemies (7-10). It ends with a confession that he would have lost heart without faith in God's goodness, and an exhortation to wait on the Lord for strength and courage of heart (11-14).

### ***Study the Text...***

#### **Confidence in the Lord**

David expressed great confidence in the Lord. The Lord was his light, salvation and stronghold, therefore he did not fear what his enemies could do to him. He could have fearless trust in the Lord. David further expressed his confidence in the Lord by his longing to dwell in His house. He would love to abide there all his life, to enjoy His beauty and to seek Him there in the temple. To dwell in the presence of the Lord would add to David's security. The Lord would keep him safe in the day of trouble and establish him securely in danger. Consequently he would triumph over his enemies and joyfully sing praises to the Lord. Perhaps the idea of safety in the sanctuary, where his enemies could not reach him, caused David here to meditate on the Lord's protection. Read Psalm 27:1-6

- What does David mean when he says the Lord is his "light"?
- How is the Lord David's "salvation" and "stronghold"?
- Why are these characteristics of God so important to David?
- What difference do these characteristics of God have on David's perspective of his current situation?
- What did David earnestly desire of the Lord? (verse 4)
- Why did David desire such fellowship with God? (verse 5)
- How would David respond to victory over his enemies? (verse 6)

### ***Group Discussion...***

- What are the greatest sources of fear in your life?
- What is your normal pattern for responding to these fears?
- How does the fact that the Lord is your “light”, “salvation” and “stronghold” help you respond to these fears?
- In what ways have you previously experienced the Lord as your “light”, “salvation” or “stronghold”?

### ***Study the Text...***

#### **Earnest Prayer in Faith**

Apparently the Lord was not promptly granting David’s request for protection. He asked the Lord not to forsake him since he was in great need. God had instructed the righteous to pray and that is what David was doing. Therefore, God ought not refuse to help him. David also affirmed that he was the servant of the Lord, and that the Lord had been his Helper. In light of this David begged the Lord not to reject him. His prayer was strengthened by the knowledge that the Lord would not forsake him, even if his parents did. Read Psalm 27:7-10

- How does this passage relate to the previous passage (Psalm 27:1-6)?
- Why did David hope for the Lord to hear his prayer and have mercy on him?
- Who would take care of David when he was forsaken by his parents?
- Why do you think David changes his tone from verses 7-9 to verse 10?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- Can you sympathize with David’s frustration in this passage? Please explain.
- Have you ever felt like God has forsaken you and isn’t answering your prayers? How did you respond?
- How are you able to maintain trust in God during those times when He appears to be silent?

### ***Study the Text...***

#### **Wait for the Lord**

David asked God to teach him the way to go because his enemies were lying in wait for him. He asked not to be turned over to his enemies, who were false witnesses sworn to destroy him. In the end, however, David’s confidence resurfaces; he rejoiced in the prospect of waiting for the Lord. David was confident that he would survive and remain alive to see God’s blessing. Therefore he strengthened himself to wait for the Lord’s deliverance. Read 27:11-14

**Small Group Guide – Week 15**  
**THE LORD IS MY LIGHT AND SALVATION**

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*April 12-18, 2010*

*Psalm 27*

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- What difficulties was David experiencing in these verses?
- What did David ask for when enemies and false witnesses rose against him?
- What prevented David from losing heart?

***Group Discussion...***

- Describe a time in your life in which God brought about deliverance in His own timing?
- Why do you find it difficult to wait for the Lord in times when you desire immediate deliverance from some present difficulty?
- Belief in the Lord's "goodness" caused David to patiently wait for the Lord even when times were difficult. How has the Lord's goodness helped you to patiently wait for the Lord in similar situations?

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### ***A Psalm of Lament***

In Psalm 10, David laments the oppressive and unjust activities running rampant in Israel. In light of the sad state of things, he has difficulty understanding the apparent inactivity and indifference of the LORD. He opens the Psalm with a question expressing his bafflement (v. 1). How can a God of justice and compassion tolerate the triumphant tyranny of the wicked? How can the LORD delay defending the defenseless?

After raising his question, David then describes the startling situation (vv. 2-11). He portrays the wicked oppressors as arrogant (v.2), proud (v. 4), presumptuous (v. 6, 11), deceitful (v. 7), and shrewd (vv. 8-9). They prey on the weak and scheme against those who may be described as naïve and less fortunate in an effort to store up wealth and power for themselves. In so doing, they arrogantly assume exemption from Divine judgment. The wicked oppressors have drawn the conclusion that David suggests in his opening question. They interpret God’s temporary delay in dealing with their sinful activities as permanent indifference.

Yet, David offers a faith-filled prayer in the last section of the Psalm (vv. 12-18). His faith-filled prayer is fueled by his knowledge of God. He refuses to affirm the wicked people’s audacity, choosing rather to rehearse back to God what he believes about God. The LORD is not ignorant of injustice (v. 14). Nor is the LORD indifferent towards oppression (vv. 17-18). David believes the LORD will be compelled by compassion to conquer the wicked and care for the wounded.

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### ***Afflicted and Abandoned? (v.1)***

The question raised by David is not unique to David. Believers throughout the ages have deduced from faith and experience the same concern. Reconciling the apparent discrepancy between what we know to be true about God with what we witness in the world is a difficult task. If God is a God of justice and compassion then why does oppression and injustice seem to prevail across the globe? If those whom God loves perpetually suffer at the hands of wicked people then can we trust His care? At what point do we lose heart? David’s inner conflict is compounded by the combination of affliction and abandonment. For not only are God’s people suffering, they seem to be doing so on their own.

- What kind of emotions may have driven David to ask this question?
- What kind of experiences may have driven David to ask this question?
- What is the significance of David addressing God by his covenant name, LORD?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- Have you ever asked David’s question?
- Have you ever felt abandoned by God in the midst of your affliction?
- Would you be willing to share your story with the group?
- How might thinking about the LORD’s covenant promises shore up a person’s faith when he or she feels not only afflicted by people but abandoned?
- What are some of His covenant promises?

***Study the Text . . .*****Assessing the Affliction (vv. 2-11)**

David provides a poetic account of what he's observed in Israel. He uses parallelism and metaphors to capture the dire scene. The passage may be divided into two sections. Verses 2-6 and 11 describe the inner disposition of the wicked; verses 7-10 emphasize their external schemes and activities. After describing the condition of their hearts, David then links their oppressive behavior with their internal disposition. The flow of the Psalm anticipates Jesus' teaching on how a tree will be known by its fruit (Matthew 12:33-37). Jesus memorably stated, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." In other words, the condition of the heart animates the confession of the mouth and conduct of the hands. In this case, arrogant and selfish hearts inspire the atrocious victimization of many people. Moreover, David makes clear that the twisted inner disposition of wicked hearts is rooted in either disbelief in God or a distorted view of God.

On a further note, Paul quotes verse 7 in his description of universal sinfulness in Romans 3:14.

- How does David describe the internal disposition of the wicked?
- Why does David describe the internal disposition of the wicked before describing their external behavior?
- How does David describe the external behavior of the wicked?
- What do the metaphors suggest about the oppressor's methods?
- What is significant about Paul quoting verse 7 in his description of universal sinfulness in Romans 3:14?

***Group Discussion . . .***

- What is the relationship between the condition of one's heart and the confession of one's mouth? Conduct of one's hands?
- How does a disbelief in God contribute to injustice?
- How does a distorted view of God contribute to oppression?
- How might an acknowledgement of divine judgment deter wicked ways?
- How might the reality of divine judgment encourage the oppressed?
- What does Paul's quoting of verse 7 in his description of universal sinfulness in Romans 3:14 say about the human heart?

***Study the Text . . .*****Addressing God in light of Affliction (vv. 12-18)**

David knows God well. This explains why he does not simply ask the hard question in verse 1, and why he is not driven to despair by his sin-ridden society. He knows that God's temporary delay in defending the defenseless does not mean he is permanently indifferent. So, he proceeds to talk to God about all that he knows to be true about God. In so doing, he shores up his faith and the faith of those who read his words. His prayer reminds readers to trust that God will right all wrongs.

- What does David ask God to do in verse 12?
- What does it mean for God to "forget not"?
- What are the truths about God that surface in David's prayer to God?

***Group Discussion . . .***

- What is the relationship between prayer and oppression?
- List all the truths about God mentioned in this passage.
- Discuss the implications of each truth as they relate to how believers should respond to injustice.
- Why is it important to rehearse back to God what we believe about God in our prayer life?
- How might such a practice strengthen faith and inspire patience in the face of affliction?

## Small Group Guide – Week 16

### A Psalm of Lament

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*The Church at Brook Hills*

*April 19-25, 2010*

*Psalm 10*

- How might such a practice inspire action among God's people to curb injustice and oppression in Birmingham and throughout the world?
- What might we do now individually and maybe even together as a group?
- What does the Gospel teach us about how God has acted or will act to right all wrongs?

## Small Group Guide – Week 17 THE SHEPHERD WHO SATISFIES

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*April 26 - May 2, 2010*

*Psalm 23*

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...***

Start your time together by sharing the reasons for your confidence in the Lord. *Try to give personal and honest answers that apply to your everyday practice of placing confidence in the Lord.* Give only one reason at a time so others get the opportunity to share also.

### ***Study the Text . . .***

In life there are events we experience and truths we learn that contribute to our understanding. Often it is easier or even more effective to express our understanding with images. Sometimes we even use the same images that we gained the understanding from in the first place. In Psalm 23 David is clearly expressing His confidence in the Lord, but don't miss the thanksgiving and praise wrapped up in his expressions of confidence. As you read and study the Psalm, reflect on the images used and the depth of the meaning they convey. Consider the images as they applied to David personally and their general meaning to the culture he lived in.

### ***Read Psalm 23***

*Psalm 23:1-3*

In the first three verses of this psalm David issues a general proclamation of his confidence in God. David claims that the Lord is his shepherd and he continues to describe the way this is true with what he says *about* God *to* the listener.

- The central image that David uses to describe how the Lord relates to him is as a shepherd to a sheep. Jesus also chose this image in John 10:11, describing himself as the Good Shepherd. What is implied in such an image of relationship?
- David specifically uses images of lying down in green pastures and leading beside still water. These images convey the ideas of peaceful rest and guidance.
- David immediately reiterates the same concepts with more clear words in v.3. The implied "rest" of v.2 is connected to restoration of the soul and the implied "leading" is connected to righteousness, specifically for the glory of God.

*Psalm 23:4-6*

In the later portion of this psalm David transitions from speaking *about* God to speaking *to* Him. His praise and proclamation seem to lead him back to personal praise directed toward his Shepherd. As he speaks to his Lord, David demonstrates confidence in three aspects of personal relationship.

- In verse 4, he sings of his confidence in the midst of danger. David knows the Lord is *his Protector*, and he celebrates his presence.
- In verse 5, his “cup overflows.” David knows the Lord as *his Provider*. Even through whatever pressures are weighing on him, the Lord gives every need and more.
- In verse 6, David speaks of being pursued by goodness and mercy, and he rejoices that his position in the Shepherd’s fold or “the house of the Lord” will last forever. His confidence is in the Lord, *his Pursuer*.

***Discuss***

- Did David speak of the same reasons for confidence in the Lord as your group listed before studying the Psalm? Where did you overlap? Did he speak of areas you did not?
- What is the significance of the shepherd and sheep image when it comes to needs and God’s/your ability to meet them?
- Do you find yourself proclaiming your confidence in the Lord more to Him or to others?
- What are the specific ways in which you speak or act that fail to acknowledge your need for (or dependence on) your Shepherd?
- If we follow David’s pattern of proclamation and praise, what affect should we expect on our lives? On others lives around us?
- How can you be more faithful to practice praise in the way you live your life with God and before others?

## Small Group Guide – Week 18

### The Promise of a Kingdom

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*May 3-9, 2010*

*2 Samuel 7*

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.

### ***2 Samuel 7 – God promises David an everlasting Kingdom, and David responds with praise.***

This is the explanation of the Davidic covenant, which is the last major covenant we have seen since Moses and will see until the new covenant is prophesied and then fulfilled in Christ. God promises to bless David's line and to establish His Name forever through David's line. David responds in praise to God for His blessing upon him. This chapter is the theological climax of the books of Samuel and is an extremely important chapter in Old Testament history and the overall story of redemption.

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **David desires to build a Temple for the Lord (7:1-3).**

This aspiration arose after Hiram's stonemasons and carpenters built David's palace (cf. 5:11), and David was at rest from his enemies. Israel is experiencing peace, the ark of the covenant is now in Jerusalem (in a tent), and David is enjoying his new cedar palace. All these events lead David to decide God needs a proper dwelling place.

- During peace, how does David respond? To what or whom, does he turn his attention?
- Who is Nathan the prophet? What role will he play in David's life?
- Does Nathan seek the Lord before responding to David's request?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- How do you respond during peaceful times? In crisis, we tend to cry out to the Lord, but when we are at rest where do we turn our attention?
- When you have a great idea for how to exalt God, do you just do it? Or do you first consult Scripture and your small group to discern if it is God's desire?

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **The Lord makes eternal promises to the House of David (7:4-17).**

This revelation is the climax of David's life. Through this pronouncement David is made the founder of the only royal line God will establish forever, and he becomes the standard by which his descendants will be judged. Furthermore, this covenant will become the center of hope for the messages of the prophets in later generations, and these promises are the foundation for the messianic expectations that are fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

- Is God bothered that he does not have a temple?

## Small Group Guide – Week 18

### The Promise of a Kingdom

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*May 3-9, 2010*

*2 Samuel 7*

- What is God's point by reminding David of God's hand on his life (vv. 8-9)? Read 1 Samuel 16:13; James 4:5; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, 6:19. Is it possible that God is not concerned about a temple made with hands because he is building a temple inside David?
- Verse 11b, God promises to make David a "house." What kind of house is God going to build for David?
- Does Jesus fulfill all of the promises God makes to David? Can you find the fulfillment of these promises in the New Testament? Are any of these promises not fulfilled yet?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- What does it mean that Christians become a living temple to the Lord? Was David a temple to the Lord the same way Christ-followers are a temple to the Lord?
- God notes that his people have been afflicted (vv. 10-11), but he says that he will give them rest from their enemies. Today, we face hardships, difficult times and even persecution. Where is our hope? Where are we to fix our eyes?
- Verses 14-15 speak of the relationship between a father and a son and discipline? Describe a father-son relationship? How do love and discipline exist together? Does God discipline Christians for sin? If so, how does he discipline his children?
- How does Christ fulfill the promises in this text?

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **David Praises the Lord (7:18-29).**

David responds to God's declaration by going into the tent (tabernacle) sitting before the ark of the covenant (the footstool of God's throne) and praising God. This response provides a model for all who receive unmerited blessing from God.

- How does David begin? How does he speak of himself? How does he speak of God?
- How many times does David refer to himself as servant? Why respond in this manner instead of referring to himself as the king of God's people?
- How does David praise God? What does he say about God? Does he talk about himself?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- What promises has God made to each of us? How often do you praise God for the promises he has made to you? How often do we praise God as a body of believers?
- If David's prayer is a model, how do we praise God?
- Read Psalm 33. What does this psalm teach us about praising God?
- If you were to write a prayer of praise, how would you write it? Consider writing a prayer or song of praise to God together as a group.

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### ***Psalm 40...***

This psalm occurs during a very turbulent time in David's life and kingship. He is in the middle of facing the consequences for his sin of adultery with Bathsheba. In 2 Samuel 12:10 Nathan the prophet warned him that the sword would never depart from his house. It was not long after he began to experience the heartbreaks of rape, fratricide, treachery, rebellion, seizure of David's concubines, and civil war. This is definitely the low point in David's life. It's during this time that David in all likelihood pens this psalm. While surrounded by enemies who are seeking to kill him David cries out and ask the Lord to deliver him as he had done in the past.

### ***Study the Text...***

#### ***Thanksgiving for Past Deliverance***

While in the midst of great difficulty David's thoughts turn to previous times of trouble in which God heard his cry and delivered him. These times of deliverance have reinforced the truth for David that "the man who makes the Lord his trust" is blessed. Read Psalm 40:1-5

- What two images does David use to describe his time of great difficulty? [see verse 2; the only other two times these images are used are in Jeremiah 38:6 and Psalm 69:1-2]
- What do these two images communicate about David's situation and what he was experiencing?
- In light of such dire circumstances, how did David respond? (v. 1)
- David responded to his situation by "crying" out to the Lord? What does this communicate about David's situation? [also note Psalm 6:6; 56:8]
- What image does David use to describe how God delivered in times of trouble? (v. 2) How is this image significantly different from the image he used to describe his life prior to being delivered?
- What was David's response to being delivered? (v. 3, 5; also v. 9, 10)
- Who does David say put a new song in his mouth? Why is this significant?
- What type of song did God put in David's mouth? What does this mean?
- These verses reveal that God had two motivations for delivering David out of his troubles. What are they? [(1) desire for David to be delivered; (2) desire for Himself to be praised] Are these motivations surprising? Do you believe it is right or fair for God to hold both motivations? Why are both of these motivations good for those who have been delivered?

## ***Group Discussion...***

- When faced with great trouble, what did David first reflect on? Do you find yourself following David's example? Why or why not?
- Do you find it difficult to wait on the Lord as David did?
- In what areas of life are you currently waiting on the Lord?
- Has there been a time in your life in which you cried out to the Lord and he delivered you from a troubling situation? "Proclaim and tell" of God's wondrous deeds to those in your group. [verses 1-3 are also a beautiful picture of what Christ has done for those who have trusted in him, therefore you may want to ask each person in your group to share their testimony of deliverance from spiritual death to spiritual life]
- David said at the time of his deliverance that God put a new song in his mouth. Do you believe singing is an important part of the Christian life? Why or why not?
- How did those who witnessed God's deliverance of David respond? What does this teach us? What implications does this have on how we relate to unbelievers?

## ***Study the Text...***

### ***Dedication for Present Obedience***

David responded to God's gracious act of deliverance by dedicating himself to the Lord. He recalled that God preferred his obedience to his sacrifices. David responded to this truth in verse 6 by yielding his life to do God's will. He presented himself willingly to the Lord and expressed his desire to do the will of God. These verses present a marvelous example of what is involved in dedicating oneself to God's will in accordance with His Word. Read Psalm 40:6-8

- What do these verses teach us about the OT sacrificial system? (also note Psalm 50:8-15; 51:16-19; Proverbs 14:9; Isaiah 1:11-17)
- What does David mean when he said that "you have given me an open ear"?
- The author of Hebrews uses these verses in reference to Christ in Hebrews 10:5-7. Please turn to Hebrews and read these verses. How do these verses apply to Christ according to the context of Hebrews 10?

## ***Group Discussion. . .***

- What was David's approach to God's will? Can this be said of you? How would you describe your approach to God's will?
- What did David do with God's law? How about you? What's your daily practice and use of God's word? In what ways can you hide it in your heart?
- What's the relationship David makes between delighting in God's will and putting his law in his heart? What are the implications of this for our lives?

## ***Study the Text...***

### ***Petition for Present Deliverance***

The tone of the psalm changes dramatically here to one of urgent prayer. David begins his prayer by asking the Lord to continue His mercy, steadfast love and faithfulness because of the many troubles and sins that surround him. The troubles he was experiencing were the consequences of his many sins (cf. Psalm 25:17-18; 38:2-14). His prayer became more specific in verses 13-16 as he asked for a quick deliverance from his troubles. He believed that the Lord, in rescuing him, should put to shame all those who sought to take his life and bring him ruin. In doing so the righteous would be encouraged to rejoice and praise the Lord. These would be the effects of God's answer to his prayer. Read Psalm 40:11-17.

- Why is David so certain in verse 11 that the Lord will not restrain His mercy from him?
- What part do verses 1-10 play in David's certainty in verse 11?
- What "iniquities" is David likely referring to in verse 12?
- What were the consequences of David's iniquities?
- What was David's prayer against his enemies?
- What are your initial thoughts about David's attitude toward his enemies? Is David just in having such an attitude?

## ***Group Discussion...***

- What do we learn about sin and its consequences in these verses? Have you experienced this truth in your life? If so, please share with the group.
- How do these verses give us a clear picture of our ultimate deliverance in Christ? (note verses 16-17)
- How many times is the word "Lord" used in this passage? In light of the context why is this important? In light of his current situation what does this reveal about David?
- How many verses in the psalm speak about praising God and telling of the "glad news of deliverance in the great congregation"? Spend the remaining portion of your time together praising God for the mercy He has lavished on you in salvation.

## Small Group Guide – Week 20

### Transition in the Kingdom

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*The Church at Brook Hills*

*May 17-23, 2010*

*1 Chronicles 29:10-22*

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## A Final Prayer

In 1 Chronicles 29, David's life and forty year reign as king of Israel comes to an end (vv. 26-30). He accomplished exponentially more than his predecessor, Saul. In fact, where Saul's life ended tragically on a battle field, David's life ends triumphantly on the thresholds of the soon-to-be erected Temple. David ends his reign as king as faithfully as he began his reign as king.

Throughout 1 Chronicles, David takes major steps toward actualizing God's desire and intent to dwell in the midst of His people (see, 2 Samuel 7:1-17). David conquered Jerusalem and brought the Ark of the Covenant into the city. In addition to securing peace and prosperity in Jerusalem, he conditioned the people of Israel to consider constructing the Temple their most important and immediate objective. His leadership was so well executed that people not only offered their time, energy, and resources willingly but also joyfully. One might be tempted to laud David with praise and acclaim for his accomplishments. One might be equally tempted to think David would be quick to accept such esteem and accolades. However, David curbs such enthusiasm by clearly crediting God for all that took place during his reign as king. Just before anointing Solomon as his successor and himself being laid to rest, David fixes everyone's attention in the gathered assembly of God's people upon the greatness and glory of God. In so doing, 1 Chronicles 29 reports David's final prayer.

## ***Study the Text . . .***

### **Adoring God (vv. 10-13)**

In vv. 10-19, David honors God as God by praying a thoroughly God-centered prayer of adoration. He gives God credit for his past success and appeals to God for Solomon and Israel's future success.

In vv. 10-13, David blesses the LORD in the presence of all the assembly (v. 10). He adores God's eternal fatherhood (v. 10), universal kingship (v. 11), and gracious generosity (vv. 12-13). God gathered the people of Israel together as His children and committed Himself to caring for them. Thus, Israel owed her very existence to God. The inclusive "our" in verse 10 encouraged all those gathered that they too can adore God and appeal to Him as father, not just David. David also announces God's universal kingship in verse 11. A string of praises is listed: greatness, power, glory, victory and majesty, followed by a comprehensive acknowledgement of His sovereignty. Everything in heaven and in earth belongs to God.

## Small Group Guide – Week 20 Transition in the Kingdom

The Church at Brook Hills

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1 Chronicles 29:10-22

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After affirming *who God is* for His people, David turns his attention to *what God does* for His people. As eternal father and universal king, God established David as His earthly, representative ruler of His people. God bestowed riches and honor upon him. David gives general credit to God for his and, subsequently, Israel's success. David becomes more specific as his prayer unfolds. Ultimately, he expresses gratitude and gives God glory for all that He has done (v. 13).

- What works has God accomplished thus far in Israel's history?
- What does it mean to "bless" the LORD?
- Why did David bless the LORD publically?
- What is significant about the use of "our" in verse 10?
- What does David say about God in these verses?
- What does David say about what God does in these verses?
- Where else is God referred to as "father" in the Old Testament? Or, "king"?
- What similarities do you find between David's prayer at the end of his life and the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray in Matthew 6:9-13?

### **Group Discussion . . .**

- What elements are necessary for a God-centered prayer?
- How does knowing what God is like affect how we address Him in prayer?
- What does adoring God as *both* eternal father *and* universal king do for our faith? Why might it be unhealthy if we reflect on one aspect of who God is to the neglect of the other?
- Why does David focus on who God is for His people before focusing on what God does for His people?
- Should we draw public attention to the worth and work of God in our lives? If so, how might we do so?
- Are you quick to credit God for your various successes in life? Why or why not?
- What is gratitude?
- How does expressing gratitude glorify God?

### **Study the Text . . .**

#### **Appealing to God (vv 14-22)**

In verses 14-17, God's gracious generosity sharpens into focus. Since all things belong to God and come from God, the people are only able to serve God with the resources supplied by God. Had He not lavished Israel with resources then the people would have nothing to offer God in this moment. Had God not given David strength and power to lead Israel in battle and conquer their enemies to enter Promise Land, then they would have no place to gather. Not only does God supply the material resources, but He also supplies His

## Small Group Guide – Week 20

### Transition in the Kingdom

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*May 17-23, 2010*

*1 Chronicles 29:10-22*

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people with the spiritual resolve and immaterial motivation for accomplishing his purposes. The worship taking place in this moment and that which will occur in the future takes place by God's gracious generosity.

Just before dying, David takes a moment to pray for the people and Israel and his son Solomon. He asks God to supply them with the spiritual resolve and immaterial motivation necessary to complete the task of constructing the Temple. In a similar way, just before Jesus died on the cross, He interceded for his disciples (see, John 17). He too prays for God to supply His disciples with the necessary resources for advancing His kingdom in the world.

The scene ends with David leading the people to bless the LORD as he has just done. The people proceed to assume the appropriate posture of worship: prostration and surrender (vv. 20-22).

- What does God take pleasure in? (v. 16)
- How does David describe the people's worship? (v. 17)
- What material resources does God supply the people with? (vv. 16 and 21)
- What sort of spiritual resolve and immaterial motivation does God supply the people with? (v. 18-19)
- What three components make up David's prayer? (adoration, accreditation, and appeal)
- Why does David pray for the people? (v. 18)
- What does David pray for Solomon? (v. 19)
- Compare David's intercession with Jesus' intercession in John 17.
- Specifically, how do the people worship God? (vv. 20-22)

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- What do we learn about worship from David's prayer?
- What do we learn about prayer from David's prayer?
- Why could prayer be described as the posture of dependence?
- Why does God sometimes lavish His people with material resources?
- How might we use what God gives us to serve God and accomplish His purposes?
- What kind of heart pleases God?
- What does David's prayer for Solomon imply about the human heart?
- How might we be found upright in our relationship with God?
- Is it appropriate to ask God to supply what He requires?
- Is it encouraging to hear David ask God to supply what He requires?
- How does knowing Jesus prayed for God to supply what is needed for the accomplishment of God's purposes strengthen faith?
- How might we depend upon God to accomplish His purposes?
- How might we live in such a way to ensure that people will adore and accredit God for all that has taken place in our lives when we die?
- What do you think it would look like for you to finish faithfully?

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## ***Connect...***

Option 1: Take a few moments to poll your small group. How many of them before now have ever done a study of The Song of Solomon? How many have attended a conference based on this book of the Bible? How many have thought of it as an unimportant book of the Bible in comparison to other books? How many have questioned why it is even in the Bible? How many at some point in the past have learned something about the book that made them think of it as more important than other books?

Option 2: How important is it in our day and age to have God’s perspective on sexuality? Why is it so important to know what God’s says about sex? Before you were a Christian, who or what most shaped your view of sex and sexuality (music, T.V. books, magazines, friends, parents, etc.)

## ***Study the Text . . .***

### ***Approaching the text***

The questions of why The Song of Solomon is in the Bible and why we should study it are one in the same. When we come to study The Song of Solomon we see a very different presentation than we are used to in our studies of Scripture. It seems risqué because of its stark contrast in form, but when considered for its message, it is not in contrast but in harmony with the truths and teachings found elsewhere in the canon of Scripture.

Besides its form, the content of this book sometimes leads its reader to wonder if they should even be reading it. This was the case for many in the time it was written because of the abundance of sexual promiscuity and the prominence of sensual and sexual abuses in the worship of pagan gods. The situation is very similar in our world today. Nakedness in God’s story leads to shame (Genesis 3), but the culture we live in unashamedly flaunts sexuality through every form of media available.

The cultures of the world around Israel in the Old Testament and around the church today have, by their misuse of human sexuality, greatly affected the mindset of God’s people. In an effort to avoid the church’s adoption of the view the world holds about the subject, they tend to avoid the subject altogether. If the subject has not been treated as taboo it may have been discussed, but primarily in ways that treat it as appalling or as a temptation to be avoided.

We have this book of the Bible because God saw fit to remind his people that He is the Creator God. Our bodies and souls are fashioned by His design. God is reminding us that

He created man to be in relationship with woman (monogamy), and in relationship with Him. God created man and woman, and the union of the two, to be good. This book gives a wholesome and God-glorifying perspective on human sexuality and its place inside marriage.

### ***Reading the Text***

The text seems to present itself most clearly as a unified narrative poem focused around a man and woman as they dialogue. The reader witnesses a great deal of their relationship as they become attracted to one another, prepare for marriage, guard their purity, consummate the marriage, deal with misunderstanding, find restoration, reaffirm commitment, repeat mutual praise and continue in infatuation with and enjoyment of each other. Today's reader may struggle with the abstract images used for description because it comes from a culture that is chronologically and geographically different, but the model given in this poem can impart timeless wisdom to be applied in relationships today.

#### *Some examples:*

- In much of the first three chapters these lovers share their desire for each other. They communicate their love so each knows how the other feels. The beloved even corrects his bride in 2:1-2 as she considers that he sees her as a flower among many others in the valley, but he is clear that she is the only flower. All others compare as thorns. *Praising and edifying your spouse is healthy for the relationship and a proper enjoyment of God's design.*
- The repeated refrain in 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4 reminds the reader that the longing for intimacy must be restrained until it is found inside marriage. The repetition of this need for restraint highlights the difference between God's design and the practice of the worldly. *Valuing God's design for sexual intimacy will lead to respecting marriage and the boundary it should be found in.*

There is such a rich wealth of wisdom in the example given us in this pristine model of love and marriage. However, the central idea of the text is evident regardless of how deep the reader goes in understanding. The longing for ones beloved is good, and the intimacy it leads to has its place inside the context of marriage where those romantic feelings are even more meaningful than when they were first felt. These feelings are not the whole (as the world may assume), but a very important part of the entire relationship between man and woman as God designed it.

### ***Comparing the Text***

The primary function of this poem, The Song of Solomon, is to put before God's people an example of love and intimacy as it was designed to be by the Creator of all things. The content of this book reminds the reader of the creation story. The companionship and the coming together of the man and the woman were first seen in Genesis 1 and 2. Not only that, but the imagery of fruits and flowers, and the language of life and the garden remind

the reader of the truth that God did create all things good and that human sexuality was a central part of that story.

The presence of The Song of Solomon in Scripture reminds the reader of the beginnings of sex, and reclaims it as a good and wholesome by sharing its true design and function in the context of marriage. The picture of pure and devoted love seen in the marriage of this book should be greatly valued by all people, past and present, young and old, married and single. It is vastly important for all in the church to have a good understanding of marriage and sexuality. Many have their own perspective on these topics. It may come from personal experience, watching parents or friends, and even from the world around them. Knowing what God intends, however, is what is necessary to understand what is meant when Christ and the church are compared to the bridegroom and his bride (Ephesians 5:22-33). Imagine the difficulty in accepting this comparison if ones perspective of marriage was limited to what they observed in the world. This book functions to help guard not only our perception of the way God designed husband and wife to relate, but the way He designed us to relate to Him. God is passionate in pursuit of his people, He showers them with love and mercy, and He desires their complete union to Him and will not share them with other “gods”.

***Discuss***

- Some examples of wisdom that can be found in this book were shared above. In your study of this book, what are some other thoughts of wisdom that you have identified?
- How can you model showing affection in a biblical way to your wife, your family and your friends?
- If married, do you think about your marriage as an example to those around you (in the church and the world) of the relationship between Christ and the church? If not married, can you identify examples around you that model this loving relationship?
- In what ways does The Song of Solomon enrich your understanding of Christ and His love for the church?
- How should the church look different from the world in its approach to sexuality?
- If you are married, discuss how you can incorporate The Song of Solomon in your marriage?
- Do you think God’s view of sex is more satisfying and pleasurable than the view of the world? Explain and defend your answer.
- How can parents use this book to teach their children and teenagers about sex? What truths do you think are most important to point out to them?
- How should this book affect the way you see Christ’s love for you (the church), and in response the way you love Him?
- Do you need to work to change your outlook toward intimacy?
  - Should you value it more highly?
  - If single, do you reserve it for its proper context?
  - If married, do you enjoy it to the fullest?
  - As a member of the church do you consider the possible depth of the relationship to be enjoyed with your Creator? Do you pursue God and shower Him with love in response to His love for you?

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### ***Proverbs***

The Book of Proverbs provides short pithy sayings that give wise instruction for living a skillful or useful life. Proverbs deals with general truths that apply differently depending on the particular situation. These pithy sayings are not law. They taught the nation of Israel and teach the Church today how to apply the law to daily life. The overall purpose of these sayings is to inspire faith in the Lord (22:19).

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **Purposes of Proverbs: To Develop Moral Skill and Mental Acumen (Discernment) (1:2-6)**

The word "wisdom" basically means "skill." In the Book of Proverbs it refers to skillful living, "the ability to make wise choices and live successfully according to the moral standards of the covenant community." Wisdom is the skill of applying knowledge rightly, or skill in the art of godly living. This introduction provides insight into the different ways that wisdom affects daily living and begins to reveal the importance of wisdom.

- Define the different words that are used to describe the purpose of the book (i.e. wisdom, instruction, insight, righteousness, justice, equity, prudence, etc...).
- Each of these purpose statements builds on the statement before to clarify how important the Book of Proverbs is for daily living. How do the minor differences in these descriptive words help the reader understand what skillful living (wisdom) is?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

Begin by asking group members to share how the Book of Proverbs has impacted the way they live their life. Does anyone in the group read a proverb a day? Encourage the group to consider, throughout the study today, and as they read the Book of Proverbs this week, what sort of influence these short pithy sayings would have on their daily life if they read one saying a day or one chapter each day.

- What is the purpose of the Book of Proverbs?
- Is it important that Christians live their lives skillfully?
- Define wisdom or skillful living (rely on verses 2-6).
- What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?
- Will reading the Book of Proverbs make us wise?
- How do we attain wisdom?

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **Motto: The Fear of the Lord (1:7)**

“The fear of the Lord” expresses submission to the Lord’s will and reveals the most important characteristic for gaining knowledge and the beginning of wisdom. It describes a true worshipper of God.

- Find all the occurrences of “fear of the LORD” in the Book of Proverbs.
- What is opposed to the fear of the LORD (example: to hate knowledge, evil)?
- What attributes are found in a person who fears the LORD?
- What is the reward for a person who fears the LORD?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- Discuss what it means to “fear the LORD.”
- Describe a person who does not fear the Lord compared to one who does.
- How do we attain fear of God?

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **1 Corinthians 1:10-2:16**

#### **Wisdom is imparted to believers through the Holy Spirit.**

When discussing the importance of the Book of Proverbs, attaining wisdom and fear of the Lord, it is necessary to look to the source of wisdom. In 1 Corinthians 1-2, Paul explains to the Corinthian church the difference between wisdom of the world (foolishness) and wisdom from God (source of life).

- Find all the verses from 1:10-2:16 that refer to wisdom.
- What is the difference between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom from above?
- How is wisdom from above received?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- Discuss Paul’s distinction between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom from God.
- How do we distinguish worldly wisdom from God’s wisdom?
- Through whom is wisdom from above imparted?
- Combining what we have learned in Proverbs and 1 Corinthians, how do we pursue skillful living? What is the role of the Holy Spirit?
- Is it helpful to read a proverb a day or a chapter from Proverbs a day? If so, why? How will it help you to live skillfully in service and worship to God?
- What does the Bible mean when it refers to Jesus Christ as our “wisdom” (1 Cor. 1:24)?

## Small Group Guide – Week 22

### Words for the Wise

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*The Church at Brook Hills*

*May 31 - June 6, 2010*

*Proverbs*

- What does the Bible mean when it refers to Jesus Christ as the one who became our wisdom (1 Cor. 30)?
- What is so significant about the fact that all wisdom is found in Jesus Christ (Col. 2:1-4)?

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## **1 Kings 8**

The dedication of Solomon's Temple was a major event in the nation of Israel. The ark of the covenant was brought into the Temple and the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. Here the unapproachable Lord becomes approachable and ready to help those who worship, sacrifice and pray. Few moments in biblical history surpass this scene in hope, gladness and glory as God reveals his presence and the people worship him with praise and thousands of sacrifices. The entire event served to unify Israel as one people, under one king, serving the one true God.

### ***Study the Text . . .***

**1 Kings 8:1-11: The ark of the covenant is transported with the support of the leaders of Israel into the Temple.**

- Who supports moving the ark from the city of David into the Temple?
  - Elders (older, respected leaders who advised the king of various national matters)
  - Heads of tribes (mature, older men who were to clans and villages what the elders were to the nation as a whole)
  - Common men (v. 2)
- Describe the ceremony that preceded the ark as it was transferred from the city of David into the Temple (Compare to 2 Samuel 6).
- What does the cloud represent in verse 11? Where have we already seen this cloud in Scripture? Is it possible that the cloud demonstrates divine approval of Solomon's Temple?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

Approaching the presence of God is not to be done lightly. In 2 Samuel 6, Uzzah touched the ark and was immediately killed. As the priests carried the ark to the Temple, Solomon and all the congregation sacrificed many sheep and oxen. Sacrifices were offered in recognition of national sin and individual sin, as well as praise to God.

- Begin by asking people to share about how they approach God. God dwells in all of his children. Do we approach Him with a repentant heart that is lifted in praise to God?
- Discuss how we today should approach the presence of God in worship as a small group or a church gathering. What can we learn from 1 Kings 8:1-11?

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **1 Kings 8:12-21: Solomon praises God for his covenant faithfulness to Israel.**

Solomon begins by reminding the people of God's faithfulness to David and the whole nation. He starts with their deliverance from Egypt (v. 16) and ends with their deliverance from Egypt (v. 21).

- List how God has been faithful to Israel (according to Solomon's praise).

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

How often do we look back and remember the faithfulness of God in our lives, in the life of our small group, and in the life of our faith family? As we remember God's faithfulness, we praise Him, and we trust that He will always be faithful.

- As a group review God's faithfulness to His people, to our faith family, to our small group, and to each of us as individuals.
  - What are some examples of God's faithfulness in the Old Testament?
  - What are some examples of God's faithfulness in the New Testament?
  - What are some examples in our faith family of how God has been faithful to His promises?
  - What are some examples in our small group of how God has been faithful to His promises?
  - What are some examples in your life of how God has been faithful to His promises?

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **1 Kings 8:22-53: Solomon dedicates the Temple as a house of prayer.**

The prayer begins with a confession of who God is similar to Deuteronomy 7:7-9. Then Solomon turns to ask the Lord to bless certain kinds of people and to judge others. This prayer is grounded in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27-28. Solomon understands the greatness of God as well as how small this magnificent temple is in the eyes of God. He also realizes that God alone is judge and that all nations will be judged. He prays for the foreigners and prays that Israel will teach the nations God's will.

- List the different requests that Solomon makes of God (separate the blessings and curses or judgment).
- What does Solomon ask God to do for the foreigners?
- According to this prayer, what is the purpose of the temple?
- Read Mark 11:15-19. Does 1 Kings 8 provide clarity for why Jesus was so upset about how the Temple was being misused?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

Solomon calls on God to hear from heaven the prayers of his people.

- Do we believe God hears our prayers (all of them)?
- Do we take all of our requests and concerns to God? When the land is dry, do we pray for rain? Do we confess our sins?
- How can Solomon's prayer guide how we pray?

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **1 Kings 8:54-61: Solomon concludes by turning and blessing the people.**

This blessing is prefaced with an expression of God's faithfulness, and there are three parts to the blessing. Solomon encourages the people to recognize the importance of God's presence in their lives. He hopes that God will turn their hearts to him, and he desires for God to uphold the cause of Israel so that all the people may know that the Lord is God and there is no other.

- Verse 58 calls on the Lord to incline the hearts of His people to Him? Is it possible for the people to turn their hearts to God? (Deut. 6:4-9, 30:6, 14, 32:46)
- Why does Solomon ask God to maintain the cause of Israel? Is it for the sake of Israel alone? (vv. 59-60)

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- How are the hearts of God's people turned to him? How are God's people enabled to obey God's statutes and laws? See Romans 3:21-31.
- Why has God provided salvation to His children? Is it for their sake alone?
- When we pray for God to bless us and to maintain our cause, what should be our ultimate purpose in making this request? (v. 60)

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **1 Kings 8:62-66: The nation of Israel celebrated the dedication of the Temple by worshipping the Lord with sacrifices.**

Solomon spared no expense when it came to dedicating the temple. These sacrifices were fellowship offerings or peace offerings. The goal of this offering was to unite the people with their leaders and their God. This scene concludes with the people going to their homes with joyful and glad hearts.

- How rich must God have made Israel for them to be able to offer such extravagant numbers of animals in sacrifice to God?
- What was the mood of the people because of the feast? What was their view of God?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- When is the last time you have given generous free will offerings to God out of praise and thanksgiving to God because of His faithfulness?
- Can we imagine being joyful and glad of heart after watching our country sacrifice so much of our resources in worship to God? What about possible famine, pestilence or war? Is it not necessary to keep reserves?
- Can we imagine being joyful and glad of heart if our church sacrifices a large part of our resources in worship to God?
- How can we today worship God in a way that is similar to 1 Kings 8? Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-5. Did the Macedonians give out of joy like Israel?

## Small Group Guide – Week 24 Is Everything Really Meaningless?

*The Church at Brook Hills*

June 14-20, 2010

*Ecclesiastes*

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.

### ***Ecclesiastes***

"Both Job and Proverbs conclude that God creates and dispenses knowledge that renders life bearable and even enjoyable (cf. Job 38:1-42:6; Prov. 2:1-15; 8:22-36). Neither book claims that the world is always a friendly place for the righteous or the wicked. Rather they observe the power and wisdom inherent in creation and then probe the limits of revelation and experience to explain life's perplexing issues. It is within this canonical framework that Ecclesiastes must be interpreted" (House, 470).

The thesis of the book is that everything "under the sun" is vain, empty and meaningless. The Preacher even concludes that wisdom is not fully satisfying because the wise cannot comprehend all that the Lord does in the world.

"Perhaps more than anywhere else in Scripture – except the cross of Christ – Ecclesiastes presents the real effects of sin in our world" (Dever, 538). The world around us seeks to allure us with promises of meaning and success in things that are ultimately meaningless. It is a bad place for our investment. The Preacher spends most of the thirteen chapters showing us the bad news of the futility and meaningless of pursuing after things of this world before allowing us to see the good. Verses 12:13-14 "bring us the ultimate message of this book: only with God do we have a clear and true perspective that gives meaning to life" (Dever, 542). At the very end, the author summarizes the message of all of the Old Testament. He instructs the reader to fear God (calls us to a right relationship with God), keep God's commandments (brings to mind the law) and third he reminds the reader that God will judge every deed. We are to live in light of the future judgment that is coming.

"As we turn to the New Testament, we see that Jesus Christ is the one who redeems us from the vanity, the meaninglessness under which the Preacher suffered. Jesus redeemed us from the Preacher's meaninglessness world by subjecting himself to it...Jesus conquered the biggest fear facing the Preacher. He showed that for believers death is not the end of all meaning, but the entrance into the presence of God" (Longman, 40).

### ***Study the Text . . .***

It has been stated that Ecclesiastes is an essay in apologetics that defends the life of faith in a generous God by pointing to the grimness of the alternative (Eaton, 44).

- Read Ecclesiastes and write down all the different examples that the writer gives of vanity from wisdom to wealth.
- Read Acts 17:16-34. Is Paul's method of addressing the Athenians similar to Ecclesiastes? (neither alludes to God's commandments until the end)
- The word vanity or meaningless occurs 35 times in this short book. It refers to something insubstantial, temporary or passing. The author writes that everything "under

## Small Group Guide – Week 24

### Is Everything Really Meaningless?

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*Ecclesiastes*

the sun” is vanity. “Under the sun” refers to life that is apart from God. What then is not meaningless? What is a meaningful life?

- Ecclesiastes is alluded to in Romans 8:18-21. The word translated “futility” in Romans 8:20 is the same word used in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) to translate the motto word of Ecclesiastes “vanity.” What is the connection to Romans? How is meaningless and futility removed?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

Begin by asking group members to share how they measure success? How do they measure success at work, at home (in their relationships with their spouses and children), and at church (in small group or even the church budget)?

- Do you agree with “the Preacher” that everything under the sun is vanity? What does “under the sun” mean? What is “vanity?”
- What “under the sun” are you most attracted to, and most tempted to believe that in it true life is found?
- Did Paul ever present the gospel in a manner similar to Ecclesiastes (where the sinfulness of the world is presented upfront and intensely and then followed by the gospel)?
- Why is it important for Christians to read Ecclesiastes?
- What is the truth that Ecclesiastes clearly presents to the reader? What or who are we to live for and how are we to live?
- Is everything “under the sun” really meaningless?
- Have someone read Romans 8:18-21, 1 Corinthians 15:58 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. According to these verses what is the purpose of life in this world?
- How does Christ bring meaning and life into a dead and meaningless world?
- What are the “false Christ’s, false Messiah’s, false hopes” that are most advertized and promoted today?
- “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” (12:13). Who or what do you fear other than God at times? What’s the relationship between those things we pursue (vanities) and the things we fear?

## Small Group Guide – Week 24 Is Everything Really Meaningless?

*The Church at Brook Hills*

June 14-20, 2010

*Ecclesiastes*

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## Small Group Guide – Week 25

### Exaltation and Judgment on Mount Carmel

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*June 21-27, 2010*

*1 Kings 18*

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.

## **1 Kings 18**

The kingdom of Israel was divided into two nations following a foolish decision by Solomon's son, Rehoboam (1 Kings 12). Judah, the Southern Kingdom, was ruled by Rehoboam while Israel, the Northern Kingdom, was ruled by Jeroboam. All of the Northern Kingdom's kings were wicked, but Ahab had the distinction of being the most wicked king of all (1 Kings 16:30, 33; 21:25-26). Together with his wife Jezebel, Ahab re-introduces the worship of Baal and the Asherah to Israel (1 Kings 16:31-33; also 1 Kings 11:1-8). She then begins to systematically kill off the prophets in hopes of eliminating completely the worship of Yahweh in favor of Baal. It's at this time that God intervenes through a prophet named Elijah.

### ***Study the Text...***

#### ***Elijah Confronts Ahab (1 Kings 18:1-24)***

During the third and final year of the famine in the land God directed Elijah to present himself to King Ahab. As Elijah confronts Ahab he commands him to gather all of Israel at Mount Carmel, along with the 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the Asherah. Upon arrival Elijah challenges the people to make a decision about whom they will serve. He urges them to serve the one who truly is God. If Baal is God then the people should follow him. However, if the LORD ("Yahweh") is God then they should follow him. Apparently, the people of Israel were seeking to worship both Yahweh and Baal, therefore Elijah's initial challenge is answered with silence. No one says a word. The people are not about to commit themselves to one God or the other. Elijah then proposes a contest between the God of Israel and Baal. He purposely arranges the contest in such a way that the odds are completely against him. Not only is Mount Carmel regarded by the people as the sacred dwelling place of Baal but Elijah is outnumbered 450 to 1. From the perspective of the people of Israel it would be impossible to lose this contest! The rules are laid down. Each side is to prepare an altar and a sacrifice, without lighting the fire under it. Each side will call on its God (god) to consume the sacrifice with fire. The side whose God (god) answers by igniting the sacrifice is the one true God.

- What is the setting for Elijah's confrontation with Ahab? Why is this significant?
- Why does Ahab call Elijah the "troubler of Israel" in verse 17?
- What is the real reason for the trouble in the land?
- What do we learn about Jezebel in this passage of Scripture? How is she portrayed?

## **Small Group Guide**

### **Exaltation and Judgment on Mount Carmel**

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*June 21, 2010*

*1 King 18*

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- Where did Elijah command Ahab's prophets and the people of Israel to meet him? Why did Elijah want to meet at this particular location?
- What accusation does Elijah bring against the people of Israel? How do the people respond?
- How many prophets opposed Elijah on Mount Carmel? Why is this significant? What was Elijah wanting to prove to the people?
- How will the prophets of Baal know who the one true God is? Why is this particularly significant? (extrabiblical sources give evidence that Baal was thought of as a god who controls fire and lightning) Where else in Scripture have we seen the Lord associated with fire? (cf. Lev. 9:24, 10:2; Num. 16:35)

### ***Group Discussion...***

- It's easy to criticize the people of Israel for their idolatry and following Baal. However, the reality is that in many ways we are just as guilty as they. What current day "idols" do you often find yourself following?
- What's so appealing to you about those "idols"? What do they promise you? How do they offer you hope?
- What does this passage reveal about God and His character? Why is this important?

### ***Study the Text***

#### ***The Prophets' Failure (1 Kings 18:25-29)***

All morning Baal's prophets call on their god and dance around his altar to arouse him to action. At noon Elijah begins to taunt them and sarcastically suggest that Baal is thinking about other things, or away on a trip, or even sleeping. When it was time for the evening sacrifice there was still no response.

- How long did the prophets call on their god?
- In what specific ways did the prophets attempt to gain the attention of their god? Were they successful? Which of their attempts do you find the most curious?
- How did Elijah respond to the prophets attempts to arouse their god to action?
- What does this passage reveal about the god these prophets served?

### ***Group Discussion. . .***

- Today there are also millions upon millions of people crying out to false gods who are unable to respond. Share a time when you witnessed man attempting to gain the attention of his god? How do people try to get the attention of their gods? What do they give their gods? What does what they give to their god say about what they value as most important?

## Small Group Guide – Week 25

### Exaltation and Judgment on Mount Carmel

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*June 21-27, 2010*

*1 Kings 18*

- What does this scene reveal about the condition of all mankind?
- How does the God we serve (“Yahweh”) differ from the god of the prophets in this passage? What difference should this make in our lives?

### ***Study the Text...***

#### ***The Lord’s Victory (1 Kings 18:30-40)***

At the time of the Israelites’ evening sacrifice, Elijah steps forward and prays. He doesn’t cry out with a loud voice or leap on the altar as the prophets of Baal did earlier, instead he addresses God with a simple prayer. He prays that God will hear his prayer so that the people will know that Yahweh alone is God, and so that His people will worship Him alone. He prays that the people will see that he has done all these things at the Lord’s command. He prays that they will know that it is God who has turned their hearts toward Him. Almost immediately, it would seem, God responds. He sends fire from heaven that consumes the bull and the wood, and the stones, the dust, and the water. The fire consumes absolutely everything! Yahweh wins the contest hands down. He demonstrates that He alone is the one true God. As the people recognize this reality they respond accordingly by falling on their faces and crying out “The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God.”

- What was the Lord’s motivation for answering Elijah’s prayer? Where else have we seen this truth in Scripture?
- Why did Elijah go to such extremes to make sure the entire area was saturated with water?
- How did the Lord answer Elijah’s prayer? What was remaining after the fire of the Lord fell?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- Contrast how Elijah approached the Lord with the prophets’ approach to their god? What does this teach us about the God we serve and how we should or should not approach Him? What does this teach about the character of the God we serve? What other passages in the New Testament address this issue? (see Matthew 6:7-13)
- What was the ultimate outcome of the prophets? Was this a just penalty or too severe?
- In what ways does Elijah foreshadow the role of Christ?
- At this point in redemptive history why is this event of Elijah and the prophets of Baal so significant?

## Small Group Guide – Week 26

### A Rebellious Missionary and a Relentless God

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*June 28- July 4, 2010*

*Jonah*

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## **Jonah**

The book of Jonah broadcasts the relationship between a rebellious missionary and a relentless God. It is one of the most famous stories in the Old Testament due to the miraculous moment when a man is swallowed by a whale. The message of Jonah, however, moves beyond the miraculous and magnifies human sin in the ruthless forms of racism and hatred. In contrast, the message of Jonah highlights God's sovereign grace in the remarkable forms of persistence and compassion.

## **Study the Text . . .**

In vv. 1-2, God calls Jonah to do something he does not want to do. The LORD wants him to go to the great and wicked city of Nineveh (v.2). The term translated "great" means not only large in size but wide in influence. What happened in Nineveh affected many other areas of the ancient world, much like modern day New York City. The term translated "wicked" means that the city was marked by much evil behavior, but it also carries a meaning that suggests the city may have experienced some type of calamity. One might think of Nineveh like New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. New Orleans was notorious for its hedonistic habits before being devastated by a hurricane. Likewise, Nineveh was a great city with people that were far from God but that may have had great physical needs. In His compassion, the LORD wanted to meet the city's needs, primarily spiritual and possibly physical, so He calls forth His prophet, Jonah.

In vv. 3-17, Jonah rebels against God's call. He does not want to go to Nineveh so he rises, boards a boat, and sails in the opposite direction. He is described as trying to flee "from the presence of the LORD" (v. 3). He consciously rebels against the LORD and all that the LORD desires him to do. Yet, the LORD is relentless in His purposes, so He "follows" Jonah by hurling a great wind upon the sea to disrupt the voyage. The storm frightened all on board. They began crying out to their gods to discover who was at fault. Before the boat and all on board were destroyed, Jonah was identified as the one who had brought trouble to the ship. Jonah volunteered to be thrown overboard in an attempt to appease God and stop the storm (1:12, 15). To our surprise, the other sailors at first refused to throw him overboard. Thus, the pagan sailors demonstrate more compassion for Jonah than Jonah did for them or the people of Nineveh. Jonah's actions show that he would rather die than obey God by going to Nineveh. Yet, God did not let that happen. He appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah (1:17). Once the storm ceased, all on board worshiped the LORD (v. 16).

- Why do you think Jonah refused to go to Nineveh? (see 4:1-2)
- Compare Jonah's attempt to "flee from the presence of the LORD" with Psalm 139:7-12.

## Small Group Guide – Week 26

### A Rebellious Missionary and a Relentless God

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*June 28- July 4, 2010*

*Jonah*

- Why did God relentlessly pursue Jonah in his rebellion?
- Why do you think the sailors continued rowing and fighting the storm even after they found out the cause of the storm was Jonah?
- What other examples exist in Scripture of God relentlessly pursuing people in the midst of their rebellion? (i.e. 1 Kings 19:1-18; Luke 5:27-32)

### **Group Discussion . . .**

- Why do you think Jonah refused to go to Nineveh?
- Is it possible to flee from the presence of the LORD?
- Have you ever consciously rebelled against God's will for your life? Ask if someone would mind sharing their story.
- Have you ever been angry or rebellious because of God's forgiveness / grace / compassion towards someone else (maybe an enemy)? If so, why?
- How did you discover the LORD's relentless pursuit of you?
- How does knowing that the LORD relentlessly pursues those who rebel against Him affect how you relate to Him and to others?

## **Jonah's Rescue (Ch. 2)**

### **Study the Text...**

In Jonah 2, we find the prophet in the belly of a great fish—where he spent three days and three nights. Often, we read Jonah's story and consider the fish to be an instrument of judgment. We think, "If Jonah had not disobeyed, then he would not have wound up in such a precarious position." However, had God not provided the fish, Jonah would certainly have died (v. 5). Just before drowning, Jonah cried out to God in repentance (v. 7). In verse 7, Jonah "remembered" the LORD. This term is used frequently throughout Scripture. To remember does not simply mean to call to mind something that was forgotten. It is a call to action. A call to remember is a call to act on that which is remembered (See also 1 Corinthians 7:23-32 noting the role of remembering in the LORD's Supper). Jonah remembered what the LORD was like and *acted on that knowledge* by crying out to Him!

Even while Jonah was in the belly of a great fish, God heard and responded to his prayer. No one's rebellion renders them beyond God's redemptive reach. In response, God provided the fish to rescue Jonah from the consequences of his disobedience. The fish, then, is a surprising instrument of salvation! Jonah realizes this and prays the prayer contained in this chapter. Its theme is captured in the last phrase: "Salvation belongs to the LORD!" In Matthew 12:40-41, Jesus associates his death, burial, and resurrection with Jonah's time spent in the belly of the great fish. People, like the Pharisees, viewed the cross as an instrument of divine judgment. Anyone who died on a cross was considered cursed by God (See, Galatians 3:13). However, God sent Jesus to die on the cross in order to save people from their rebellion. As God brought Jonah's life from the pit (v.6), God would vindicate His Son, securing salvation for all who believe. He would raise Jesus from the grave after three days and nights in the tomb. The message of the Gospel shows the world that "Salvation belongs to the LORD!"

## Small Group Guide – Week 26

### A Rebellious Missionary and a Relentless God

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*June 28- July 4, 2010*

*Jonah*

All nations need to know that “salvation belongs to the LORD.” Christians are commissioned to carry the message of the cross to all nations so that a remnant from all nations can be rescued from divine judgment.

- How does Jonah’s prayer resemble many of the Psalms? (i.e. Psalm 3; 139; 118)
- What do you think Jonah “remembered” about the LORD (v. 7)?
- How does Jonah respond to the LORD’s salvation?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- What does it mean to remember the LORD?
- Where in the New Testament are we told to “remember”? (answer—the LORD’s supper)
- Why is it important to act on that which is remembered rather than to just think about it?
- In what ways is the Gospel a surprising instrument of salvation?
- What is the appropriate response to the LORD’s salvation?
- How does knowing that no one is beyond God’s redemptive reach shape your confidence in approaching and executing the Great Commission?

## **Nineveh’s Repentance**

### ***Study the Text (Ch. 3)***

The LORD granted Jonah a second chance and commanded him to go to Nineveh. Jonah obeyed. Upon arriving in the city, Jonah spent several days preaching a message of judgment (v. 4). God gave Nineveh forty days and in so doing He showed merciful restraint. He restrained judgment so that the people might repent and find rescue. The people believe his message and repent (v. 5). People all throughout the city of Nineveh repented (vv. 6-9). Just as God responded to Jonah’s repentance by coming to his rescue, God “relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it” (v. 10). God spared the people of Nineveh because they believed His word and repented of their sin. God relentlessly pursued Jonah in the midst of his rebellion so that he might relent from destroying Nineveh upon their repentance. In other words, God showed Jonah grace and mercy so that He might show Nineveh grace and mercy.

- What was Jonah’s message?
- Why was God gracious towards Jonah?
- What does the people’s repentance look like?
- Examine what repentance looks like or would look like in other people’s lives in Scripture (i.e. Luke 5:27-32; Mark 10:17-22)

### ***Group Discussion...***

- What is the relationship between God’s relentless pursuit of Jonah and His decision to relent from destroying Nineveh?
- Why did God give Jonah forty days? (merciful restraint)

## Small Group Guide – Week 26

### A Rebellious Missionary and a Relentless God

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*June 28- July 4, 2010*

*Jonah*

- In light of what happens in Nineveh, why did God relentlessly pursue Jonah?
- Why does God show us grace and mercy?
- What does it mean to repent?
- What does repentance look like in our lives?

### ***Study the Text (ch. 4)...***

The entire narrative comes to a climax in chapter four. In vv. 1-3, the reason why Jonah initially refused to go to Nineveh is revealed. He knew God would be gracious and merciful to the people of Nineveh if they repented. Jonah did not want that to happen because he was a racist rebel whose heart was filled with hatred toward the Ninevites. Fear did not prompt his disobedience, a lack of compassion and hatred did. Just as God treated the people of Nineveh better than they deserved, He treated Jonah better than he deserved. God appointed a plant “to save him from his discomfort” (v. 6). The word “appoint” is the same word used to describe the fish in 1:17. This made Jonah happy, but God also “appointed” a worm to eat the plant, which then made Jonah angry. Bitter Jonah became angry enough to die. Jonah revealed that he was more concerned about his comfort than the salvation of the Ninevites. But, God revealed that He was more concerned about the salvation of the 120,000 persons than he was with Jonah’s comfort.

- Why was Jonah exceedingly displeased and angry?
- Why was he so filled with hatred toward the Ninevites?
- What does it mean for God to be gracious and merciful?
- How is God’s sovereignty portrayed throughout the Jonah narrative?
- Compare Jonah’s reaction to God’s mercy and grace for Nineveh with the sailors’ reaction to discovering that Jonah was the cause of the storm. Why would the story of Jonah be offensive to someone that had made Israeli patriotism an idol?
- Compare Jonah’s reaction to God’s mercy and grace for Nineveh with the older brother’s reaction to the father’s love for the younger brother in Jesus’ parable of the two lost sons in Luke 15:25-32. What sin does Jonah and the older brother share?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- How might racism and hatred prevent us from being obedient to the Great Commission?
- Is there a particular kind of person that we have trouble loving? Why?
- How might we cultivate hearts of compassion like God’s rather than copying the heartlessness of Jonah?
- Are we more concerned with our comforts (i.e. plants) than we are with God’s compassion for the nations?
- What are our “plants?” What blessings from God have we turned into idols such that if they were taken from us we would be “angry enough to die?”
- How do we respond when the LORD removes our comforts?
- What is keeping us from being obedient to God’s command to all believers to

**Small Group Guide – Week 26**  
**A Rebellious Missionary and a Relentless God**

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*The Church at Brook Hills*

*June 28- July 4, 2010*

*Jonah*

make disciples of all nations?

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## ***Study the Text . . .***

### ***Approaching the text***

The nation of Israel was God's chosen people. God had brought them out of Egypt and rescued them from their affliction. He led them to their land, giving them victory over their enemies, that they may possess it. Israel was His people, and He gave them commands and promises of blessing if they would obey Him and be His. But Israel instead gave themselves to the gods and the peoples of the nations around them (Amos 3:1-2). Amos and Hosea both prophesied against the Northern Kingdom (Israel). They delivered to the people God's coming response (judgment) to the manner in which they had chosen to live and dishonor Him.

### ***Read***

*Amos 5:1-7; 18-27*

Throughout Amos we see the rebuke from the Lord that Israel has turned aside and refuses to return to Him. It's not a picture of this happening just recently or only once. God has repeatedly and patiently shown grace and mercy to His people. Now because of Israel's persistent sin, severe punishment must come before He restores them again.

Hosea's prophecy carries much the same message, but in addition to vocal proclamation, his message is demonstrated in unconventional actions. God calls Hosea to execute his message as a living symbol to Israel. Hosea follows God's instructions to take a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom giving them names that symbolize judgment on Israel (Hosea 1:1-8).

*Hosea 4:1-12; 5:14-15*

Here we see the charges of controversy that the Lord had against Israel. He specifically names a lack of faithfulness (steadfast love) and knowledge of God. Instead of faithfulness to God and knowledge of God, Israel has filled their lives with worldly pursuits that are described in strong and offensive ways just as they were to the God they were forsaking. We also see the coming punishment and destruction at the hands of the Lord. He will tear them like a lion and leave them.

### ***Discuss***

- What character traits or attributes of God are evident in these passages of Scripture?
- Which of these character traits of God are least likely to be talked about in the church today? Why?
- Many are the manifestations of Israel's sin and offense toward God, but what is the root of the matter? How does your answer to the preceding question relate to the root of sin

## Small Group Guide – Week 27

### AMOS AND HOSEA

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*The Church at Brook Hills*

*July 5-11, 2010*

*Amos and Hosea*

we see in the Garden of Eden? Have you ever thought that this may also be the root of the sins that you struggle with the most?

- Our modern church culture emphasizes forgiveness and patience, but this scripture seems to focus more on the resolute wrath of God due sin. Do you find yourself counting on continued patience? When you struggle with sin, do you focus on its manifestations or its root?

#### **Read**

Amos is a prophecy weighing heavily on the transgressions of Israel and speaking strongly of the destruction the nation is sure to face. It is not, however, without its upturn and looking forward toward a garden like restoration.

#### *Amos 9:11-15*

Speaking of the raising and repairing of the fallen booth of David is a promise that Israel will have a remnant to carry out its purpose in Salvation History. This passage is even quoted in Acts 15:16-17 as they consider gentiles coming to faith and that they are seeing part of the fulfillment of this claim in David's house possessing "all the nations who are called by [His] name." The focus has turned from an ethnic Israel to a spiritual Israel to which people from all nations may belong by faith in the Messiah who came through Israel's remnant.

#### **Discuss**

- How does God coming to Israel with both judgment for sin and promises of restoration anticipate the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ? (judgment for sin= cross, restoration and hope= resurrection)

#### **Read**

The book of Hosea is more complicated in its cyclical nature of addressing Israel's transgression, warning of punishment, and God's desire to restore them. Like Amos though, it does end on a positive or hopeful note.

#### *Hosea 14:1-9*

The call is for Israel to return with humble repentant hearts requesting the favor of the Lord. Then God's response will be healing, blessing, and a reminder that he was always the only God, and that he alone is worthy of all their worship. Not only do we hear of this redemption and healing in the words of the prophet, but they are also symbolized in his act of redeeming his unfaithful wife (Hosea 3).

These prophecies display God's wrath in ways that are hard to deal with, but the grace, mercy and love of God are evident also. We see that God tears so that he may heal and strikes down that he may bind up (Hosea 6:1). His purpose is to purify His people and gather them to Himself.

#### **Discuss**

- Read again Hosea 14:2-3. From the words Israel has been suggested to use, what elements can we see that should be present in hearts that return to God?

## Small Group Guide – Week 27

### AMOS AND HOSEA

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*The Church at Brook Hills*

*July 5-11, 2010*

*Amos and Hosea*

- How can we seek to be a people of faithfulness and steadfast love – the faithful bride of Christ?
- How can we seek and share knowledge of God?
- In your relationship with Christ, do you communicate your gratefulness that as a follower of Jesus you have been included in “all the nations who are called by [His] name”? If so, how do you do that on a daily basis?
- The unfaithfulness of Israel calls for a more permanent remedy, which will come in the faithfulness of Christ to the Father and the faithfulness that Christ then works through the Holy Spirit in his people. How does the Holy Spirit enable us to remain faithful to God?
- God’s love for Israel foreshadows Christ’s love for the church. How has God specifically shown you love despite your unfaithfulness?

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### ***Micah***

Micah continues in the theme established by Hosea and Amos--God will judge his people for their sins. The book takes on the feel of a lawsuit. God's people are in the dock, and God himself will bring about judgment. However, judgment is not the only note sounded in this book. Restoration is also a major theme. God will show his covenant faithfulness by fully and finally redeeming his people.

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **Micah 4-5: God promises the restoration of a remnant of Israel under the leadership of a Shepherd-King.**

The book begins with God's indictment against Israel and Judah for their many transgressions. God will destroy all idolatry in Israel, and the people will be sent into exile. In chapter 2, God indicts the leaders and the wealthy for oppressing the poor by seizing land and power. Micah's prophecy is even more specific in chapter 3 as God condemns the prophets and rulers who have led God's people astray with false prophecy and evil deeds. Because of the evil of the rulers of Judah, Jerusalem shall become "a heap of ruins" (3:12). In chapter 4, the tone shifts to restoration.

- 4:1 – What is being referred to as "the mountain of the house of the LORD"?
- Why will many nations come to "the house of the God of Jacob"?
- Why will nations stop fighting one another?
- 4:7 – With who will God "make the remnant" and build "a strong nation"?

In chapter 5, Micah offers clarity and specifics for how the promises in chapter 4 will come to pass.

- From what little town will the ruler of Israel come?
- How will this ruler reign over the people of Israel?
- In 5:15, God states, "In anger and wrath I will execute vengeance on the nations that did not obey." What have these nations done that is going to bring the wrath of God upon them?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

Sin and specifically idolatry will be judged. We praise God that Jesus Christ is not only our Shepherd-King but also our substitutionary sacrifice. Because of his death on the cross, God's wrath and judgment for the sins of his people was placed on Christ. For those who do not turn and follow Christ alone, God will execute his vengeance.

- Begin by asking people to share about how they view God. Do you see God as just a loving God? Do you view Him as a wrathful God? Do you see God as both loving and wrathful? How do you hold these two characteristics in tension?

## Small Group Guide – Week 28

### Who is like Yahweh?

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*July 12-18, 2010*

*Micah*

- Idolatry brought swift and harsh judgment against the nation of Israel? Why does God judge idolatry so harshly?
- Today our idols are not pillars, Asherah images, or even fortunetellers. What are the idols that we worship?
- Should we make a distinction in the actual worship of false God's like Asherah and the putting of certain things like material goods or certain people before the true and living God? The answer to this is yes. It is a greater degree of idolatry to actually bow down to false God's like Asherah. It is important to keep this distinction in mind when we talk about our idolatry here.
- We are saved by grace alone through faith in Christ alone. Does this mean it is ok to worship idols?
- If we at times put other things before God can we lose our salvation?
- Do those who are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone ever put things before God in our hearts?
- How does this fact make you even more appreciative of the work of Christ on our behalf?

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **Micah 6:1-8: God indicts His people and states His expectation for His people.**

The text now moves from restoration back to judgment. Micah is not going to leave the people dreaming about the restoration yet to come. He will remind them of their sins and coming judgment, and God's expectation for His children.

- How did God redeem His people from Egypt?
- What did Balak king of Moab devise against Israel?
- How did Balaam answer Balak?
- What are some examples of "saving acts of the LORD" that we have seen so far this year in our chronological reading of the Bible?
- Does God desire burnt offerings? Read Isaiah 1:11-17.
- What does God desire and expect?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

God began his indictment by reminding Israel of how he has always been faithful to keep his covenant promises; yet, they were unfaithful. God has and always will be faithful to His children; yet, we so often turn from God and sin against Him.

- Ask a couple of people to share how God has shown His faithfulness in the life of their family?
- Seeing and knowing that our God is always faithful, why do we turn from Him and sin against Him?
- Isaiah 1:16 says, "Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes." How do we wash ourselves and remove our evil deeds? Can we do this? How are our evil deeds removed? How are we cleansed of all our sins?
- What does it mean to do justice? Provide some practical examples.
- How do we love kindness?

- How do we walk humbly with our God?

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **Micah 7:18-20: No one is like Yahweh.**

Micah ends the book by providing his readers with a description of the character and covenant faithfulness of God. This is not the first time that the character of God has been described to us. In Exodus 33:18, Moses asked to see God's glory. When Moses went up on Mount Sinai, God passed before him and proclaimed His character.

- List the characteristics of God found in Exodus 34:6-7.
- List the characteristics of God found in Micah 7:18-20.
- There are several other places that also describe God's character. Can you remember any of them? If so, list the characteristics of God in each occurrence.
- Describe the character of God.

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

God's character never changes, and as we continually see God is always faithful to His promises.

- Knowing that no one is like our God, why do we at times pursue the things of this world instead of worshipping God alone?
- How can you as group continually remind one another of the character and faithfulness of God and stir one another to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with our God?

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## ***Isaiah 24-26***

The book of Isaiah was written during the second half of the eighth century B.C. (approximately 750-700 B.C.). During that time, five different kings reigned in the southern kingdom of Judah, the kingdom built around Jerusalem. The Assyrian empire had grown in strength and ambition. It destroyed the northern kingdom and eventually pushed its borders to within eight miles of the walls of Jerusalem. The king at that time, Ahaz, then made a bad decision. He decided to put his trust in the Assyrian emperor. So he made a treaty with him, paid tribute to him, and even sent Israelites to Assyria to study their styles of worship to bring back to Jerusalem. In other words, Ahaz made Judah a vassal of Assyria and Assyria's gods. Following Ahaz's death his son Hezekiah followed him and reigned twenty-nine years as one of Judah's best kings, but the threat of Assyrian invasion was alive and well. Therefore, the people in Judah faced a crisis of belief; do they trust in God to deliver them or the surrounding nations for protection. It's within this context that the prophet calls for the people to make a commitment to honor God and trust Him for deliverance and victory.

## ***Study the Text...***

### ***Judgment on the Whole Earth (24:1-23)***

This chapter contains announcements of future judgment on sinful humanity and the places where they live. As in chapters 13-23, similar images of destruction, death and ruin are used to describe the demise of individual cities and nations, however now one finds a climactic curse on all humanity and the whole earth (24:1-13, 18-23). This destruction of wickedness will bring relief to the oppressed, and the righteous will exalt God's name because of His great and mighty deeds (24:14-16), but these events will not happen immediately. Instead, God's people must now endure trouble and hardship (24:16-18) as they wait for that future day when God will reign as king from Zion (24:23). Nevertheless, the outcome of their struggle is set and is absolutely sure; God will be victorious. In light of this future victory and deliverance the people should commit to Him and trust Him in their present trouble.

- How does Isaiah describe the condition of the earth in the last days (24:1-6, 19-20)?
- What caused this condition (24:5-6)?
- Why is there a connection between human sin and the earth's curse? See Genesis 1:28, 2:15, 3:17-18; Romans 8:18-21.

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- What is the meaning of verse 2 within the context of the chapter? What does this teach us about the day of judgment? (social status makes no difference on the day of judgment)
  - What is the general attitude of the people during the last days (24:7-13)? What will come to an end during this time? What will take its place?
  - How does 24:14-16 fit within the context of the chapter?
  - According to 24:21-23 who also will face judgment in the last days? (also note Ephesians 6:11-12 and Revelation 20:7-10)

### ***Group Discussion...***

- What thoughts and feelings come to your mind as you read through the descriptions of judgment and destruction in the chapter?
- What initial questions does this chapter provoke? Did anything from the chapter surprise you?
- In what ways would the truths of this chapter provide hope and encouragement to the people of Israel? How about you?
- This chapter describes the future reality of those apart from Christ. Who do you know that doesn't know Christ? How can you begin to practically share the gospel with them?

### ***Study the Text***

#### ***Praise to God for the lavish banquet to come (Isaiah 25:1-12)***

Whereas chapter 24 involved doom and destruction, chapter 25 pictures a celebration in which God and His people rejoice over His establishment of His victorious reign over the world. This victory celebration involves:

Singing God's praise	25:1-5
Enjoying God's bountiful feast	25:6-8
Expressing trust in God	25:9-12

The song of thanksgiving in 25:1-5 serves as the response of God's people for the victory He will win over His enemies and for the establishment of His reign as king over heaven and earth (24:1-23). The final paragraph of trust and confidence (25:9-12) is a response to the announcements made at the banquet in 25:6-8. The overall picture of the chapter is that of trust and praise in the God who sovereignly reigns over all. This chapter should provoke hope and trust in the people while the Assyrians surround them.

- What are the reasons the people are thankful and sing praise to God in 25:1-5?
- What are the wonderful deeds a reference to in 25:1? (the events described in chapter 24) When were these wonderful deeds planned by God?
- What is the positive result of the destruction and devastation described in chapter 24 (25:3)? Do you think this is the appropriate response or a little strange?

- What picture is used to describe God's deliverance of His people in the kingdom (25:6-8)?
- Who is included at this magnificent banquet (25:6)?
- What will God do at this lavish banquet for all the peoples (25:6-8)?
- How do the people respond as they look ahead to the banquet that awaits them in the future (25:9-12)?
- What is the people's posture or attitude in regards to their coming salvation (25:9)?

### ***Group Discussion. . .***

- The prophet declares that God will abolish death but does not describe the details of how this will take place. How do New Testament writers explain God's elimination of death? (see Romans 6:13-14; 1 Corinthians 15:12-28; Revelation 21:1-4)
- List out the attributes of God's character that are manifested throughout this chapter?
- Read 1 Peter 1:13. How can you actively set your hope on the promises found in Isaiah 25?
- How should the present hope found in Isaiah 25 (particularly 25:6-8) affect your present choices and attitudes?
- Of the events described in 25:6-8 which do you most anticipate? Please explain.
- In light of the fact that "all peoples" will be present at the Messianic banquet (25:6-8), how are you actively seeking to spend your life for sake of the nations?
- In what ways are the events described in chapter 25 partly fulfilled today? In what ways are they yet to come?

### ***Study the Text...***

#### ***Trust in God for Deliverance (Isaiah 26:1-27:1)***

The prophetic message now moves from future eschatological events when God rules the world from Mount Zion (24:23) to the present situation of the people of Judah. The people are in great pain (like the pain of childbirth) in light of the Assyrian threat with no salvation in sight. They continue to hope for God to act (26:8) and see God's zeal for His people soon (26:11).

In the context of chapters 24-27, the prophet describes the eschatological picture of God's destruction of all of His enemies (chapters 24-25) to convince the people of Judah to place their faith in God now (chapters 26-27). In the future God's people will trust God and experience His salvation when He destroys all His enemies (25:9), therefore the prophet exhorts His audience in Jerusalem to trust God to do the same thing now in the midst of their present Assyrian distress. The chapter can be divided into three general sections:

A community song of trust	26:1-6
A community lament	26:7-18
A salvation oracle	26:19-27:1

Each section expresses the need to trust and have confidence in God's ability to save His people and defeat their enemies. Each section also exhorts the audience to act in faith because they know what God can do for them.

- How is the “strong city” that God creates for His people described throughout the chapter?
- What do these descriptions communicate about the nature of the city?
- Who dwells in the “lofty city” (26:5)? What is the ultimate outcome for those who dwell there?
- What are the characteristics of those who will enter into the “strong city”?
- Why are the people waiting on the Lord (26:8)? Specifically, what are they waiting for?
- Who do the people give the credit to for the victory and peace they enjoy (26:12-15)?
- In the midst of their present distress, what three promises can the people be assured of (26:19-27:1)?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- What does it mean in practice to trust the Lord?
- Take some time to think about 26:7-9. The people claimed that God's name was the desire of their souls. Can you make the same claim about God? Are there things you desire more than God and His glory?
- In 26:10, Isaiah says that the wicked person ignores God's majesty and upholds his own pride, despite the “grace” God shows him. How do even wicked people experience God's grace?
- In what ways do you ever take credit for that which God alone deserves credit for?
- What does this chapter teach us about the nature of unregenerate (unsaved) man apart from Christ?
- How does this chapter point to man's need for Christ?

## Small Group Guide – Week 30 Do We Really Want to See Christ?

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*July 26- August 1, 2010*

*Isaiah 53*

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.

### ***Isaiah 52:13-53:12***

In John 12:21, a group of Greeks approach Philip and say, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." The term "see" means far more than to view merely with the eyes. It carries an investigative quality. The seekers wanted to discover what Jesus was all about. In verses 23-24, Jesus discloses to his disciples that He is all about bringing life through death. In order to understand Christ, then, we must seek to understand His death on the cross. In order to "see" Jesus, we must gaze at Him through a cross-shaped lens. Had the Greeks been privileged to read Isaiah 52:13-53:12 perhaps they would have already "seen" Jesus. Today's passage is a prophetic portrayal of the salvific death of Christ.

### ***Study the Text . . .***

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is one of several "servant songs" recorded in the book of Isaiah (see, 42:1-4; 44:1-5; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). Each servant song contains a series of meditations on the ministry of the "Servant of the LORD," who is to be the Messiah. The climax of which comes in today's text when he is depicted as a suffering servant. The passage begins by describing the destiny of the LORD's servant. He shall act wisely and be exalted. The language "high and lifted up" is used elsewhere in Scripture only in reference to God Almighty.

After affirming the glorious nature of the servant, Isaiah traces a consistent theme throughout this text by repeatedly emphasizing the servant's repulsive appearance and pitiful state. Isaiah writes, "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (52:2). Earlier, the servant seems to have been beaten beyond human semblance (51:14). Yet, in the passage where Isaiah describes Christ's suffering and shame, he also affirms His glory. The unattractive, suffering servant will prosper, be satisfied, and vindicated (53:10-12). This text, then, provides a cross-section of suffering and glory.

Suffering and glory seem antithetical. How can a person's suffering be considered glorious? The answer is dependent upon the identity of the one who is suffering. If the suffering person is the "servant of the LORD" and his suffering accomplishes the will of the LORD (v. 10), then it cannot be anything less than glorious. This is the strange, theological interplay resident in today's passage. Suffering is nothing to be desired, yet we read that "it was the will of the LORD to crush" the suffering servant (53:10). Glory is supposed to be attractive, yet we read that the suffering servant "had no form or majesty that we should look at him and no beauty that we should desire him" (53:2). Suffering and glory, then, are not antithetical in God's redemptive economy. They are essential components in God's salvific purpose.

## Small Group Guide – Week 30

### Do We Really Want to See Christ?

The Church at Brook Hills

July 26- August 1, 2010

Isaiah 53

- What does the language of “high and lifted up” and “exalted” reveal about the servant?
- Where else is such language found in the book of Isaiah?
- How is Christ’s suffering described in this passage?
- How is Christ’s glory described in this passage?
- What other texts speak of the interplay of suffering and glory in the life of Christ? In the life of the Christian? (i.e. John 12:23-26; 2 Corinthians 4)
- Study today’s passage in light of John 12.

### **Group Discussion . . .**

- What do we find attractive?
- Would we have found Jesus attractive? Why or why not?
- Is it good to suffer? Why or why not?
- What would we describe as being glorious? Why?
- What does seeing Christ’s death and suffering reveal about the nature of our sin?
- What is the relationship between suffering and glory in the life of Christ?
- What is the relationship between suffering and glory of the life of the Christian?

## **We Rejected Christ**

### **Study the Text...**

Isaiah 53:1-6 describes the servant’s rejection. Verse 1 is a rhetorical question. The arm of the LORD is a figure of speech referring to God’s salvific activity. To not believe God’s Word is to reject God’s salvation. In John 12:38, Jesus quotes this passage when describing the people of Israel’s unbelief. They rejected Him and in so doing they rejected salvation. Here, the prophet Isaiah predicted such a response.

Isaiah identifies himself with the people who rejected the servant. Notice the use of the inclusive “our” and “we” in vv. 4-6. The inference is that those of us who read the text today are also included. We rejected the servant. We esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. We did not believe he represented the LORD because of his pitiful appearance. He seemed to be a cursed man rather than the blessed servant of the LORD. Yet, the cursed appearance of the servant was a reflection of our cursed condition. The grief he bore was *our* grief! This is a picture of the empathetic nature of Christ. The iniquities that were placed upon him were *our* iniquities! This is a picture of the substitutionary nature of Christ’s death. Though we are described as behaving like sheep Christ is described as the spotless lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (v.6; John 1:29)

- Underline the inclusive language peppered throughout the entire passage.
- What does it mean for the servant to have “borne our grief” and “carried our sorrows”? (v.4)

## Small Group Guide – Week 30 Do We Really Want to See Christ?

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*July 26- August 1, 2010*

*Isaiah 53*

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- What does it mean for the servant to bear our iniquities?
- What benefits did we receive because he was crushed and chastised

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- What does it mean to empathize?
- How does Christ empathize with our fallen condition?
- What does it mean for us to turn our own way? How does Christ fulfill the role as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world?
- What kind of peace and healing did Christ bring?

## Christ Gave Himself Up

### ***Study the Text . . .***

In verses 7-11, Isaiah anticipates further Christ's innocence and accentuates His compliance. What is implied about his innocence in verses 4-6 is made explicit in verse 9. He was accounted among the wicked though he himself was not wicked. Even more astonishingly, we read here of his willful compliance. Not once did he speak up in his own defense. Often times we think about Jesus' death as if he was a victim but what we find here is that he was a volunteer.

- What language is used to describe Jesus' innocence?
- What language is used to describe Jesus' compliance?
- Read John 18:28-40
- What is significant about Jesus being accounted among the wicked?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- Was Jesus a victim or a volunteer?
- What's significant about identifying the difference between Jesus being a volunteer rather than a victim?
- Why is Jesus' innocence important for our salvation?
- What does Jesus' compliance teach us about the nature of grace?

## God's Will and Christ's Satisfaction

### ***Study the Text...***

Read vv. 10-12. Though Christ suffered and died in the place of sinners, he did not suffer and die according to the purpose of sinners. Verse 10 clearly states that Christ was crushed according to the will of God. God offered Christ to Himself as a guilt offering. Most of the offerings of the Old Testament were not totally consumed by fire. They would be partially burned up and then the rest would be eaten. The one exception was the guilt offering. It was the only offering to be totally consumed. The guilt offering was the only such

## Small Group Guide – Week 30

### Do We Really Want to See Christ?

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*July 26- August 1, 2010*

*Isaiah 53*

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offering that could atone for sin (see Lev. 5:16, 18; 7:7). Christ was *the* guilt offering. His death atones for sin and enables sinners to stand guiltless before God.

Once Christ atones for sin, he is then “satisfied” (v. 11). He accomplished the LORD’s will and is satisfied. His suffering and death made many “to be accounted righteous.” After suffering and dying, Isaiah ends the chapter by commenting on Christ’s intercessory work. Christ intercedes for the sinners he saves through his suffering.

- Examine the nature of the guilt offering in Leviticus 5 and 7.
- What does it mean “to be accounted righteous?”
- What is intercession?
- Examine Hebrews 7:25

### ***Group Discussion...***

- Why did Christ die?
- How does verse 10 affect your understanding of God’s will?
- What does it mean to be guilty?
- What are we guilty of?
- How does Christ’s death remove our guilt?
- What does it mean “to be accounted righteous”?
- How does knowing Christ removed our guilt enable us to move forward from past disobedience?
- How does knowing Christ removes our guilt empower future obedience?
- How does knowing Christ removes our guilt encourage us to respond to sins committed tomorrow?
- How does Christ’s death and subsequent intercessory ministry highlight the necessity of evangelism?

## Small Group Guide – Week 31 DESTRUCTION AND DELIVERANCE

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*August 2-8, 2010*

*Nahum and Zephaniah*

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.

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### ***Nahum***

Nahum's prophecy highlights the wrath of God in his response to sin and sinners. He speaks particularly of the destruction coming to Nineveh. There is relief promised to what is left of Israel (referring to the kingdom of Judah). But even with relief coming, there is still a reminder in the language that God had used Assyria to punish His people. This prophecy focuses more on the destruction coming to Nineveh rather than restoration coming to Israel. From either perspective, Nineveh's or Israel's, the clear truth is that God is jealous for His glory.

#### *Nahum 1:2-8*

- Review verses 2 and 3. Do they describe the characteristics of a God you would like opposing you?
- The particular words used here and the subject matter discussed incite fear in those who reflect on them. Should this fear only be the response of those of Nineveh?
- A healthy fear of God can be a natural response of worship. The tendency may be to read these verses from the perspective of Nineveh. Reread verses 2-8 as a song of praise and adoration toward the God of all creation. Also read them from the perspective of God's people who will be freed from the oppression of this wicked nation when they are destroyed.
- The character traits that incite fear are still there to be observed but they are accompanied by other qualities of God's perfect holiness that also inspire confidence and trust along with fear and awe. (v. 3 & 7)
- Do you hate sin and evil the way God does? If not, do you think that is a sin you should repent of?
- Do you think God's patience ever runs out for those who continue in rebellion against him?
- When a person truly comes to Jesus Christ as Savior and *Lord*, will they continue habitually and consistently in rebellion against God?

## Small Group Guide – Week 31 DESTRUCTION AND DELIVERANCE

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*August 2-8, 2010*

*Nahum and Zephaniah*

### **Zephaniah**

Zephaniah's prophecy is directed toward Judah and all people. Where Nahum dealt more specifically with Nineveh, Zephaniah from the opening verses broadens the spectrum of those who will receive God's wrath to include the whole earth. Not only does this prophecy address a broad spectrum of people, it addresses a wider range of time. There are certainly parts of Zephaniah's declaration that speak of more immediate judgment, but there is great attention devoted to the final judgment on the "Day of the Lord."

#### *Zephaniah 1:14-18*

- We again see that the anger of the Lord burns against those who have sinned against him. The day of the Lord is to be a day of wrath.
- In 1:6 and 1:12 we see what demands punishment in the eyes of the Lord. Interestingly, in these verses we see language of guilt not in opposing the Lord but in complacency and not valuing Him rightly.
- His people would keep God's festivals in part, but give themselves also to worship other gods. (1:5)
- However this complacency or syncretism as seen here is clearly called opposition in other parts of God's word. Consider Ex. 20:3, Mt 12:30, and James 4:4.
- In contrast to the wrath due to the enemies of God Nahum 1:7 reminds us of the stronghold He is for those who take refuge in Him.

#### *Zephaniah 3:14-20*

- Zephaniah also looks forward to the future restoration of Israel, and to the work of their deliverer who will ultimately bring about that relief and blessing.
- The Lord is a deliverer who takes away the judgments against Israel.
- He deals with Israel's oppressors. He changes Israel's shame to praise.
- Take note of where the credit belongs in this passage. God says "I will..." (v.18-20). The Lord is mighty to save. He is faithful to the promises he has made to the His people.

### **Discuss**

- Discuss how you fear things or people as opposed to how you fear God. Is there a difference in how you would describe these fears? How has this study changed or influenced your understanding of types of fears? Are all fears good or bad?
- Fearing God is often a simple response to life experience or parts of scripture. How can you develop a discipline of fearing God in a healthy way?
- Remember that you did nothing to put yourself in the right with the Lord. A healthy fear may be the result of the realization that by all accounts we should

## Small Group Guide – Week 31 DESTRUCTION AND DELIVERANCE

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be enemies of God. How can you make a habit or discipline of rehearsing these truths?

- How can you incorporate your deserved destruction and the deliverance you receive daily into your conversations and relationships as you are making disciples?
- What's the relationship between humility and genuine seeking of God (Zeph. 2:3)?
- Close by reading Zephaniah 3:14-20. Discuss how God's judgment of the wicked contrasts with the eternal love, hope, and joy of God's people who have been saved from their sins. Encourage your group to meditate on Zeph. 3:17 before you close in prayer together.

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### **Joel**

The name Joel may be translated, "Yahweh is God." God sent Joel to proclaim "the day of the LORD" or judgment on Israel and all nations. He offers a message of hope and reconciliation for those who truly repent and turn to God, but for those who do not repent God promises utter destruction. Joel's message is that we must choose whom we will follow, God or man. God rejects apathy. He demands and is worthy of our worship.

### **Study the Text . . .**

#### **Joel 1: The destruction of the nation and a call to repent.**

- What do the locusts destroy?
- Why do locusts destroy the nation?
- Why is the nation told to commence a fast?
- Who will fast?
- Do you think there were people of Joel's day that explained this judgment away based on their naturalistic worldview? In other words, do you think some tried to explain what was going on in purely scientific categories?
- Do you think God still uses nature as a means to bring about His judgment today?

#### **Joel 2:1-17: Joel foretells the Day of the LORD and again calls the people to return to the LORD.**

The beginning of chapter 2 is similar to chapter 1, but it speaks specifically of judgment on Jerusalem through a plague of locusts. Most likely, Joel is making an analogy between the locusts and the Babylonian army. The prophecy is clear; no one can withstand the judgment of God. God then turns and says to His people, "Return to me with all your heart."

- How did God command the people to return to him?
- How does Joel describe God in verse 13?

### **Group Discussion . . .**

Joel's prophecy focuses on explaining the coming Day of the LORD. It will be a day of judgment and destruction. Joel is warning us to not live in apathy towards God, but to devote our lives to God, repent of our sins and live for God alone.

- Begin by asking people to share about how they approach God. Verse 2:13 describes God as gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting over disaster. We are comfortable with this description. But do we believe that God will judge all who do not worship Him alone? Do we approach God as a God of judgment and wrath?

## Small Group Guide – Week 32

### Yahweh is God

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*August 9-15, 2010*

*Joel*

- Verse 2:12 states, “Return to me with all your heart.” How does a person return to God with all his or her heart?
- How does a church return to God with all their heart?
- Why does God require fasting, weeping and mourning?
- Why does God want them to “rend” (tear) their hearts and not their garments? What does that mean?
- Is God seeking the repentance of individuals only? What does Joel call the whole congregation to do together?
- Have group members to share how they have seen God’s grace, mercy, patience, and steadfast love toward them in the past when they repented before God of a particular sin that had entangled them. Some may even want to share how God saved them when they first repented and trusted in Christ (this would be a good time to hear some peoples stories of salvation).

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **Joel 2:18-32: Yahweh alone is God, and He will pour out His Spirit on His people!**

- List examples of how God will restore His people.
- Why will God restore His people? See verse 27.

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

God will deliver a remnant of His people who are repentant so that all peoples will know that Yahweh alone is God and there is no other. God will transform His people with His Spirit so that all who call upon the name of the LORD will be saved.

- Read Joel 2:28-32. Read together Jeremiah 31:31-33. God will secure restoration with His children by sending His Spirit to change the hearts of all His children. Judgment will come upon all the earth, but some will be saved. Who shall be saved?
- Read together Acts 2:14-24, 37-38.
  - Who was filled with the Spirit?
  - Who was cut to the heart?
  - Jeremiah 31 and Joel 2 are beginning to be fulfilled as God’s Spirit changes the hearts and minds of His children. Later in Acts, we see that God also pours out His Spirit on Gentiles. The prophecies in Joel and Jeremiah have already begun to be fulfilled!
  - What are some evidences in a person’s life that demonstrate that the Holy Spirit lives within them (that they have been born again)?
- Read Romans 10:10-21.
  - Who will be saved?
  - As Christ-followers what is our responsibility?
  - Will everyone we share the gospel with believe?
  - Why do we share the gospel?
  - Ask group members if they have seen God save someone through their witness over the last year. Begin praying that God would use and allow each person in your group to be a part of seeing someone saved this next year.

### ***Study the Text . . .***

**Joel 3: God avenges the blood of His people, and He is a refuge for His children.**

All nations will stand before Christ and be judged. There is no escaping the judgment of God.

- Why will God judge all peoples?
- Will Judah be destroyed? How does God describe Jerusalem?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

God is “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.” Nowhere in the Old Testament does God forgive a stubborn and rebellious people. Repentance precedes mercy and forgiveness. Joel’s message to us today is repent and call on the name of the LORD (have faith in Christ alone), and we will be saved!

- Do we truly believe that God will punish all mankind for their sins?
- Have we repented of our sins? Are we living for God alone, or are our loyalties divided?
- Have we been cut to the heart because of our sins? Have we turned to God with all our hearts?
- Why is fasting so important in the life of a local church?
- How will your family fast and pray this coming Sunday?

As a small group, end your time together with corporate confession. Give everyone an opportunity to confess sins out loud and quietly. Then you can end with a prayer like this below from *The Book of Common Prayer* (1897).

Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Maker of all things, Judge of all men - We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness which we from time to time most grievously have committed by thought word and deed against thy Divine Majesty provoking most justly thy wrath and indignation against us. We do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings. The remembrance of them is grievous unto us. The burden of them is intolerable. Have mercy upon us. Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father. For thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may ever hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life. To the honor and glory of thy Name through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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## ***Jeremiah 31***

Jeremiah 31 is a pivotal chapter in the redemptive history of God's people as God provides further insight into how He will redeem a disobedient people. Jeremiah introduces us to the new covenant, and the reality that the old covenant is only a pattern of the covenant that Christ will initiate. The old covenant is dependent on man circumcising and transforming his or her own heart to follow God alone, and man is responsible for offering yearly animal sacrifices for sin. With the new covenant, God will circumcise the hearts of His children, and God will offer His son as a substitutionary sacrifice that covers all the sins of His children.

In this guide, we will walk through several different texts to see how Jeremiah 31 connects Deuteronomy with Acts and Hebrews. This text clearly reveals that the Bible contains one overarching story of God's perfect plan in salvation history.

Read through and study all the texts and then decide how to structure your small group discussion. If you have time, you may want to walk through each of the texts together. If you don't, focus on Jeremiah 31 and provide a short summary of the connections in the other texts.

## ***Study the Text . . .***

**Deuteronomy 4:1-14: Listen and obey the law of God and teach the rules to your children.**

- Why are they to obey the rules of the LORD?
- To whom are they to teach the rules?

**Deuteronomy 6:1-9: Fear the LORD by keeping his statutes and writing them on your heart.**

- What kind of fear is Moses writing about?
- Why does Moses tell them to be careful to obey the commandments?
- How are they to write the commandments on their hearts?

**Deuteronomy 10:12-22: Circumcise your heart because our God is God of gods and Lord of lords.**

- Describe God.
- How are they to circumcise their hearts?

**Deuteronomy 28:45-47: God will punish the people because they did not obey Him.**

Moses foretells the disobedience of the nation. Why according to verse 47 will they be punished and cursed?

**Deuteronomy 30:1-10: God will circumcise the hearts of His people so that they will love Him with all their hearts and souls.**

- Why does God circumcise their hearts?
- Are we able to circumcise our own hearts?
- What does it mean to circumcise your heart?

**Jeremiah 9:25-26: The LORD promises punishment on all those who are merely circumcised in the flesh.**

As you read through Jeremiah, you will notice the attention Jeremiah gives to showing and explaining how both Judah and Israel have been unfaithful and broken the covenant. God is reminding them of His words in Deuteronomy, and He is clearly proclaiming to them that outward circumcision is not enough. He expects and demands inward circumcision. Since the people do not worship Him alone with all their hearts and souls, He will punish them.

- Who will God punish? Just Israelites? Or all nations who are not circumcised of the heart?

**Jeremiah 31:31-40: God promises a new covenant that He will write on the hearts of His children.**

- How is this covenant different?
- How do you think He will put His law in His children?

**Hebrews 8, Hebrews 10:1-25: Jesus Christ is the new and better covenant.**

The writer of Hebrews is making the point that what Moses set up (tabernacle and sacrificial system) was according to the pattern Moses saw on Mount Sinai. God gave Moses a glimpse of heaven and then instructed Him how to do everything according to what He saw. Jesus did not follow a pattern when He came. He is what Moses was foreshadowing in the Old Testament. Jesus died on the cross, and he offered atonement for all mankind before the throne of God. Jesus' substitutionary atonement replaced the old covenant with a new and better covenant.

- Why is the new covenant better than the old covenant?
- Why is the blood of Jesus better than the blood of bulls and goats?
- Does the new covenant mean that the Old Testament and the Ten Commandments should be ignored? How does the new covenant impact the way we read, understand and apply the truths in the Old Testament?
- Does the blood of Christ circumcise the hearts of Christ-followers? How is the law put on our hearts and written on our minds?

**Acts 2:1-37: The Holy Spirit filled the Apostles who proclaimed the Word of God so that those who heard the Word would be cut to the heart.**

God works in indescribable ways. He gives us Moses' covenant to show us what is required to follow Him, but God knows all along that we are too sinful to be able to faithfully obey it. He calls us to write His law on our heart and obey Him. But, we are unable.

## Small Group Guide – Week 33

### The New Covenant

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*The Church at Brook Hills*

*August 16- 22, 2010*

*Jeremiah 31*

Abraham, Moses, Elijah, David – they all sinned. God not only provides redemption through Christ, but He sends His Spirit to open our eyes to see and our ears to hear. The Spirit cuts us to the heart and calls us to repent. He enables us to repent and turn to Christ, and when we do He fills us and begins to make us more and more like Christ. The Holy Spirit writes the law on our hearts.

- What do you think God means when He says, “Write the law on your heart”?
- What role does the Spirit play in the proclamation of the Word?
- What role does the Spirit play in the reception of the Word?
- What role does the Spirit play in the transformation (sanctification) of a Christ-follower?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

Jeremiah 31 is rich with meaning, and the truths found here should impact our understanding of God and our response to Him. As a group think through many of the questions above together and focus on a few specific questions.

- Is it possible for us to turn our hearts to God and live for God alone (circumcise our hearts)?
- How are our hearts circumcised? What does that mean exactly? Does it mean we are sinless?
- What role does the old covenant play in our life as Christians? Are the 10 commandments important to us? How do we read the Old Testament?
- How do we seek the power of the Holy Spirit? Can we? Is repentance important?
- What is the evidence in a person’s life that they have a circumcised heart?
- How should this entire discussion cause true Christians to view the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives on a daily basis?
- When Christ died, was buried, was raised, and then ascended into heaven, what did He promise to send to His followers (Jn. 16:7-7)?

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## ***Study the Text . . .***

The book of Habakkuk is a very special look at the mind and heart of a prophet. Books about the prophets and their prophecies vary in the amount of information they give. The stories of other prophets often record the happenings of the time or how the word of the Lord was delivered by the prophet, and even the response of those who heard it. In Habakkuk we have a much narrower focus. We are allowed to observe the intimacy of conversation between God and Habakkuk. This different approach is even highlighted by the absence of Habakkuk delivering God's message, within the context of book. Our focus is therefore drawn to Habakkuk as we identify with the essential complaint he presents, that God would allow the evil sinners to flourish.

### ***Read***

*Hab. 1:1-4*

Habakkuk presents a complaint to God that is not too different from a question we have all heard, "How can God let evil go unpunished?" This is only a slight variation from the possibly more popular, "Why do bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people?"

- Habakkuk assumes that God does not hear, that He will not save, and that He will sit idly by.
- He cannot see a plan for justice.

### ***Discuss***

Have you ever looked around you and questioned whether or not God was just?

Should we ever question God's justice?

Do you think it is possible for God to be doing good without us even realizing it?

Do you think God ever does good, wise, and perfect things that are beyond our present circumstance or understanding to even see?

*Hab. 1:5*

God's response begins with this simple and clear assertion that Habakkuk just doesn't get it. God even gives commentary on Habakkuk's heart when he says you would not believe it if I told you. God continues to share that He has a plan for punishment, but it is far from what Habakkuk expected or wanted to hear.

- God speaks of raising up a nation Habakkuk felt should be destroyed. (v.6)
- God recognizes that this nation is a conceited nation with confidence in their own abilities (v.7)
- He calls them guilty and knows their “own might is their god.” (v.11)
- This seems an unlikely response to a complaint such as Habakkuk’s.

***Discuss***

Do you ever wonder, stand amazed, and give God glory even when we don’t understand what is happening around you?

Do you trust God even when things don’t look favorable? Why or why not?

*Hab. 1:12-13; 2:1*

- Habakkuk remembers God’s promises to prosper His people and has confidence in His God. (v.12)
- Habakkuk also realizes God’s intention to use this nation He raises up as a judgment on disobedient Israel.
- Habakkuk also still feels as though this cannot be the right answer, and makes a case against the people of Babylon claiming they are more evil than Israel.
- 2:1 continues to show Habakkuk’s heart. He may realize that God is readying to punish Israel, but he still speaks as though confident God has chosen the wrong way to go about it.

***Discuss***

Should we ever question God’s wisdom?

What causes us to question God’s wisdom at times?

In those moments of questioning, who are we trusting in?

*Hab. 2:2-4*

- God is clear in verses 2 and 3 that His timing is perfect and must be trusted.
- The center of the issue is exposed. This is not only the central point God makes to Habakkuk but the central idea behind the teachings of the apostles in the New Testament, and the primary message of the whole of Scripture: “the righteous shall live by his faith.” (v.4)

Habakkuk was cut to the core with this reminder of the necessity of faith. He had been complaining about a mighty nation who put its confidence in its self and its own power, but he too had grown dependent on self, placing confidence in his own understanding and perceptions. After God had dealt personally with Habakkuk and his faith He gave him a

## Small Group Guide – Week 34

### HABAKKUK

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*August 23-29, 2010*

*Habakkuk*

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word against Babylon. Following that revelation we see once again the condition of Habakkuk's heart as he puts away his complaints and doubts to offer a prayer of praise and confidence.

*Hab. 3:17-18*

- Now in humility Habakkuk recounts the faithfulness of the Lord.
- He remembers the miraculous parting of the waters and the stopping of the sun as examples of God's faithfulness and divine planning. (v 8;11)
- Only in faith can he "take joy in the God of His salvation" while even in the midst of despair.

#### ***Discuss***

Have you ever (or recently) asked the Lord why He allowed evil to continue, seemingly unchecked?

Can you recall the condition of your heart when you asked such a question?

What can you learn from studying this account of the way God dealt with his messenger?

Is a lack of faith in your life keeping you from sharing God's message?

What is the relationship between humility and faith?

When you find yourself in times of despair do you tend to reflect on other similar times you have suffered, or do you remember ways God has proved His faithfulness to you in the past?

Have you ever considered it possible to truly have joy in the midst of suffering, or have thought it is only possible to have joy after suffering passes?

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## ***Lamentations***

The book of Lamentations is aptly titled due to its sorrowful tone. To "lament" means to express deep sorrow and grief. The book, then, consists of five dirges written to capture and to console those mourning over the just destruction of Jerusalem in 587/6 B.C. The prophet Jeremiah had issued multiple warnings to the people of Judah that God would judge Jerusalem due to their wickedness (i.e. Jeremiah 25:1-11). He pleaded with the people to repent and return to the LORD, yet they refused. The people did not heed the word of the Lord, and all that Jeremiah prophesied came to pass. Now that judgment has come in the form of a ruthless Babylonian siege, the city and its inhabitants lie in utter ruin and many are wondering if restoration is even possible. Without presuming upon the LORD's mercy (5:21), Lamentations assures God's people that restoration is possible if they simply remember and seek refuge in His compassionate character (3:21-33).

## ***The LORD is in the right.***

### ***Study the Text . . .***

Lamentations is divided into five chapters reflecting the five distinct poems found therein. Four of the poems are single acrostics structured on the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The first word of each stanza begins with a different letter of the alphabet; hence why chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5 contain 22 verses. Since English translations cannot capture fully the acrostic structure of the book, it is important to point this out because the book's design highlights chapter 3 as the crux of the matter. The third chapter is a triple acrostic containing 66 verses and the climactic appeal of the book. All in all, Lamentations is a literary masterpiece.

Chapter 1 portrays Jerusalem as a weeping widow who has digressed from royalty to slavery. Affliction, suffering, and sorrow have turned her life upside down. Her "majesty has departed" (v. 6). Memories of better days add to the bitterness of her tears (v. 7). Yet, while she mourns her destruction, she recognizes the justice of God in her demise. She "sinned grievously" (v. 8). In verse 9, her frequent rendezvous with idolatry are described by the phrase: "her uncleanness was in her skirts" (v. 9) Often, in the prophets adultery is used as a metaphor for idolatry. All the while, she "took no thought of her future," meaning that the people of Jerusalem did not believe God would judge their sin (v. 9).

The destruction of Jerusalem and the depression of the narrator are intertwined. Thus, the first poem seamlessly shifts back and forth between describing Jerusalem to discussing the narrator's inner turmoil. As goes Jerusalem so goes the poet. Jerusalem sinned grievously and was judged. The poet was part of the problem. In verse 20, He states, "I have been

very rebellious” (20). The writer is very careful to root the suffering and sorrow of Jerusalem as a just consequence of the people’s sin. In verse 18, he states clearly, “The LORD is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word.” By recognizing the justice of God, he rightly confessed his and everyone else’s sinfulness in response to the LORD’s judgment. He did not try to defend himself or anyone else.

- Identify all the points where the writer identifies Jerusalem’s sinfulness.
- Identify all the points where the writer identifies his own sinfulness.
- How does the writer describe Jerusalem’s struggle? What metaphors and images does he use?
- How does the writer describe his own struggle? What metaphors and images does he use?
- List some of the consequences of Jerusalem’s sinfulness? (i.e. in verse 7, the Babylonians gloated over the city’s downfall).
- What does it mean for the LORD to “be in the right”?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- Do you ever feel like the punishment for sin outweighs the offense?
- Why is this never the case?
- Have you ever been tempted to accuse God of wrong doing?
- Is God ever guilty of sin? Why or why not?
- Is our first instinct to defend ourselves or to confess our sins in the midst of suffering and sorrow?
- Why do you think our first instinct is to defend ourselves rather than to confess our sins?
- How might we foster the humble discipline of confessing our sins when suffering?

### **The LORD will do as He says.**

#### ***Study the Text...***

In the second and fourth chapters, the writer focuses mainly on God’s role in judging Jerusalem. God is the subject of most verbs in these chapters, and His severe sovereignty is portrayed with graphic clarity. He “swallowed up Israel” and “multiplied in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation” (2:5). God “gave full vent to his wrath” and “poured out his hot anger” (4:10).

Yet, once again, the writer justifies God’s actions by identifying the transgressions of Israel. In particular, the people chose to follow ungodly leadership. They gathered to themselves leaders who delivered false and deceptive visions and failed to identify sin as sin (v. 14). This too harkened back to Jeremiah’s warnings (i.e. Jeremiah 23:9-15). God held Judah responsible for who they chose to follow. If given a choice between following a likeable leader who is not faithful to speak God’s word or an unlikeable leader because he speaks God’s word, the people were to choose the latter (i.e. Jeremiah rather than the false

prophets). God judges both ungodly leaders and their followers severely. God's people must only follow leaders who are faithful to preach God's word even when they are commissioned with a hard message.

The ungodly leaders had set a pace of ungodly living before the people. They were faithless, proud and violent (4:12-13). God's people need godly leaders who speak the truth even if the truth hurts initially and strive to live their lives accordingly because God will always do as He says. "The LORD has done what He purposed; He has carried out His word, which He commanded long ago" (2:17) Israel's problem with ungodly leadership anticipated what Paul would warn Timothy about in 2 Timothy 4:3-4 and always reflects the spirit of the times prior to Day of the LORD (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11).

- Circle/list all the verbs that have God as subject in chapter 2.
- What did the false prophets fail to do (vv. 9, 14)?
- In what ways did the people fail to believe that God would do as He said? (i.e. 4:12)
- Read and examine Jeremiah 23:9-15 and 2 Timothy 4:1-5.

### ***Group Discussion...***

- In light of chapters 2 and 3, why is following godly leadership important?
- Why does God hold people accountable for who they choose to follow?
- Discuss nonnegotiable markers of godly leadership and teaching?
- Do Paul's words to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:1-5) ring true today? Why or why not?
- How can we be responsible to hear and to heed the word of God?
- How might our lives better reflect that we believe God will do as he says?

## **The LORD will hear our contrite requests for restoration.**

### ***Study the Text . . .***

Chapter 5 presents a corporate prayer of contrition and restoration. The passage reminds God's people to pray forward into the future. The implication is that with God, there is always hope for restoration even if all the evidence of the present situation points to the contrary. However, this does not mean God's people can presume upon the kindness of the LORD.

The truth of God's kindness is meant to lead people to repentance (Romans 2:4). Unfortunately, however, people tend to mistake God's kindness with indifference. Some assume that because God is kind, he will tolerate their disregard for His word and ways. Yet, this is exactly what Paul warns against in Romans 2:4-5, "Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteousness will be revealed." Confusing God's kindness with indifference renders repentance unnecessary and thus restoration unattainable.

Perhaps the most devastating, yet common, errors of our culture is widespread presumption upon the LORD's kindness. Such an assumption leads many to think that repentance is unnecessary to enjoy God's grace and favor. This was certainly the climate in Jerusalem for years leading up to the Babylonian siege. No one believed God would judge them for their sin. They presumed upon His kindness and as a result they experienced a foreshadowing of the final Day of the LORD. The closing verses of Lamentations, however, reveal that that changed. The people are now contrite and humble in their request for restoration.

- Read and reflect on Romans 2:14
- Why does Lamentations end with a corporate confession and appeal for restoration?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- What does "presumption" mean?
- What does it look like to presume upon the LORD?
- Why might the sin of presumption be so common?
- What does "contrition" mean?
- What does a prayer of contrition sound like?
- Why is contrition necessary for restoration?
- How can we further guard ourselves from the sin of presumption?

## **God's Mercies are New Every Morning**

### ***Study the Text...***

Nestled in the middle of Lamentations is perhaps one of the more famous and beloved passages about the mercy of God found in the Old Testament. 3:21-33 represents the crescendo of the book and the source of the people's hope and grace. These verses shine forth much promise for the people's restoration despite the devastation that surrounds them.

The writer calls to mind the character of God, which is the source of his hope (v. 21). He emphasized the steadfast love, unending mercies, and faithfulness of the LORD (v. 22). The wonder of God's grace is highlighted by the fact that the judgment the people are enduring is just. He does not "willingly afflict or grieve the children of men" (v. 33). In other words, God does not exercise wrath flippantly or sadistically. All that He does is right and just, including the punishment He brings about in response to human sin. Moreover, God does not have to restore His people, but He chooses to do so because of His remarkable character. His willingness to be the only source of hope for His hurting people induces humble contrition within them.

Verse 23 captures that memorable phrase about God's mercies being "new every morning." The writer's experience with the Babylonian siege has reminded him that he is not promised tomorrow. Each day he lives is a testimony to the merciful restraint of the

## Small Group Guide – Week 35

### Lamentations

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*Lamentations*

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LORD. Therefore, each day is a day graciously given by God to exercise repentance and faithful obedience to His glory.

- List the attributes of God peppered throughout this passage.
- Define those attributes (i.e. what is steadfast love?).
- What does it mean to “wait for the LORD” (v. 25-26)?
- What does it mean that God “does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men” (v. 33)?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- What does it mean to be hopeful?
- What do people put their hope in?
- Why is it important that God be the object and source of one’s hope?
- What does it mean for God’s mercies to be new every morning?
- How does being mindful of the merciful restraint of God affect our day to day lives?
- What aspects of our character does being mindful of the merciful restraint of God change?
- What does waiting on the LORD look like?
- Why does God willingly restore His people?
- What does restoration look like?
- Share testimonies of how you have experienced Divine restoration.

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## ***Ezekiel***

The book of Ezekiel was written during the time of Judah's exile in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem and most of Jerusalem's prominent people, including Ezekiel's family, were taken into exile (see Jeremiah 29:2) and placed in a refugee settlement. Apparently many believed this exile was only a temporary blip on the screen of their glorious history as God's people (see Jeremiah 28). However, Jeremiah had already informed the people (Jeremiah 29:1-23) that they were going to be in exile for quite sometime. Five years later Yahweh called Ezekiel to be a prophet who would announce God's judgment against Jerusalem, addressing his words primarily to the exiles in Babylon (Ezekiel 3:1, 11). The book contains a variety of prophetic visions and oracles, which Ezekiel presented over a twenty-two year period (593-571 B.C.). The structure of the book has three clear parts:

- Ezekiel 1-24 contains oracles from the five-year period preceding the siege of Jerusalem (588 B.C.). Yahweh's holy wrath against His people's idolatries would cause Jerusalem to be destroyed, including her temple, despite the people's disbelief and protest.
- Ezekiel 25-32 contains a series of oracles against surrounding nations. Yahweh is the sovereign God over all the nations, so they, too, will experience judgment because of their idolatries and sins.
- Ezekiel 33-48 features oracles which cover a sixteen-year period after the fall of Jerusalem. Here we see that Yahweh is a God of great mercy and compassion, who intends to restore His people for the sake of His name and glory among the nations.

The focus of this study guide will be on Ezekiel 34. God has allowed Babylon to destroy Judah and scatter the people in exile because the shepherd kings of Judah ignored the people, destroyed them, and did not protect them from predators (34:1-10; see Jeremiah 23:1-8). To encourage his listeners, Ezekiel assured them that the scattered people were God's people, sheep in His flock. Jerusalem's destruction allowed Him to remove these evil leaders. One day God will care for the sheep, bring them back from foreign nations into the pleasant and peaceful land, feed them, and nurse the sick (34:11-16). God will judge between the good and the evil who treat others unjustly (34:17-22). Then God will set one king over them, the messianic seed of David who will serve God. His eternal covenant of peace will bring fruitfulness to the land, security, and a heartfelt acknowledgement of God's relationship to them (34:23-31; compare Lev. 26:4-13; Hos. 2:17-23; Jer. 30-31). With this vision of the future Ezekiel was trying to convince the exiles to believe in what God would do, in spite of their discouraging situation in exile.

## ***Study the Text...***

### ***Prophecy against the Shepherds of Israel (Ezekiel 34:1-10)***

God charges Ezekiel to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel. The rulers of the people were often called shepherds (cf. Ps. 78:71-72; Isa. 44:28; 63:11; Jer. 23:1-4; 25:34-38). They were to be strong, caring leaders who guarded their nation like a flock. The image of the people of God as a flock of sheep occurs several times throughout the Bible. In this oracle, the current shepherds - i.e. the rulers of Israel - are rebuked for their self-interest and lack of care for the people. In this section Ezekiel first explained the sins of the shepherds (Ezek. 34:1-6), then pronounced judgment on them (Ezek. 34:7-10). Read Ezekiel 34:1-10.

- Who are the shepherds of Israel? (also note Psalm 78:7-72; Isaiah 44:28; 63:11; Jeremiah 23:1-4; 25:34-38)
- What were the specific sins God held against the shepherds of Israel? (also note Jeremiah 23:1-4; Ezekiel 22:25; Micah 3:1-3)
- What were the consequences of the shepherds sin and failure to shepherd the people of Israel (34:5-10)?
- Verse 5 says that the people “were scattered” and “became food for all the wild beasts.” What does this mean? (also note Leviticus 26:33; Deuteronomy 28:64)
- Why does God say the people were scattered?

## ***Group Discussion...***

- It's easy to look down on the people of Israel as if we ourselves are above such sins. In what ways does your own life reflect the sins of the people as described in 34:1-4?
- What do these verses teach us about the responsibility held by those who lead others spiritually?
- What aspects of God's character shine through in these verses?

## ***Study the Text***

### ***God, the Shepherd, gathers His flock (Ezekiel 34:11-31)***

What the people's shepherds failed to accomplish because of their selfish greed (34:1-10), God would bring to pass. He would be the people's shepherd by personally intervening and caring for His flock (34:11-16), judging between His sheep (34:17-24), and establishing a covenant of peace (34:25-31). This covenant of peace is directly tied to the appointment of His servant David as the new shepherd over the people. As in other oracles, the name is symbolic. The reference to David does not mean that the

ancient king David will be literally resurrected and set up as ruler. Its primary force is that the coming ruler will have the exemplary attributes of David—someone in whom the

Lord delighted and who triumphed over the foes of Israel. David is also referred to in 37:24–26, where his rule is described as lasting forever. The same passage also refers to the everlasting covenant of peace which the Lord will make with his people, a theme almost identical to that in 34:25–30. Both passages are clearly looking forward not just to Israel's immediate future but also to her long term future. God would make peace with the people, and he would appoint a shepherd prince to rule them.

The oracle brings a promise of hope. Even if God's people were scattered and oppressed they would one day receive justice. Readers of the NT will see that day as the time of the return of Jesus Christ, a promise sealed by his first coming, death and resurrection. Read Ezekiel 34:11-31

- How does God respond to the shepherd's failure of leading the people of Israel? What are His logical steps of action as outlined in the text? (also note Ezekiel 11:17, 20:41; Jeremiah 23:3; Psalm 23; Micah 2:12, 4:6-8)
- How does Yahweh's shepherding style differ from that of the people's shepherds?
- What is God's first course of action after gathering His scattered sheep (34:13-14)? Why is this important, particularly when the historical setting of the book is taken into account?
- How does God say He will exercise justice?
- How will God differentiate between the sheep? (34:17, 20, 22; also Ezekiel 20:38)
- What will God do after judging the individual sheep? (34:23-24)
- Who is the new shepherd that God will appoint over His people? (also note Ezekiel 37:24-26; Jeremiah 23:5-6)
- How is this new shepherd described? What is the title given to this new shepherd? (34:24)
- What is the significance of this title given to David? Do you believe this new shepherd is a reference to Christ? Why or why not?
- What will come as a result of the new shepherd being appointed? (34:25-31)
- How is this new covenant of peace described? What are the results of this new covenant of peace that God establishes with His people?
- What is the covenant of peace a specific reference to? Where else in Scripture have we seen this covenant mentioned? (note Jeremiah 31:31-34)

### ***Group Discussion. . .***

- The imagery of the Lord as our shepherd is found throughout Scripture. What are the implications of the Lord being the shepherd of your life? How have you seen the Lord as the shepherd of your life?
- Elsewhere in Scripture God differentiates between the sheep and the goats (see Matthew 25:31-46). His sheep are primarily characterized by what qualities?
- What New Testament passages does this text (Ezekiel 34:11-24) bring to mind? (Luke 15:4-7, 19:10)

- Spend some time sharing how God the shepherd gathered you to Himself when you had been scattered from Him because of your sin. In other words, if you have yet to do so have everyone in your group briefly share their conversion testimony.

## ***Study the Text...***

### ***Jesus, Our great shepherd (John 10:1-18)***

Through the prophet Ezekiel, God rebuked the evil shepherds (or leaders) of the nation Israel. He spoke of a coming day when they will be judged, and when God Himself will gather His scattered flock by means of a new shepherd, namely the Messiah (“My servant David”, Ezekiel 34:24). In John 10, Jesus boldly claims to be this promised “Good Shepherd,” and in contrast to His shepherding, He exposes and indicts the Jewish religious leaders (especially the Pharisees) as wicked shepherds, who care not for the hurting and troubled sheep and who use and abuse the sheep of God’s flock for their own personal gain.

It is not difficult to see that Jesus looks upon the Pharisees before Him as the kind of shepherds Ezekiel’s condemned. Like Ezekiel 34, Jesus contrasts the bad shepherding of the Pharisees (as seen in their attitude towards the blind man in John 9) with the manner of His shepherding. Three common shepherding images are given to differentiate Jesus, the good shepherd, from the Jewish religious leaders.

- The Shepherd and the Stranger (John 10:1-6)
- The Shepherd and Thieves and Robbers (John 10:7-10)
- The Shepherd and the Hired Hand (John 10:11-18)

Jesus uses these contrasts to reveal in great detail what it means for Him to be our Good Shepherd.

- What are the major differences between how the sheep relate to the shepherd as opposed to the stranger? (John 10:1-6)
- Who is the shepherd and stranger referring to within the context of the passage? (also note John 9)
- What does it mean that the sheep “know his voice”? (John 10:4)
- What is the overall point or meaning of the parable of the shepherd and stranger? (John 10:1-6) What does it teach us about Jesus, our good shepherd?
- What are the major differences between how the shepherd relates to the sheep as compared to the thieves and robbers? (John 10:7-10)
- Who are the thieves and robbers a reference to within the context of the passage? (also note John 9)
- What does it mean that Jesus came that we might “have life and have it abundantly”? (John 10:10)
- What does the parable of the shepherd and thieves and robbers teach us about Jesus’ character? (John 10:7-10)

- What are the major differences between how the shepherd and hired hand relate to the sheep? (John 10:11-18)
- How is Jesus' care for His sheep demonstrated within the passage?
- What do verses 14 and 15 teach us about Jesus' relationship to His sheep?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- What does the parable of the shepherd and thieves and robbers teach us about Jesus' relationship toward us? (John 10:7-10)
- In what other ways, other than Jesus, do you seek to find an "abundant life"? (John 10:10)
- How well does God the Father know Jesus and Jesus know God the Father? (John 10:15) Jesus says this is a picture of how well Jesus knows us and we are to know Him. (John 10:14) How well do you really know Jesus? How can you continue to grow in your intimacy and knowledge of Christ?
- As the Good Shepherd, Jesus is the ultimate standard for how we shepherd others (note Hebrews 13:20-21; 1 Peter 5:1-4). How does this passage challenge you as you seek to shepherd those God has entrusted to your care?
- In what ways does the shepherd imagery found in John 10 give you a new appreciation or even understanding of the cross?

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## ***Daniel***

Daniel is set in the sixth century BC while Israel is exiled in Babylon. Daniel and his friends have been taken into exile as young men and are to be educated as diplomats and scholars in the court of Babylon. Though their training immerses them in the Babylonian worldview, culture, literature, and religion, they remain faithful to their God. Daniel stands as a witness to, and sometimes illustration of, God's sovereignty over even the greatest empire the world had known. People in the ancient world would have believed that Israel's defeat indicated the weakness of their God in relation to the great Babylonian Empire and its powerful gods. However, the purpose of the book of Daniel is to illustrate and proclaim the absolute sovereign power of Israel's God. He alone possesses sovereign authority over all nations and establishes and deposes kings and empires to serve His purpose. This is most clearly seen in Daniel 2 as God reveals to Daniel the content and interpretation of King Nebuchadnezzar's dream, thereby demonstrating His wisdom and power over all others.

## ***Study the Text...***

### ***Nebuchadnezzar's Disturbing Dreams (Daniel 2:1-13)***

In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign he was plagued with dreams which left him restless and greatly disturbed. The ancient Babylonians believed that dreams were messages from the gods, therefore a right understanding of his dreams was critical for the future of his kingdom. Nebuchadnezzar responded by summoning his advisors to interpret the content of his dreams. Failure to do so meant death for the king's trusted advisors.

- Why was Nebuchadnezzar so troubled by his dream? Why was he so concerned that his dreams be interpreted?
- Why did Nebuchadnezzar want his advisors to not only interpret his dream but also to tell him the content of the dream? (2:8-9)
- What would happen to the king's advisors if they failed to explain the content of the king's dream and interpret it? (2:5)
- How did the king's advisors respond to the king's request? (2:10)
- According to the advisors, who alone is able to fulfill the king's request? (2:11)
- How did Nebuchadnezzar respond to the advisors failure to explain his dream? (2:12)  
What implications did this have on Daniel and his friends? (2:13)

## ***Group Discussion...***

- Why do you think Nebuchadnezzar was so willing to dispose of his advisors?
- Was this a just penalty for their inability to explain his dream?
- What overall picture do these verses give you about the character of Nebuchadnezzar? (also note 2 Kings 25:7; Jeremiah 29:22; Daniel 3)

## ***Study the Text***

### ***God Reveals Nebuchadnezzar's Dream (Daniel 2:14-30)***

Unlike the king's advisers and gods, Daniel's God was able to reveal the king's dream. He alone is the sovereign One who is superior to all earthly kings, men and gods. He alone is the One who has the power to explain and interpret the dreams of men. Daniel responded appropriately by offering praise to His God. He acknowledged that His God is a God of wisdom, knowing the end from the beginning, and God of power, for whatever He determines, He can do. Evidences of His power are seen in His control of events ("He changes times and seasons") and of the destiny of nations ("He removes kings and sets up kings"). Nebuchadnezzar was on the throne because God determined to use Him there to fulfill His will. Evidences of God's wisdom are seen in His "giving wisdom to the wise" and in His revealing "deep and hidden things." It was God, not Daniel's insight, which allowed Daniel to understand and interpret the king's dream.

- How did Daniel initially respond to the threat of death? (2:14-16)
- When faced with a life-and-death situation what did Daniel urge his friends to do? (2:17-18)
- How did God answer the prayer of Daniel and his friends? (2:19)
- Who revealed Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel? What did this reveal about Daniel's God? (note 2:11)
- How did Daniel respond to God's revelation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream? (2:19-23)
- In Daniel's prayer how long does he say that praise should be given to God? (2:20)
- What two primary characteristics of God does Daniel highlight in his prayer? (2:20)
- In light of the preceding events why does Daniel specifically mention these two attributes? (2:20)
- Daniel praises God because "He changes times and seasons" and "removes kings and sets up kings." What do these truths stress about God? (2:21)
- When Daniel goes before the king who does he credit for revealing the king's dream? (2:27-29)
- Why does Daniel say the king's dream was revealed to him? (2:30)

**Group Discussion. . .**

- What are your initial thoughts about how Daniel responded when his life was at stake?
- Why do you think Daniel responded with such courage?
- Any wisdom or knowledge we possess ultimately comes from whom? Why is this so important to remember? In what ways do we tend to forget this truth?
- God’s sovereignty extends over every ruler and king this world has ever known. Verse 21 tells us that “he removes kings and sets up kings.” Does this truth bring you comfort, confusion, fear, etc? What other questions does this truth bring to mind?
- What other truths and attributes of God does this passage bring forth?

**Study the Text...*****Daniel Interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream (Daniel 2:31-49)***

Nebuchadnezzar had seen a great image (or statue) shaped like a human being and made of metals of diminishing value (gold, silver, bronze, iron mixed with clay). In his dream appeared a rock which struck and destroyed the statue. The rock had two important features. First, it was not cut out by human hands (v. 34). Second, it became a huge mountain which filled the whole earth (v. 35). The dream referred to what will happen in the days to come (v. 28). Since the head of gold was specifically identified as Nebuchadnezzar’s kingdom (v. 38) we may assume that the other parts of the statue also represented specific empires or dynasties. Their identity was not yet unveiled to Daniel and his contemporaries. If they are to be identified in retrospect, the chest and arms of silver (v. 32) represent the Medo-Persian Empire. The belly and thighs of bronze (v. 32) would then symbolize the Greek Empire which would rule over the whole earth (v. 39) followed by the Roman Empire. This interpretation has often led to the understanding of the rock as Christ and its growth as a reference to the advance of the kingdom of God. The overall point of the vision is that God’s kingdom is supreme and is the only one which will endure.

- What did Daniel report about what the king saw in his dream? (2:31-35)
- What happened to the great image (or statue) in the king’s dream? (2:34-35)
- What do we learn about the stone that the king saw in his dream? Where did it come from? Who hurled it at the image (or statue)? Why is this important?
- What was the result of the stone that struck the image (or statue)? (2:35)
- According to Daniel’s interpretation, what are the different parts of the image (or statue) a reference to?
- What’s important about the fact that the list of metals on the image (or statue) shows a progressive decrease in the value and splendor of the materials?
- According to Daniel’s interpretation, what is the stone in the king’s dream a reference to?
- What important truths about God’s kingdom are revealed in this passage?
- How did Nebuchadnezzar respond to Daniel’s interpretation of his dream?

- In what ways does the king's answer in verse 47 summarize the main point of the entire chapter?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- One major truth is repeated throughout the chapter, namely that Daniel's God reigns supreme and is sovereign over all earthly kings and kingdoms (note 2:17-28, 36-38, 44-45, 47). What are the implications of this truth on your life?
- At the end of verse 45 Daniel says that "the dream is certain, and its interpretation sure." What does this reveal about God? How does this give you confidence and encouragement?
- In what specific ways does this passage help and encourage you to walk by faith and not by sight?

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## ***Haggai and Zechariah***

Haggai speaks about rebuilding the temple and being restored to the glory of God. Zechariah sounds hope of restoration to God as he expresses the longing of the people of God for the glory of God. Both of these books leave us in the Old Testament longing for Christ. He alone is the true temple, where we encounter the glory of God. And He alone can reconcile and restore us to the presence of God. Zechariah, in particular, looks forward to the victory that the Lord will bring, and indeed, Jesus alone will inaugurate that victory.

We will begin by tracing the historical setting in 2 Chronicles and Ezra that prepares the way for the prophecies in Haggai and Zechariah.

## ***Study the Text . . .***

**2 Chronicles 36:22-23, Ezra 1:1-11, Isaiah 44:24-45:13: God sovereignly uses rulers to fulfill His purposes and declare His glory.**

- Why does Cyrus allow the Judeans to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple?
- How did Cyrus and his kingdom support the Judeans as they returned to Jerusalem?
- What do we learn about God, when we read that He has "anointed" Cyrus and that Cyrus is His "shepherd" who shall fulfill all His purposes?

**Ezra 3-4: God's people will encounter opposition if they are faithfully obeying and worshipping the LORD.**

- What part of the temple did the people rebuild?
- What rulers laid the foundation of the temple (v. 3:8)?
- What did the people do when the foundation was laid?
- How were the people opposed in their rebuilding efforts?
- What led to the people ceasing work on the temple?

**Ezra 5:1-5, Haggai 1: When God's people faithfully obey God's commands, nothing can hinder their work or their success.**

- Why did the people begin to rebuild the temple?
- In what kind of houses did the people live (Haggai v. 1:4)?
- What two men led the people as they begin to rebuild the temple?

**Haggai 2:1-9: God's glory accompanies His presence as He draws all nations to worship Him.**

This declaration from God comes a little over a month after the first command in Haggai 1.

- Why does God tell the people to fear not (v. 5)?

- Do you know why God says, “The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former”?

**Zechariah 1:1-6: Repentance is necessary for people who desire to obey and worship God.**

This word from God comes only a few weeks after the command in Haggai 2.

- What does it mean “to return to the Lord” (v. 3)?

The people were already at work rebuilding the temple, but this obedience was not enough to meet their basic need, reconciliation with God. The people needed to humble themselves and repent of their sins. The people did repent, and after they repent God begins to speak to Zechariah in a series of visions that begin to explain some of the glorious plans of God.

***Group Discussion . . .***

The prophecies in Haggai and Zechariah are closely tied to several other Old Testament books that we are reading. Daniel, in Daniel 9 realized that the prophecy of Jeremiah had past, and he turns to God with prayer and fasting, begging God to turn His face back to His city and His people. King Cyrus issues a decree granting the Judeans permission to return and rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. We do not know what role Daniel played in this decree, but he most likely made a significant contribution. The people then begin to return to Jerusalem in waves. Ezra writes of how they rebuild the altar and begin to offer burnt offerings before the LORD. Then, they begin taking an offering for the rebuilding of the temple. In their second year back in Jerusalem, Zerubbabel and Joshua oversee the laying of the foundation of the temple, and the people worship God with great shouts of joy. Their adversaries hear this joyful celebration, and many rise up to oppose the work. This opposition eventually leads to the cessation of the work until the second year of Darius. During that year, Haggai and Zechariah receive a Word from the LORD to start rebuilding the temple. The people are living comfortable lives in nice houses, but God’s house sat unfinished. Through Haggai, God promises that His Spirit will be with them. Then Zechariah receives a Word to call the people to repent. It is not enough for them to obey God. They must humble themselves, turn from their sins, and turn to God and worship Him alone.

This is an amazing story of how God uses ordinary, poor people and pagan kings to bring glory to His name.

- Discuss how God shows and pours out His grace in this story among a people who were in exile?
- Share examples of how God has been gracious to your family during the last year? How has God used your family to declare His glory to another family or individuals in the last year?
- These people were faithfully rebuilding the temple under the leadership of Joshua and Zerubbabel; yet, God calls them to repent and return to Him. Is it possible that any of us or all of us are trying to faithfully serve God and obey, but we have not repented of

our sins and turned to God to worship Him alone and serve Him alone? Do we need to repent of any sins? Are we worshipping anything or anyone other than Christ?

### ***Study the Text . . .***

It is not possible to study all of Zechariah, so we are going to look at one remarkable vision.

#### **Zechariah 4: God calls His people to be a light to the world.**

Read the chapter and try to visualize the vision Zechariah is describing.

The angel returns to Zechariah and arouses him from the stupor that he is in from the last vision. The angel asks him, "What do you see?" This is what Zechariah describes. There is a golden lampstand with seven oil lamps on it. Above the lampstand is a bowl that is connected to each lamp by seven pipes for a total of 49 nine pipes coming out of the bowl and going to the lamps. There are two olive trees on each side of the lampstand and the branches of these olive trees reach over the bowl. There are two branches that connect the olive trees to the bowl. The purpose of the olive trees is to provide an automatic and spontaneous supply of golden oil to the basin, which continually fills the lamps with oil without the help of the priests.

There was a lampstand in the tabernacle and in the temple, but this one is different. The tabernacle contained one seven branch lampstand, but it did not have an oil bowl above it. The lampstand did not have seven pipes coming from each lamp, and there were not two olive trees in the tabernacle. The priests maintained the tabernacle lampstand. The people gave the priests oil, and in the morning and at night the priests were to fill the lamps with oil to keep the lampstand lighted.

What is the significance of the lampstand? It signified Israel's divine calling to be a witness of God's salvation to the pagan nations around her. For example, Genesis 12:2, God tells Abram, "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing." In Ezekiel 5:5, we see that God intentionally put Jerusalem in the center of all the nations because Israel was to be a witness of God's glory. The lampstand symbolized what kind of nation Israel was supposed to be, but Israel failed. Israel killed the prophets, disobeyed God's word and lapsed into idolatry with the nations to whom she was supposed to witness. So God destroys the temple and sends his people into exile, but he does not end there. In Isaiah 60:1-3 God tells his people who are in exile, "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising." God's design is that once again Israel will be a light to the nations.

This prophecy speaks of that day. The two olive branches refer to Joshua, the priest, and Zerubbabel, the prince who is fulfilling the role of king at that time in Judah. It is through these two leaders that the oil is being supplied for the nation to be a light to the world. In the Bible, oil almost always refers to the Holy Spirit. It is through Joshua and Zerubbabel

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that the Holy Spirit is going to make Judah a light and rebuild the temple. All the promises that are made to Zerubbabel in verses 6-10 are only going to be possible because the Holy Spirit is working through Joshua and Zerubbabel to accomplish God's plan just like the Holy Spirit worked through Cyrus to issue the decree and begin Judah's return from exile.

- Look at Zechariah 4:6. This is the verse that we all know. What is God saying will be done "not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit"?
- Look at Zechariah 4:9-10. Why does God promise that Zerubbabel's hands shall complete the temple?

Unfortunately, we cannot look at all the details of chapter 4, but it is important to see the connection to Jesus. In Zechariah 4:12, Zechariah asks what the two olive trees represent. For Zechariah's time period, they represented Zerubbabel, the prince of Judah, and Joshua, the priest. They were filling the important roles of king and priest. In the New Testament, we know that Jesus is king, priest and prophet. This is how we explain the prophecy as it relates to the church. Christ is the two olive trees, and Christ is constantly filling the basin with oil and the basin is constantly filling each lamp of the lampstand with a plentiful supply of oil. The oil refers to the Holy Spirit. Christ is constantly pouring out the Holy Spirit into his church (Revelation 1:12-20) into the individual lamps, believers who are connected to the church. This is a beautiful picture of how the church is a light to the world not by our own might or our own strength but by the power of the Holy Spirit. As Israel and Jerusalem were to be a light to the world, today the church is to be a light to the world through the power of the Holy Spirit.

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

God was declaring His glory and proclaiming His name during the time of Zechariah and Haggai not by the peoples own might or power, but by the power of His Spirit. God used pagan kings and opposition to His name and His temple to trumpet His name and bring Him glory and honor. God still works powerfully today using any means He desires to turn people to worship Him. We know that God desires for His people to proclaim His gospel. God makes His church a beacon of light in a very dark world. Zechariah 4 gives us a picture of Christ pouring a spontaneous and unending supply of His Spirit into His church.

- Do we believe that our church is receiving an unending supply of the Holy Spirit?
- Do we believe that each member of this church is a lamp that is shining brightly for Christ because that member is connected to the body of Christ and receiving the power of the Holy Spirit?
- Do we live and proclaim the gospel without fear because we know that the power of the Spirit fills us?
- What (maybe) is keeping our church from receiving an overflowing supply of the Holy Spirit? What was necessary before God delivered this vision to Zechariah? See Zechariah 1:3, 6.
- Do we realize how powerfully God can use us if we are a repentant church dependent of the Spirit of God?

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- Do we want to be a Holy Spirit filled church that is a light to the world?

**Ezra 6** – King Darius issues a decree, and the people begin work on the temple again. The temple is completed and the people of God worship Him and praise His holy name. God gave them a command to rebuild the temple. God has given us a command as well. Are we pursuing it? Are we obeying God's word? Do we truly desire for all nations to look to us and see Christ and worship Christ because of how He is making His name known through our lives?

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### ***The Providence of God in the Deliverance of His People***

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*Esther, Ezra 7-10 & Nehemiah*

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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.

### ***Esther, Ezra 7-10 & Nehemiah***

The three historical books that we will consider this week recount three instances of God's deliverance of His people. However, with each successive deliverance we find that the people still do not receive final rest from their enemies. They are still oppressed by foreign powers and the glorious presence of the LORD is still not dwelling in their midst. They are left longing for a final Deliverer who will give them rest from their enemies and bring the very presence of God to them.

Esther delivers the Jews from an insidious enemy, but more enemies continue to oppress them. Ezra leads the rebuilding of the temple, but the visible presence of the LORD does not return nor does the temple attain to its former glory. Nehemiah builds a wall around Jerusalem, but it will not ultimately keep invaders out, as the subsequent history of Israel will demonstrate.

All of these deliverances are incomplete. They point us to the great Deliverance that is yet to come. God's people need a final Deliverer to deliver them from all of their enemies. They need the true Temple (Jn. 2:21) who brings the very presence of God to earth (Jn. 1:14). They need a new Jerusalem, a city coming down out of heaven with an impenetrable wall where nothing unclean will ever enter, a city that has no need of a temple, for God Himself and the Lamb are its Temple (Rev. 21:9-27).

The events recorded in the book of Esther take place during the reign of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) king of Persia, after the return of the first group of Jewish exiles under Zerubbabel ca. 538 B.C (Ezra 1-6) and before the second return led by Ezra ca. 458 B.C (Ezra 7-10). Nehemiah's journey occurred later (ca. 445 B.C.). Historically, the book of Ezra provides the background for the Jewish feast of Purim (Esther 9:20ff.). Theologically, the book displays God's faithfulness to His promises and His meticulous providence over historical events.

### ***Study the Text . . .***

The book of Esther never mentions the name of God, and yet to the eyes of faith it is strikingly evident that God is providentially writing the plot of this story.

Haman the Agagite (3:1) sought to destroy Mordecai the Benjamite (2:5) and all the Jews (3:6). This conflict goes back a thousand years to the battle that Israel fought with the Amalekites immediately after the Exodus. The LORD even swore that He would make war against Amalek "from generation to generation" (Ex. 17:16). In First Samuel,

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God commanded Saul to utterly destroy the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15). However, Saul disobeyed and preserved the life of Agag the king of the Amalekites. Because of this disobedience, God took the kingdom from Saul and gave it to David (1 Sam. 15:28). Here in the book of Esther we see Agag again seeking to oppress the people of God, but once again God shows Himself faithful to His covenant promises.

Neither Esther nor Mordecai seem to be particularly godly people. In fact, they engage in some rather questionable practices (see for example 2:13-16). Yet God uses them to fulfill His purposes and preserve His people.

Note Mordecai's confidence in God's faithfulness to His people (4:14). Therefore, he implores Esther to use her providential position for the preservation of the people.

Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was a pagan king. Yet Esther "found favor in his sight" at pivotal points throughout the book.

Ahasuerus' decree allowed the Jews to plunder their enemies (8:11). Yet the author emphasizes that they did not touch the plunder (9:8, 15). This stands in stark contrast to the first time Israel defeated Agag (1 Sam. 15). This victory is a reversal of Saul's disobedience.

Mordecai escaped a sinister plot and became second in command of a great empire, like Joseph and Daniel before him (Gen. 41:40ff; Dan. 6).

Esther 9:1 states that what appeared to be a day of impending doom for God's people turned out to be a day of great victory. This is the pattern by which God works to bring salvation to His people. How do we see this played out in the Cross of Christ and the history of the church (see for examples Acts. 4:27-28; 8:4)? How have you seen this in your own life and the lives of other?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- What are some ways that you see God working "behind the scenes" in the story of Esther? What does this tell you about how God works in our lives and in the world? Are His actions always overt or are they sometimes covert? Can you look back on times in your life and see how God was working like that?
- In light of the observation that neither Mordecai nor Esther seem to be "super-believers," who is the true hero of the story?
- What do Mordecai's instructions to Esther in chapter 4 tell you about the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility? Where has God providentially placed you to fulfill His purposes?
- What does the book of Esther teach you about how government rulers, even ungodly government rulers, fit into God's plan (cf. Prov. 21:1). How does this reflect the way that you view and respond to political events?

- How does the book of Esther point us to the final great deliverance of God's people in Christ?

## **Ezra 7-10**

Although the book never mentions Ezra himself as the human author, it is probable that he wrote this record that bears his name. Ezra was a scribe who had access to a myriad of administrative documents, hence the detailed recording of the royal decrees contained in this book. The first six chapters of Ezra, which we read last week, recount the first return under Zerubbabel in 538 B.C. Chapters 7-10 give the account of the second return, led by Ezra in 458 B.C. The Jews' return from exile in Babylon is presented as a second Exodus and the primary theological message of the book is that God is faithful to His covenant promises. God orchestrated the exile into Babylon and God has orchestrated the return from exile. God displays His sovereignty by using a pagan king (Cyrus) to deliver His people and return them to the Promised Land. Amazingly, God had foretold this deliverance over a hundred years earlier through the prophet Isaiah when He declared that Cyrus should command the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple (Is. 44:28). As Pastor David often says, "God has this thing rigged!"

### ***Study the Text . . .***

The key to Ezra's effectiveness in ministry is found in Ezra 7:10. He set his heart to study and to practice and to teach the law of the LORD.

As in the books of Esther and Nehemiah, we see the LORD directing the hearts of pagan kings in order to accomplish His perfect purposes. Ezra's benediction in Ezra 7:27 demonstrates that God is sovereign even over hearts that do not recognize His sovereignty (cf. Prov. 21:1).

Note how seriously Ezra takes sin (Ezra 9:3ff.!) He is ashamed and embarrassed to lift his face to God (9:6). Contrast that with how flippantly we often waltz into the presence of God while living in sin.

Note also that Ezra does not separate himself from the rest of the people. He does not say, "They have sinned." He says, "We have sinned (see for example 9:7)." As fellow members of the covenant community, we share in one another's iniquity. Sin in one part of the body affects the whole body.

Note the response of the people (10:9). They tremble when they are confronted with their sin and this fear leads them to separate themselves from their pagan wives.

The revival under Ezra was short-lived. When we get to the book of Malachi, we will see that the people are still in rebellion against the LORD. They still need Him to remove their hearts of stone and give them hearts of flesh (Ezk. 36:26).

The second Temple never attains to the glory of the first Temple and the glory of the Lord never again fills the Temple...at least not until nearly 500 years later when a twelve year old boy from Galilee enters it and amazes the teachers of the Law (Lk. 2:47). The Jews were left waiting for a greater Temple, the True Temple, which would be torn down and rebuilt in 3 days (Jn. 2:21).

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- How do you respond to your own sin and the sins of others in your faith family? Do you grieve over it or do you take it lightly? Have you ever felt embarrassed to enter the presence of God? What is the solution to this problem?
- How did the reality of God's sovereignty affect Ezra and Nehemiah? Did it produce negligence or obedience in them?
- How does the book of Ezra point us to Christ?

## **Nehemiah**

The book of Nehemiah begins in 446 B.C. and details the return from exile that Nehemiah led in 445 B.C. Historically, the book gives an account of the rebuilding of the wall in Jerusalem and Nehemiah's reign as governor.

The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) and the Latin Vulgate refer to the book of Nehemiah as "Second Ezra" and both Jewish and Christian tradition recognize Ezra as the author of the book. Although Ezra the scribe likely recorded the account, Nehemiah himself likely dictated it to him (1:1).

The phrase "the hand of the Lord" is prevalent in both Ezra and Nehemiah. This phrase underscores the fact that God is sovereignly working to rebuild Jerusalem and to restore His people. God uses faithful servants like Nehemiah, pagan kings like Artaxerxes, and even enemies like Sanballat to accomplish His perfect purposes.

### ***Study the Text . . .***

Nehemiah, like Ezra, is moved to fast, pray, and confess the sins of his people (1:4-11). He is not merely grieved because of the troubles in Jerusalem (1:3). Rather, the troubles in Jerusalem lead him to mourn for the way that his people have sinned against the LORD.

Note also that Nehemiah, like Ezra, identifies with the sins of his people. He does not separate himself from the people but acknowledges that he himself has been implicit in this rebellion (1:6).

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God had placed Nehemiah, like Ezra and Esther, in a strategic position in a pagan kingdom (1:11). These three, like Joseph and Daniel before them, used their positions of influence for the glory of God and the good of His people.

Nehemiah did not attribute his success to his strategic leadership or the kindness of the king but to the fact that “the good hand of my God was upon me.” (2:8)

Opposition from outside forces arises in chapter 4, but God frustrates their plans (4:1). God will not allow his enemies to thwart His purposes.

Nehemiah addresses the sin of oppression in chapter 5. It is instructive that Nehemiah does not merely concern himself with the enemy without, but also the enemy within. He takes sin seriously because he knows that sin in the covenant community is just as dangerous, if not more dangerous than oppression from outside the covenant community.

Note the attention that the people paid to the law of the LORD. They stood on their feet and listened to Ezra read it for hours (8:3). The reading of the law led them to weep over their sin (8:9) and yet Ezra commanded them to rejoice, for the LORD had restored them (8:10).

The people “confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers (9:2).” Throughout the history of God’s people, confession of sin has been a sign of true revival.

Nehemiah 9:28 summarizes the history of Israel (9:28). Over and over throughout the OT, we have seen the people sin against the Lord, fall under oppression, repent, and be restored, only to fall back into sin. It is obvious that the problem will not finally be solved until God changes His people from within, until He writes His law on their hearts (Jer. 31:33).

The people recognize that although they are living in the Promised Land, they are still slaves, just as they were in Egypt (9:36). Over the next 500 years the Jews will be oppressed by empire after empire, even though they are living in the Promised Land. The point is that the exile is not really over. They are still oppressed by foreign powers and they still await a final deliverance.

The rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Temple can be seen as an initial fulfillment of God’s promise to rebuild Jerusalem after the exile (see Jer. 31:38-40). However, this was not the ultimate fulfillment. God had promised that after Jerusalem was rebuilt it would never again be uprooted or destroyed (Jer. 31:40). But in 167 B.C., the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes sacked Jerusalem and desecrated the Temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar and turning it into a temple to the Greek god Zeus. Jerusalem was later conquered by the Roman general Pompey and it remained under gentile control until it was razed to the ground in A.D. 70. All of this leaves us waiting for the final fulfillment of God’s promise to rebuild His holy city. It points us to a better city, whose

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builder and foundation is God (Heb. 11:10), the true Mount Zion that we enter through Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant (Heb. 12:22-24). The writer of Hebrews tells us that in Christ we **have come** to this city of the living God even while we anticipate its consummation, when the New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her Husband (Rev. 21:22).

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- Why do we offer so little attention to the Word of God? What are some of the things that distract you from reading and listening to the Word? How can we become a people who pay careful attention to the Word of God?
- What is the initial response that the people have to the Word of God (8:9)? Do you experience this kind of contrition when you see how your life does not line up with God's Word?
- What are some barriers that we put up against confession of sin? Are these barriers legitimate or are they excuses to ignore our sin?
- How does the book of Nehemiah point to the need for Christ?

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## ***The Gospel of John***

The Gospel of John was written by the apostle John, son of Zebedee, one of Jesus’ inner circle of disciples. He writes his gospel to both Jews and Gentiles living in the last years of the first century. He is commonly found explaining Jewish customs and geography and he translates Aramaic words (the language Jesus spoke) into Greek, all so that his Gentile readers will understand. We also see John speak with a Jewish audience in mind as he clearly demonstrates that Jesus is the Messiah and that He fulfills Old Testament themes and prophecies. Overall, John makes his intent for writing the Gospel clear in 20:30-31:

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but *these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*”

His main means of showing his readers this truth is by the way he organizes his Gospel. The Gospel of John is basically organized around seven miracles of Jesus (2:1-11, 4:46-54, 5:1-15, 6:5-13, 6:16-21, 9:1-7, 11:1-44) and seven “I am” statements of Jesus (6:48, 8:12, 10:9, 10:11, 11:25, 14:6, 15:1). There are innumerable truths about Christ that we can find just by exploring these passages in depth. But perhaps the most powerful of John’s arguments for Jesus as the Son of God comes in John 1. The gospel of John is distinctly set apart from Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Throughout his gospel, John gives us excellent insight into the purpose of his writing by stepping aside in the text and explaining the spiritual reality of the facts he has laid before us. The beginning of the gospel of John is no exception to this and includes some of the most known and cherished verses in all of Scripture. Here, John shows the eternal existence and intent of Jesus, in hopes that the reader will believe in Him, that they may have life in His name.

## ***Study the Text . . . (Read Genesis 1:1 then John 1:1-3)***

Notice the similarities in these verses. John begins his story of the life and message of Jesus by echoing the very first moment in history. He speaks of the “Word”, someone who has been in existence from the beginning, and even more, someone who has always existed. John Piper said this:

“Think on the mere eternal existence of Christ...Sheer existence is, perhaps, the greatest mystery of all. Ponder the absoluteness of reality. There had to be something that never came into being. Back, back, back we peer into the endless ages, yet there never was nothing. Someone has the honor of being there first and always. He never became or developed. He simply was.”

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- Think on and discuss the eternal existence of Christ. The One who became flesh and dwelt among us has existed eternally with the Father and the Spirit. He always was and always will be. Is this something you have ever thought through or pondered?
- Compare John 1:3 with Colossians 1:15-17 and Hebrews 1:1-4. Notice the incredible power of Christ. All things were created through Him and for Him. Everything that has been made is upheld and sustained by Him. Nothing was made without Him. Often we think most of Christ's work on earth, and indeed that was the crowning glory of His work. But take a few moments and consider the work of Christ before He came. Comprehending the vastness of His power before He came makes His coming all the more glorious.
- Now continue by comparing your thoughts of Him to Philippians 2:5-11. Christ humbled Himself by letting go of His heavenly position and being born in the likeness of men. See how understanding His eternal power brings greater light to the humility of His coming? How does this change the way you understand humility and Paul's command in Philippians 2?

### ***Study the Text... (Read Genesis 1:3-5 then John 1:4-6, 14)***

John explains that this "Word" was, in fact, God Himself, and that life is in Him. This life is the light of men. Notice the similarities between the two passages. John continues to point back to Genesis to show the contrast between light and darkness. Furthermore, we find that "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." Therein lies the foundation of the gospel, God came to us as a man, Jesus.

### ***Group Discussion...***

- Compare John 1:4-5 to Romans 1:21 and then 2 Corinthians 4:3-6. See the importance of these verses. John is saying that there is life to be found in Jesus. This lines up with what Jesus says in John 8:12. The god of this world (Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they will not see the Gospel of Jesus. But John 1 says that the darkness has not overcome the light. Feel the weight of the spiritual battle this presents to us. Do you remember when the light of the gospel freed you from the god of this world? How are you proclaiming the gospel so that the minds of unbelievers might be freed from the darkness?

***Study the Text . . . (Read John 1:9-13)***

These verses tie together what John has been building to: The God who has always existed has come into the world, the very world He created. He came to His people, and yet His people did not receive Him. And yet that is not the end of the story. John speaks of those who did receive Him, those who “believed in His name.” He explains the reason that Jesus came, the most glorious truth in all of history, that to those who believe in the name of this God, in the name of Jesus, He gives the right to become children of God. These truths are what drive us in light of what we just saw about unbelievers. We must speak the Gospel that many might become children of God. The bottom line of the chapter is this: the eternal God, Jesus Christ, became flesh and came into the world to bring us grace and truth.

***Group Discussion...***

- What does it mean that His people did not receive Him? Can you think of any examples of God’s people rejecting Him that we have read over the past year? How are these examples similar to experiences in your own life?
- Discuss what you think it means to “believe in His name.” Read Matthew 7:21-23. Does this effect what you think?
- Read Titus 2:11-14. Notice the similar language about the grace of God “appearing” to us in the person of Jesus. Is this passage true of you? Are you waiting and hoping for the return of Jesus? What do you think Jesus will say to you “on that day?”
- Is your life characterized by light or by darkness? What would a life characterized by light look like? How about one characterized by darkness?
- Who is someone that you know whose life reflects the fact that they truly believe what John 1:1-5 says about Jesus? What is it about them that stands out most to you?
- Do you believe that Jesus is God? Why is this such an important question?

## Small Group Guide – Week 41 Seek First the Kingdom of God

*The Church at Brook Hills*

October 11-17, 2010

Matthew 5-7

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.

### ***Sermon on the Mount***

The Sermon on the Mount is the first lengthy discourse we see in Matthew. Some have approached this teaching considering the standards it lays forth as so high that it must either describe the future ethic of heaven or an impossible moral code designed to drive people to lean on Christ for righteousness. Others from a less than Christian perspective have approached this passage as a sort of self-help manual treating the teachings as a list of instructions for the present. While there may continue to be differences of opinion, the central teaching we find in the Sermon on the Mount is consistent with the rest of the Bible and the core of the Gospel. God's people must realize the futility of their own pursuit of self-righteousness and seek God and his righteousness first, and above all other things.

- Who did Jesus address these words to in particular (5:1)?
- Does the audience of this sermon affect the way we understand it?

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### ***Counter Culture***

Jesus teaching as we see it here in the Matthew chapters 5-7 is strikingly counter to the cultural standards of the time in which he was teaching. In fact it remains counter cultural even today and in all cultures around the world. This passage opens with a set of pronouncements about blessings and those who receive them. These Beatitudes call those who mourn and are persecuted blessed. It was not a common thought that those who were reviled, persecuted, and recipients of all kinds of evil utterance were the blessed ones in the community.

- What does it mean to be poor in spirit (5:2)? Has there ever been a time when you thought of yourself as spiritually bankrupt?
- What does Jesus want his disciples to mourn over (5:4)?
- Have you ever been persecuted for righteousness sake (5:10)? When, where, why, how? How did you respond to that persecution (see 5:12 once people answer)?

Jesus also shocked those who were following him when he strayed from the historical norms. He did not stray by relaxing the laws they knew, but really he turned the dial up several notches in intensity. In Ch 5: 21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43, he begins with a common teaching against the visible sins of the flesh and presses further to the heart issue which is the root of each one. Jesus is countering culture here because he is not looking at the outward expressions but is focused on the heart's desire that brings about such expressions.

- Have you ever had a sinful hatred in your heart toward another person (5:21-26)?

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Have you ever thought of this as murder in the heart?

- Based on 5:27-30, do you think that there is a married adult in the world who has never committed adultery in their heart?
- Did Jesus ever have sinful anger in His heart? Did he ever look at another person with lustful intent? What are the implications of the perfections of Jesus for imperfect people like us (5:48)?

In Matt 5:20 Jesus told his disciples that their righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees, a measure by which many already fell short. A little later he says in Matt 5:48, “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” If they thought exceeding the righteousness of the Pharisees was out of reach then perfection with their heavenly Father must have jolted them. What could Jesus be talking about?

Even though we know perfection is beyond our reach, as followers of Christ we are called to reflect God’s glory and righteousness as we pursue Him and holiness. We are not given the option of complacency or disregard for the moral teachings of Christ. A believer above all others should be expected to display the behaviors Jesus describes in Matt Ch. 5 because believers operate on the overflow and outpouring of the love of the Holy Spirit in them. Because of Christ and his righteousness in us, we in a very real way have righteousness beyond that of the Pharisees and our pursuit of perfection is the overflow of the changed heart that drives us. In other words, we do not work for salvation, but from salvation. Because we have experienced the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, we want to grow in obedience to Him because we love Him. We want to be holy because He is holy.

- Do you have a deep desire to obey the commands of Christ in this sermon? Do you think your obedience earns you salvation, or do you think your desire for obedience gives evidence of your salvation? What’s the difference?
- Can God really change us at the heart level? How does He do that (regeneration= being born again, sanctification= progressive growth in holiness)?

### ***Public or Private***

Chapter 5 focused more on the outward expressions of behavior and how they are an indication of what is central in the heart. In Chapter 6, the focus shifts to the private practices of a life dependent on the Heavenly Father. Jesus addresses hypocritical practices of those who were displaying their religious rituals and traditions in the most public ways possible. The practices of prayer and fasting were intended to be about focusing on God. These hypocrites, although they carried out the motions of religious rites were only honoring themselves. Matt. 6:4, 6, and 18 all speak of the reward that will come from the Father when God’s people honor him in secret rather than themselves in public. In 6:3 Christ teaches we should take care to not even honor ourselves. Some may fall into the temptation to be honored by others, but an even more subtle temptation is to honor oneself even though others may not even know. The key to what Jesus is teaching is simple. We honor him when we do these things in secret knowing that he is the only one who sees and showing that he is our master.

- Do you think you have ever given to the poor (or anyone else) for your own glory

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and praise rather than the glory and praise of God (6:1-4)?

- Do you think you have ever prayed in front of others in such a way that you were more conscience of what they thought of you than you were of actually talking to the Father (6:5-14)?

### **Seek First**

Another of the greatest deterrents to focusing one's life on the God who created the whole world is the distraction of our simple needs. Sometimes it may feel as though Christ is the only one we want, but we feel there are needs we must give our time and attention to in order to simply survive. Christ teaches against this anxious worry with simple penetrating truth. In Matt. 6:25-34 Jesus asks, "Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" Jesus clearly communicates that this is a faith issue. If we trusted God in faith, then our worry for these material needs would fade. Although they are good things and the Father knows we need them, they are not ours to worry about. Again we see the one focus of our life is to be on God, his kingdom and his righteousness. We are to seek Him first and he will take care of all our needs.

- If someone had access to your bank statement or checkbook (spending patterns) do you think they would conclude that you love God more than you love money and things (6:24)?
- Why do you work? Or, why are you currently in school? Is your only reason so that you can have food, drink, and clothing? Are you working or going to school because you want to glorify God? Are you working or going to school as a means to better love people, or to love people in a practical way? Do you think it is possible to work or go to school with an ungodly motive?
- Is your first priority in life the glory of God and the good of others?
- Do you think there is a connection between some peoples struggle with anxiety and their un-discerned sinful motives for working or going to school (6:24-34)?
- When you see your heart laid bare as Jesus does in this sermon, does it drive you to trust more in Christ or more in yourself (your righteousness or his)? Do you realize that Christ died not only for our external sins (murder, adultery/sexual immorality, theft, lies, etc.), but also for our heart sins (anger, lust, covetousness, greed, idolatry)?

### **Concluding Group Discussion . . .**

- Who do you typically think of as blessed? What about them makes you think of them that way? How might you need to change your concept of blessing in light of Matt 5:11-12?
- When the Spirit convicts you and you identify sins in your life, how do you respond? Do you contrive methods to avoid the visible sins or do you press deeper into the heart issue? What is the desire/craving that led to the sinful action?
- Where does righteousness come from? What are some other scriptures that correspond with your answers?
- If you evaluated your prayer life, would it indicate you are focused on receiving honor from others, feeling good about yourself, or honoring God the Father?

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**Seek First the Kingdom of God**

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- Do you find yourself seeking your own glory or God's?
- What distracts you as you seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness? What does that say about your faith? Is there evidence that you trust God to provide all that you need?

## Small Group Guide – Week 42 Life-Saving, Soul Satisfying Faith

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*October 18-24, 2010*

*John 6*

**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.**

### John 6

Jesus Christ entered the world to glorify God by dispensing the gift of eternal life to all who would believe in His person and trust in His work. In order to induce the faith that produces eternal life, Jesus ministered to people through signs and speech en route to dying on the cross as the Lamb of God (1:36). He paved the way for people to know that the One who died on the cross was God in the flesh, ruler of all, and the king of a new kingdom. To that end, Jesus performed signs and explained the revelatory intent of those signs. His words and His deeds complemented one another in the ministry of revealing His messianic identity. We need a proper understanding of Jesus' works as signifiers of His person. It is faith in Christ that allows us to be a part of his kingdom. John 6 teaches that such faith is both life-saving and soul-satisfying.

### The Message of the Miracle

#### *Study the Text . . .*

In vv. 1-15, Jesus feeds about five thousand people with five barley loaves and two fish. The next day the same multitude followed Jesus across the sea and into Capernaum (vv. 22-24). Jesus then took the opportunity to clarify the message of the miracle (vv. 25-51). The sign met an urgent physical need. However, the sign's purpose was to reveal Jesus as God's appointed Messiah. He was not seeking merely to meet an urgent, yet temporary, need of physical hunger but the urgent, yet eternal, need of spiritual famine. He used the miraculous provision of physical food as an illustration of God's miraculous provision of spiritual life. Ultimately, through performing the miracle and subsequently explaining the miracle, Jesus Christ reveals that He is more necessary for life than food.

On the next day, a large crowd of people pursued Jesus, but they did so not because they wanted Jesus but because they wanted His gifts. They wanted the miracles but not necessarily the One to whom the miracles pointed. Throughout John's Gospel, miracles are often referred to as "signs." All signs point to something beyond themselves. The crowd, however, was so focused on the sign that they failed to see the one to whom the sign pointed (v. 26). They preferred full stomachs instead of eternal life. An interesting comparison can be found between the crowds of John 6 and the people Paul rebukes in Philippians 3:19 whose "end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things."

Ironically, the people believed the Messiah's ministry would be accompanied by signs from God (v. 30). But, again, they were more interested in seeing signs than seeing the Savior. They refer to Moses and the miraculous provision of food for the Israelites during their wilderness wanderings (Ex. 16). Jesus dismissed the people's tendency to credit Moses for that miracle by identifying His Father as the one who provided for their needs (v. 32). Just as the Father sent the bread to care for the temporary needs of His people in that day, He has now sent His Son, the Bread of Life, to care for the ultimate needs of the world.

## Small Group Guide – Week 42

### Life-Saving, Soul Satisfying Faith

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John 6

- What is the ultimate purpose of Jesus' signs?
- After seeing the sign, what did the people say about Jesus? (v. 14)
- Why did the multitude follow Jesus? (v. 26)
- What did the miracle reveal about Jesus' identity? (vv. 35, 41, and 48)
- How was Jesus' miracle more spectacular than Moses'? (vv. 49-50)
- Why did the people stop following Jesus? (v. 60)

## Group Discussion

- What is the point of a sign?
- Jesus' miracles are referred to as "signs", what does Jesus' sign point people to?
- What does it mean for Jesus to be "the bread of life"?
- Why did the multitude seek after Jesus in verse 26?
- Do we want Jesus' provision more than his person?
- What does it look like to desire Jesus above and beyond His gifts?

## Life-Saving Faith

### ***Study the Text . . .***

The Gospel of John was written "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31). Faith and life are inextricably linked throughout the book and provide a primary theme of John's Gospel. Believing in the person and work of Jesus Christ produces life. John makes this clear from the very beginning of the book by identifying Christ as our original life-source: "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was *life*. And the *life* was the light of men" (1:3-4). In today's text, he also identifies Christ as our eternal life-source: "Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to *eternal life*, which the Son of Man will give to you" (6:27; see vv. 33, 40, 47, 54, 68).

In John 17:3, a definition for eternal life is provided: "And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." The phrase "to know the one true God" is in keeping with the Old Testament concept of intimacy such as when a man "knows" a woman in the marriage bed. Eternal life provides people with an affectionate relationship with God. In this sense, faith in Christ reverses the result of the fall that marked our relationship with God by an estranged animosity (cr. Ephesians 2:1-3). The eternal life that faith in Christ provides replaces estranged animosity with intimate communion.

In vv. 52-56, Jesus uses shocking and offensive metaphors to portray the close communion with which believers are to have with Him. Eating Jesus' flesh and drinking Jesus' blood here is not specifically tied to the ordinance of Holy Communion, but His words do seem to anticipate that practice where local churches will gather and symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood (1 Cor. 11:23-32). Here, however, the phrase most immediately parallels Jesus' appeal for people to come to Him and be saved through His atoning death on the cross and be satisfied through abiding in Him (v. 56). This kind of life contrasts with the life of the religious leaders who oppose Jesus. Because they do not receive Jesus as God's appointed Messiah, Jesus says to them, "I know that you do not have the love of God within you" (v. 42). By rejecting Christ, their lives

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continue to be marked by an estranged animosity rather than intimate communion. Such estranged animosity will carry them into a Christ-less eternity.

- How many times is eternal life mentioned in this passage?
- How many times is faith referred to in this passage?
- How do people come to believe in Jesus Christ? (v. 44)
- What does it mean for God to “draw” a person to Jesus? (this is the same word used in 2:8; 4:7, and 12:32)
- What promise is made to those who believe in Jesus in verses 35, 40, and 54?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- What does it mean to be estranged from God?
- What does it mean to do “the work of God”? (v. 29)
- What does it mean to “believe in Christ”?
- Why is faith necessary to be reconciled to God?
- What effect should verse 44 have on our faith?
- How have you experienced God drawing you to Jesus?
- How do verses 38-39 speak to the security of your salvation?
- How should we respond to God in light of saving and securing us?

## **Soul-Satisfying Faith**

### ***Study the Text...***

Not only is faith in Christ life-saving in that we will be raised in the last day, faith in Christ is also soul-satisfying. Sometimes we wrongly think that eternal life is just a future reality. What John teaches throughout His Gospel is that eternal life is not just something we are waiting to experience at some point in the future. Instead, eternal life has crashed into the present with the inauguration of God’s kingdom. Eternal life is not as concerned with the length of one’s life as it is the quality of one’s life as it is lived in affectionate communion with God. We do not have to wait to enjoy God one day after we die or after Jesus returns. We can enjoy Him by knowing Him right here, right now. J. I. Packer writes, “What makes life worthwhile is having a big enough objective, something which catches our imagination and lays hold of our allegiance and this the Christian has in a way that no other person has. For what higher, more exalted, and more compelling goal can there be than to know God?” (*Knowing God*). In the process of getting to know God, our souls are satisfied. This is what Jesus is getting at in verse 35. Coming and believing in Jesus should be a constant occurrence in the lives of those who trust in Christ.

The privilege and opportunity we have to find in Christ all that we need is threatened by many things. Rather than feasting on the Bread of Life, we are tempted to feast on other foods. Jesus knows this better than we do which is why he instructs us not to labor for food that perishes but to labor for food that endures to eternal life (v. 27). In other words, rather than investing in earthly pleasures and pursuits, invest in the eternal pleasure of pursuing God.

C. S. Lewis recognized the futile tendency people have toward settling for less than what Christ longs to provide. He writes, “Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the

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staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at sea. We are far too easily pleased" (*The Weight of Glory*). In today's passage, Jesus promises to satisfy our souls. He will quench our spiritual hunger and thirst as we eat of His flesh and drink of His blood. In other words, He does this for us as we commune with Him.

Not everyone is willing to look to Christ with life-saving, soul-satisfying faith. The majority always seems to reject what Christ offers. In vv. 60-70, the crowds refuse to believe in Christ because they did not understand the message of the miracle. Jesus then attributes faithful responses to His message and ministry to the Holy Spirit (v. 63). Many people turned away from Christ, but Peter and the faithful disciples who remained recognized the futility of seeking eternal life anywhere other than in Jesus, God's appointed Messiah.

- Why did the people turn away from Jesus? (vv. 60-70)
- What was so difficult about the message of Jesus' miracle?
- Make note of all the present tense verbs peppered through this chapter.
- Compare what Jesus says about giving eternal life to those God gives Him with what He prays in John 17:1-8.
- Compare also Nicodemus' oblivious response to Jesus' teaching on the new birth in John 3 with how the people interact with Jesus in verse 52.
- What is the role of the Holy Spirit in producing life-saving, soul-satisfying faith?

### Group Discussion . . .

- What kinds of "food that perishes" do people labor for?
- Why do we tend to settle for "food that perishes" rather than the "food that endures to eternal life"?
- Why is the flesh useless when it comes to exercising life-saving, soul-satisfying faith in Christ?
- Why is Holy Spirit necessary? What other texts in John's Gospel speak of the Holy Spirit's role in the salvation and satisfaction of God's people?
- How can we practically seek the food that endures to eternal life?

## Small Group Guide The Light of the World

The Church at Brook Hills

October 25-31, 2010

John 8:12

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.

### John 8:12

Today's passage contains the second of several "I am" statements in the Gospel of John. Last week, we discussed what it means for Jesus to be "the bread of life" (6:35). Today we see that Jesus is also "the light of the world." Jesus identifies himself as the light of the world in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles and in the midst of a conflict with Jewish leadership. When Jesus confirms that He is the light of the world, He is making an explicit messianic assertion. The imagery of a person coming as the light of the world has roots in the Old Testament which speak of the Servant of the Lord as the light to the nations (Isaiah 42:6; 49:6; and 51:4). The Pharisees resist Jesus' claim and another debate ensues.

### The Guiding Light

#### *Study the Text . . .*

The Feast of Tabernacles is one of seven major feasts celebrated in Jerusalem each year. This particular feast is celebrated in commemoration of how God guided Israel during the wilderness wanderings after the Exodus (Lev. 23:42-43). During their journey through the wilderness, God guided Israel as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night to give the people light (Ex. 13:21-22). As the people of Israel wandered through the dark wilderness, they were led toward the Promise Land by the light of God.

Each night during the Feast of Tabernacles, with the exception of the Sabbath evening, the Jews remembered God's guidance by partaking in a great candle lighting ceremony. The following passage taken from a Jewish source describes the ceremony:

*At the close of the first Festival-day of the Feast they went down to the Court of Women where they had made a great amendment. There were golden candlesticks there with four golden bowls on the top of them and four ladders to each candlestick, and four youths of the priestly stock and in their hands jars of oil holding a hundred and twenty logs which they poured into all the bowls. They made wicks from the worn out drawers and girdles of the priests and with them they set the candlesticks alight, and there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of the Beth ha-She'ubah (Sukkah 5:2-3).*

## Small Group Guide

### The Light of the World

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*October 25-31, 2010*

*John 8:12*

Imagine, then, a dramatic lighting of the city of Jerusalem at the close of each day (other than the Sabbath) in commemoration of a crucial event in redemptive history. Against this backdrop, Jesus says, “I am the light of the world.” What God did for Israel in leading them out of slavery, through the wilderness, and into the Promise Land, He does for the nations in Christ, the light of the world. God in Christ leads the nations out of slavery to sin and death, through the dark wilderness of this world, and ultimately into the promise of life in the New Jerusalem (cr. Rev. 21:1-4). As we journey through this world, we do so as those who no longer walk in the darkness of ignorance under the power of the evil one (cr. 1 Jn. 5:19) but as those who have been “rescued from the dominion of darkness and brought...into the kingdom of the Son. . . .” (Col. 1:13). Christ’s kingdom is an everlasting kingdom of light and life.

- Read and reflect on Exodus 13:17-22
- According to Leviticus 23:42-43, what were the people commanded to do during the Feast of Tabernacles?
- Read John 1:4-13.
- Why does John make such a strong connection between light and life?
- What privilege does John promise to those who receive Jesus? (Jn. 1:12-13)
- Compare your answer to the previous question with the plight of those who do not know Christ described in Ephesians 2:1-3.

## Group Discussion

- What does it mean for Jesus to be the *light* of the world? (when asking this question place emphasis on *light*, we will discuss *the world* below)
- What does the imagery of light cause you to think about?
- Why is He qualified to be the *light* of the world? (cr., vv. 14-16)
- What darkness does Jesus dispel?
- What does Jesus save us from?
- What is Jesus saving us to?
- How does Jesus provide guidance today?

## The Global Light

### ***Study the Text . . .***

Jesus’ identification as “the light of the world” is not only made against the backdrop of the Feast of Tabernacles, but is also rooted in the Servant of the Lord imagery of Isaiah as well as OT promises of the coming light of salvation. The book of Isaiah anticipates the arrival of the Servant of the Lord who will be a light to the nations (Is. 42:6, 49:6, and 51:4). The Servant of the Lord’s ministry would be global in scope. His life and ministry would benefit not just Israel but all the nations of the world.

## Small Group Guide

### The Light of the World

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*October 25-31, 2010*

*John 8:12*

The opposition of the Jewish leadership did not anticipate this being a concern of the Messiah they awaited. Instead, they believed he would be a political, militant figure bent on liberating Israel from Roman rule. They erroneously sought liberation from Roman oppression rather than from the bondage of sin and the sentence of death. Not all nations were under Roman oppression, but all nations are slaves of sin and sentenced to death apart from the Messiah's ministry. The Jewish leadership expected a national messiah but not a global messiah, even though their own Scriptures revealed that He would be (cr. 5:39).

The O.T. also contains numerous promises concerning the Messiah's global ambition. Perhaps the most prominent is found in God's initial promise to Abraham in Gn. 12:1-3. God makes His heart for the nations known. He places them front and center of his redemptive purposes. The salvation Christ provides as "the light of the world" extends to the nations.

- Read and reflect on Isaiah 42:6, 9, and 51:4
- Look up other references in John's Gospel to Jesus' concern for the world (i.e. 3:16).
- Look up other references in the Old Testament to God's global concern.
- Make note of connections between Isaiah 9:1-7 and John 8:12.

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- If Jesus is the light of the *world*, then what does that imply for those who have yet to see him as such?
- In what ways might we commit the same error of the Pharisees by fostering a narrow perspective on Jesus' mission, and subsequently, the church's mission?
- How do we agree with God by keeping the nations in view?
- What is the relationship between Jesus' identity as the light of the world and His describing Christians as the light of the world in Matthew 5:14?
- How might we more effectively reflect Jesus' identity as the light of the world and our role as the light of the world in our lives and faith community?
- What is meant by the statement: "The light that shines the farthest shines the brightest at home."

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### ***Mark 11:1-26***

Mark 11 covers a lot of ground as Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on a colt, curses a fig tree, cleanses the temple and then teaches the disciples about faith and forgiveness. The stories do not seem related, but Mark has woven them together to teach us about Christ's character and the necessity of faith. As you study the chapter ask yourself, "Why are these stories and events interwoven?"

### ***Study the Text . . .***

#### **Mark 11:1-10: Jesus is the Messianic King!**

Read Zechariah 9:9.

The passage opens emphasizing Jesus' prophetic knowledge. He told his disciples exactly where to go to get the colt, and how people would respond to them. Mark then emphasized that the colt had never been ridden. In Old Testament and Jewish origins unbroken colts had a religious or royal use; furthermore, no one was ever allowed to ride the king's animal. Up until this point Jesus has been walking everywhere, but this time he wants to ride into Jerusalem. Then, the people call out to him.

Read Psalm 118:25-26.

The people praise Jesus and call out for him to save them. They are declaring him their king. Throughout the Gospel of Mark up until this point, Jesus has been careful to avoid the praises of the people, but now Jesus embraces their praise and does not deny that he is king.

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- The people praise Jesus as their king and savior, but later they will kill him. Is Jesus the kind of king they expected? Why or Why not?
- Do we sometimes have expectations of God that he does not fulfill?
- How do we respond when God does not do what we expect?
- How can we demonstrate trust in God even when he does not do what we expect him to do?
- Can we glorify God even when our personal expectations are not met?

### ***Study the Text...***

#### **Mark 11:11-25: God's people are called to bear fruit as they follow God with faith that can move mountains.**

With verse 11, Jesus enters Jerusalem and goes into the temple. As king, we can assume that he is going in to look around to see if his people have been faithful. He is not looking

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around like a tourist at the temple. He is looking to see if his people are bearing fruit.

The next morning as he is walking back to Jerusalem he curses a fig tree. This is rather odd behavior without the context that Mark provides. Jesus is not cursing the fig tree simply because he is hungry and there is no fruit. His action is symbolic. In the Bible, The fig tree often represents Israel (Jer. 8:13; Hos. 9:10, 16). So Jesus is saying that Israel has leaves and looks like she is bearing fruit, but in reality there is no fruit.

- What are the Jewish people doing that gives the impression that they are bearing fruit? Provide some examples found in the Gospel readings over the last two weeks.
- How should they have been bearing fruit?

Jesus then enters Jerusalem and goes into the temple and drives out everyone who is selling and buying goods in the temple. This is an example of how the Jews looked like they were bearing fruit but were not. People came from all over the known world to worship in the temple. It was not reasonable for them to bring an animal with them from home to worship; so many would buy the animal when they arrived in Jerusalem. The Jews are making it easy for people to worship by selling the animals in the temple complex itself! It seems like a good thing, but it is not.

- Why does Jesus have a problem with buying and selling being conducted in the temple?
- Are the people worshipping God with commerce taking place in the temple?

Read Isaiah 56:1-8.

- How does God want to be worshipped?
- Does God desire the worship of other nations besides just Jews?
- How is the commerce keeping the Gentiles from seeking God?

They made the temple a business, and they were robbing people because of the prices of the animals or the exchange rates they offered. They were exploiting people who were coming to worship God.

The chief priests heard what Jesus did, and they wanted to kill him. However, they did not seek to arrest him in the temple because the people were astonished by Jesus and would have rioted.

The next morning when they entered Jerusalem the fig tree is withered to its roots. It portrays the coming judgment of Israel, but Jesus also uses it to teach the disciples about faith. If the disciples want to bear fruit, they must have faith that God will remove the mountains in their lives that seek to hinder them from following and bearing fruit for God.

- What kind of faith is Jesus seeking from the disciples? Strong? Weak?
- How does a person have faith that moves mountains?
- Can God forgive us if we have not forgiven another person? Why does Jesus tell them to forgive others when they are praying?

### ***Group Discussion...***

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- What are some examples of how we sometimes bear lots of leaves but no fruit? What is the difference between leaves and fruit?
- What is required for us to be able to bear fruit?
- Do our actions hinder others from worshipping God? Think about your small group, do your conversations or fellowship times together hinder guests or others in your group from worshipping God because of what you do or do not do? Think about our church, do we hinder one another from worshipping Christ with our actions or conversations whether it is during a worship gathering or during the week when we see one another?
- How does one develop or obtain a faith that can move mountains?
- How important is prayer to faith?
- What attitude should we have in prayer about the requests we make of God?
- Why is forgiveness so important?

Chapter 11 began with Jesus entering Jerusalem as the promised Messianic king! Then instead of proceeding to build an army to free his people from their oppressors (Romans), he begins to judge his own people for their sins. What is Jesus' point by portraying himself as king and then focusing on the abuse of the temple? What kingdom is Jesus concerned about?

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### **Acts 1-2**

The book of Acts is the second volume in a two-part history written by Luke. Luke was a doctor and a travelling companion of the apostle Paul. Luke joined Paul at Mysia on his second missionary journey, just before they entered into Macedonia and preached the gospel in Europe for the first time. The book of Acts provides reliable historical testimony about the earliest days of Christianity. Luke was an eyewitness of the events of the second half of the book, and he had access to firsthand testimony from the eyewitnesses of the first half of the book.

Throughout the book of Acts, Luke will show how Jesus is carrying out His redemptive mission through His church. Chapters 1-2 recount the birth of the church and the earliest stage of her mission:

## **I. The Promise of the Mission (Acts 1:1-11)**

### ***Study the Text...***

The first book that Luke refers to in verse 1 is the Gospel that we today call *The Gospel According to Luke*. Both books are addressed to a man named Theophilus, whose name literally means "Lover of God." There is some debate as to whether Theophilus was an actual historical person or whether Luke uses him as a pseudonym (symbolic name) for any Christian. Either way, the historical and theological meaning of the book remain unchanged.

Luke says that his first book (*The Gospel According to Luke*) dealt with what Jesus "began" to do and teach. The book of Acts is the second part of this story, which tells the story of what Jesus continued to do through His disciples after His ascension to heaven. What we find in this book is that Jesus is continuing His mission of bringing salvation to the nations through His church.

Jesus' mission and the church's mission are really the same mission: "that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem." (Luke 24:46-47) The church is Jesus' vehicle for carrying out His redemptive plan to bring salvation to the nations...and there is no plan B.

After Jesus rose from the dead, He commanded His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5; cf. Lk. 24:49). Throughout the *Gospel According to Luke*, we see that Jesus did many miracles and performed His entire ministry in the power of the

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Holy Spirit. Luke, more than any other Gospel writer, emphasizes that Jesus' ministry was Spirit-driven and Spirit-empowered. Jesus here promises His disciples that they would receive this same Holy Spirit so that they would be able to carry on the same ministry that He began with the same power He had.

After Jesus promised that He would send the Holy Spirit, the disciples asked whether He would now restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). They still did not understand that Jesus' kingdom was not limited to one ethnic group (the Jews). Jesus corrects their misunderstanding by telling them that their mission is to be His witnesses "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8)." In other words, they will tell the story of Jesus' death and resurrection not only to Jews, but to Gentiles as well. Jesus will set up a kingdom that includes people from every nation under heaven and the disciples will be the means by which He will extend His kingdom. They will announce that Jesus is the King and will call people from every tribe and tongue and nation to submit to His Lordship.

It is important here for us to understand how Jesus and the New Testament writers see history differently than the Old Testament writers. For the writers of the New Testament, everything in human history is interpreted in light of the finished work of Christ in His death and resurrection. The Old Testament looked forward to a day when the coming Messiah would establish a universal Kingdom in Jerusalem to which all the nations would stream (see for example texts like Isaiah 2:1-4). This is probably what the disciples had in mind when they asked Jesus about the restoration of the kingdom in Acts 1:6. Jesus, however, tells them that the nations will not be streaming to a geographical location. Rather, they, as the newly-formed people of God, will disperse to the ends of the earth with the gospel of His death and resurrection.

So, is Jesus restoring the Kingdom here? Well, yes and no. He is inaugurating His Kingdom, but not in the way that the disciples are expecting. He is establishing His Kingdom by sending out His disciples to declare the gospel and proclaim His Lordship to all nations, but His Kingdom will not be fully consummated until He returns at His second coming (1:11). This is what theologians call the "already/not yet" tension. The Kingdom is **already** here as Christ reigns by His Spirit in His church, but it is **not yet** fully realized. The entire Christian life, and the ministry of the church, are lived out in this tension between the "already" and the "not yet."

This picture of the Messiah's kingdom presented in Acts 1:8 was radically different from the picture that most Jews had in Jesus' time. Most Jews at this time viewed people from Samaria and the end of the earth as outside of God's saving purposes. Jews did not associate with Samaritans or Gentiles because Jews thought that these people were unclean and wicked. Throughout the book of Acts, we will see that the Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the gospel to extend the borders of Christ's kingdom throughout the earth.

Jesus calls the disciples his "witnesses." (1:8) The job of a witness is to witness...to testify about an objective event. Their job is not to tell people about themselves, their

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experiences, or their ideas; their job is to be heralds, news reporters who tell the story of what Jesus has done in His death and resurrection. The fundamental means by which the followers of Jesus will advance the Kingdom of Jesus and see the new creation advanced is by proclaiming the good news about Jesus. Their job is not primarily to conduct social reform or to change culture. It is to proclaim the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and to call people to repentance and faith.

Acts 1:8 provides an outline for the advancement of Jesus' kingdom in the book of Acts. In Acts 2-7, the disciples are preaching the gospel in Jerusalem and the church is formed there. In Acts 8-12, the disciples begin to preach the gospel in all Judea and Samaria and the church extends to these regions. In Acts 13-28, we see the apostle Paul taking the gospel to the ends of the earth and churches springing up all over the Roman Empire.

We today are still a part of this story. We are disciples of Jesus who have been commanded to preach His gospel in every place on earth. We are witnesses who are called to proclaim the death and resurrection of King Jesus and to call all people to submit to Him as Savior and Lord. We will continue to do this as we look forward to His promised return (Acts 1:9-11).

Immediately after Jesus commissions His disciples to be His witnesses in all nations, they see Him lifted up into the heavens. Angels then appear and declare to them that He will return from heaven. These twin realities, the exaltation of Jesus (ascension) and His impending return (2<sup>nd</sup> Coming), are the dual motivation for Christian mission. As Pastor David has often said, "Passion for the kingdom is fueled by passion for the King." When we recognize that Jesus is the exalted King of the cosmos who is coming again to judge the living and the dead, we will seek to declare His glory and extend His kingdom to all nations.

### ***Group Discussion...***

- We saw in Acts 1:6 that the disciples had a myopic view of the kingdom that was much narrower than God's view of the Kingdom. What are some ways in which our own views of the Kingdom might be too narrow? How will you intentionally move outside of your narrow view of God's Kingdom to get involved in God's redemptive plan to bring salvation to all nations?
- What is the primary mission of the church? What are some ways that we get distracted from that mission? Is it possible for good things to get in the way of our central mission?
- How does a right understanding of the glory of Christ and the immanence of His return create a sense of urgency in us to take the gospel to the nations? How can you cultivate this in your own life, in your family, small group, church?

## **II. The Preparation for the Mission (1:12-26)**

### ***Study the Text...***

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After Jesus' ascension, the disciples obeyed His command to return to Jerusalem and to wait for the promised Holy Spirit. As they were waiting, "with one accord, they were devoting themselves to prayer." The Greek verb here is in the present tense, signifying that they were continually devoting themselves to prayer (1:14). They had seen Jesus ascend before their very eyes, they had received an impossible commission from Him, they were desperate for the power of His Spirit, and so they were continually crying out in prayer. Furthermore, they were absolutely united in one mind and in one spirit. They realized that all that they had was each other and God and so they cried out to God together.

While they were praying and waiting to receive the Holy Spirit, Peter, the leader and spokesman of the apostles, perceived that the Lord was leading them to officially recognize another apostle. It is interesting to note that Peter realizes that both Judas' betrayal of Jesus and the need to replace Judas are nothing less than the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy; "The Scripture had to be fulfilled." (1:16) This is a theme that will reverberate throughout the apostolic preaching in the book of Acts: the enemies of God and of His Christ conspired together to kill Jesus, but God raised Him from the dead and triumphed over them. In the end, all of their sinister plots only served to advance the mighty saving purposes of God (see for example Acts 4:27-28).

It was necessary to replace Judas with one and only one apostle, although there were two men who met the qualifications. The number twelve was highly symbolic, signifying that the apostles represented the twelve tribes of Israel and thus the church is to be seen as the people of God, the new Israel.

The disciples selected Judas' replacement by recognizing two men who met the qualifications of apostleship, which were: (1) he must have been a companion of Jesus from the time of John the Baptist until the Lord's ascension, and (2) he must have been an eyewitness to the resurrection. It appears from the text that both Barsabbas and Matthias were equally qualified, so the disciples prayed, cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias. While casting lots was a regular practice in ancient Israel, it is noteworthy that this is the last time we see it practiced in the Bible. It may be no coincidence that this final instance of casting lots to seek the guidance of the Lord immediately precedes the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of God would come to indwell believers. Because believers are now indwelt by the Spirit, the church has no need of such practices to guide its decision-making processes.

### ***Group Discussion...***

- Have you ever experienced the kind of desperate, unified prayer that the early church experienced in Acts 1:14? Why is this experience so foreign to us in the context of the church in America? How will you cultivate this practice of desperate prayer in your own life, family, and small group?
- What practical effect does it have on your life to know that God was sovereign even over Judas' betrayal of Jesus? Is anything outside of God's control? Does this change the way that you look at tragic events that come into your life?

## **III. The Power of the Mission (2:1-13)**

## ***Study the Text...***

Chapter two, verse one states that all of the disciples were gathered together in one place on the Day of Pentecost. It is unclear whether this place was the upper room where they had gathered for prayer in chapter one or another location. Due to the fact that Pentecost was a holy day, it is quite possible that they were gathered together in the temple, but it is not possible to be sure.

It is, however, significant, that God pours out His Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Pentecost was the fiftieth day after Passover, and was commonly referred to as “the day of first-fruits,” (Num. 28:26), because it was the day when the first-fruits of the wheat harvest were offered to God (Ex. 34:22a). On this particular day of Pentecost, a great harvest will begin, a harvest of God’s redeemed from every nation under heaven beginning in Jerusalem.

When the Spirit rushes upon the disciples, they hear a sound like a mighty rushing wind (2:2). Both the Hebrew and Greek words for “Spirit” can also be translated “breath” or “wind.” What the disciples were experiencing here was nothing less than the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezk. 37:1-14). The Spirit/breath of God was filling them, giving them life, and sending them forth as an army to advance the Kingdom of God by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Spirit also manifests His presence to them as “divided tongues as of fire.” (2:3) Although we are not exactly sure what these tongues looked like, we do know that fire is symbolic of God’s presence throughout the Bible. For example, when God appeared to Moses, He appeared as a bush that burned but was not consumed (Exodus 3). Here in Acts 2, God is demonstrating that He is present among His people in an especially powerful way.

The most important aspect of the Spirit’s work among them is what He empowered them to do. The Spirit empowered and motivated the disciples to preach the gospel. This is the pattern throughout the book of Acts. Every time individuals are filled with the Holy Spirit, they begin to proclaim the gospel (see for example Acts 4:8, 31; 9:17-20; 13:8-11).

Verses 4-11 state that the Spirit supernaturally gave these Galileans, who primarily spoke Aramaic and Greek, the ability to proclaim the gospel in at least fourteen other languages. Many scholars have noted that what we have here at Pentecost is nothing less than the reversal of Babel. At Babel one language fell into confusion, but at Pentecost many languages all heard the same message. At Babel man tried to set up His own kingdom in the heavens, but at Pentecost, God established His Kingdom on earth. At Babel man tried to ascend to God, but at Pentecost God came down to man.

## ***Group Discussion...***

- The disciples realized that they were utterly incapable of fulfilling their mission apart from the power of the Holy Spirit. What crutches have we replaced the Holy Spirit with in our ministries?
- One of the primary works (if not the primary work) of the Holy Spirit throughout the book of Acts is to empower believers to proclaim the gospel. Inspect the fruit of your own life. A life lived under the authority of Christ and the power of the Spirit is a life characterized by gospel proclamation. Does that characterize you?
- How does the presence of the Holy Spirit help you overcome fear in evangelism?

## **IV. The Preaching of the Mission (2:14-40)**

### ***Study the Text...***

Verses 12 and 13 record the reaction of the crowd. While some were amazed and perplexed, others mocked the disciples and said that they were drunk, “filled with new wine.” There is a bit of irony in even their accusation here, for wine was seen throughout the prophets as a blessing of the restoration of Israel. For example, Joel 3:18 prophesies that the mountains shall drip with sweet wine in the day of the LORD. The irony that was lost on those who mocked the disciples was that the disciples were in fact being filled with the blessings of the promised day of the LORD, something far greater than mere wine!

In verses 14-21, Peter explains to the crowd that they are observing the fulfillment of God’s promises to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. This is what God had promised He would do in the last days (2:17).

There is a great deal of confusion in American evangelicalism about the “last days,” and so we must be certain that we understand the last days the way the Bible understands the last days. According to the Bible, the last days began at Jesus’ birth when the age to come invaded the darkness of this present evil age, and the last days will continue until Jesus returns in glory. Everything in between is considered “the last days.” One of the defining marks of the last days is that at the beginning of the last days, God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh. As we will see, all those who repent and believe in Jesus receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

In verses 22-35, Peter transitions from talking about what the crowd was observing to proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. The tongues have gotten the crowd’s attention (2:5-13), and Peter has demonstrated that this is a movement of God’s Spirit (2:14-21), but the church’s mission is to bear witness to Jesus Christ, and that is what he does here (2:22-35).

Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost is the first sermon in the history of the church, and it is really a pattern for the preaching that we see throughout the book of Acts. As we read the apostolic preaching presented in the book of Acts, four main elements emerge.

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The first element of Peter's sermon is an announcement that the age of fulfillment has arrived (2:17-21). Peter tells the people of Israel that what they have been waiting for has finally happened. The day of the Lord is here, the gift of the Spirit is being poured out, and everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

The second element is a basic overview of Jesus' life, ministry, death, and triumph through His resurrection (2:22-24). Peter makes it very clear in these verses that God put His stamp of approval on Jesus, not only by empowering Jesus to perform the miraculous deeds that he accomplished during His life, but ultimately by giving Him victory over death. Peter does not shy away from confrontation at this point. He puts his finger in the face of the crowd, exposes their guilt, and implicates them in the death of Jesus. And yet, this was all done according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.

Thirdly, Peter shows how Jesus' death and resurrection fulfills Old Testament prophecy, specifically prophecy related to David. The early church, from the apostles onward, interpreted the exaltation of Jesus as a direct fulfillment of God's promises to David (see especially passages like Ps. 2; 110; 2 Sam. 7). In verses 25-28, Peter quotes Psalm 16, in which David seems to claim that he will escape death. Peter makes an obvious observation to anyone honest enough to admit it: David is dead! You can go visit his grave. So, if you believe that the Psalms are really the inspired Word of God, as any God-fearing Jew did, then you had to recognize that David was talking about someone else, most likely the greater Son of David who was to follow him and reign on His throne forever (2 Sam. 7:13). Peter here demonstrates that Jesus is the greater Son of David who conquered every enemy, death included, and was exalted to the right hand of the Father, and who as the Anointed One, possesses the Spirit in fullness and now pours out the Spirit on all who are in Him (2:33). Remember that David was a "small m" messiah (anointed one) who was anointed with the Holy Spirit (1 Sam. 16:13). Jesus is the Messiah who has the Spirit in fullness, and because He has now conquered the final enemy and ascended to the right hand of power and has been declared publicly to be both Lord and Messiah (2:36), He is now able to pour out the Spirit in fullness on all who will receive Him (2:33).

The fourth element of the apostolic preaching is a call to repent. Peter ends his sermon in verse 36 with his thesis statement: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." In essence, Peter told them, you killed God ("Lord" is the way the Jews referred to Yahweh) and His Messiah (Christ). If there was ever a hopeless situation, this was it! You can hear the desperation in the response of the crowd, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

This is the kind of desperation that characterizes true conversion. It might not manifest itself with outward wailing or with dramatic events, but for a person to truly come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ we must despair of ourselves and our own righteousness, we must see ourselves as enemies of God under the wrath of God, and we must turn and trust in the work of Christ in His death and resurrection alone as the payment for our sins.

Peter tells them that they must “repent and be baptized.” To “repent” means to “turn around.” It signifies a complete change of mind and life. They once thought of Jesus as a man cursed by God who died by hanging on a tree. They must now submit to Him as Lord and Christ.

Peter also calls them to be baptized. The word “baptize” literally means to “immerse.” They were literally to “be immersed into the name of the Lord Jesus.” Baptism in the New Testament is the means by which one who has repented and trusted in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins publicly identifies with Jesus and with His body, the church. It is noteworthy that Peter does not separate repentance from baptism. In fact, throughout the book of Acts, we find that the typical “gospel invitation” is “repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins.” For the apostles and the rest of the early church, repentance and baptism were seen as inseparable. As the renowned New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce writes, “The idea of an unbaptized Christian is simply not entertained in the NT.”<sup>1</sup> (*sic*)

All those who repent and are baptized, all whom the Lord calls to Himself (2:39), will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter certainly does not back down from calling them to repentance, but neither does he shy away from boldly holding out the promises of forgiveness of sins. This is the pattern of all true gospel preaching. We must be willing to confront sin and call to repentance, even allowing the Scriptures to drive our hearers to despair, and then holding out the promise of forgiveness and the Spirit for those who truly repent and trust in Christ.

### ***Group Discussion...***

- What is the biblical “gospel invitation?” What does the word repentance signify and how can we make that clear to people as we share the gospel with them?
- Why do we sometimes separate baptism from repentance? Is it possible to be baptized and not be truly repentant? Is there anything in the water of baptism itself that saves a person? Why do the apostles link baptism and repentance so closely together?
- The crowd that heard the gospel felt condemnation and despair before they felt hope and forgiveness. Peter preached judgment before he preached salvation. Is this the way that we understand and proclaim the gospel? Why or why not?
- Peter’s gospel presentation focuses on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Peter says nothing about himself or his personal conversion experience. What does this tell you about the focus of the gospel? Is it about us or is it about Jesus? How should this affect the way that we share the gospel?

## **V. The Product of the Mission (2:41-47)**

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<sup>1</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts in The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. Edited by F.F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 77

### ***Study the Text...***

The preaching of the Word had its intended effect. As God spoke the first creation into existence (Gen.1), so here He was speaking through His witnesses to bring a new creation into existence. We see that new creation described in verses 41-47.

Verse 41 says that roughly three thousand souls were added to the church in one day. This was clearly a work that could only be accomplished by the sovereign Spirit of God and the powerful Word of God. These believers entered the faith community through baptism and immediately became immersed in the life of the church.

It needs to be stressed that God used the preaching of the gospel to create a **community** of believers. The goal of the preaching of the gospel is the establishment of the local church. This is the pattern presented throughout the book of Acts and it is the prescriptive pattern throughout the New Testament. We will search the New Testament in vain for any inkling that the Christian life in general or evangelism in particular can ever be carried out in a biblical manner apart from a close and vibrant connection to the local church. She is the center of God's redemptive plan and the Bride for which He died.

Verse 42 lists four practices to which those earliest believers devoted themselves within the context of their local church gatherings. The "apostles' teaching" was the authoritative rule for everything regarding the life of the early church. Jesus had vested His authority in His apostles and therefore, to obey Jesus was to obey the teachings of the apostles. It is the same in the church today. These same twelve apostles are not with us today, but we do have their writings preserved in the pages of the New Testament. The apostles' teachings must always remain the absolute authority for all matters of faith and practice in the life of the Christian and the church. If Jesus is Lord, and if Jesus mediates His authority through the teachings of the apostles, then the apostles' teaching contained within the pages of Holy Scripture is the absolute, final, and unquestioned authority for our lives and for the life of our church.

The second practice mentioned in verse 42 is "fellowship," which is sometimes translated "partnership" or "sharing." The idea is one of sharing life together. These early Christians realized that they were organically connected to one another, not because they liked each other or enjoyed hanging out together, but because they were all united to Christ. Suddenly, people who once had nothing in common with each other were closer than blood relatives because they were all united to Christ. Their fellowship was so strong that they were willing to sell their own possessions and give to their brothers and sisters who had need (2:44-45).

One of the tangible practices by which they reminded themselves of this fellowship was the "breaking of bread." This phrase may include a common meal that the believers shared, but it probably specifically refers to the Lord's Supper. The early church likely observed the Lord's Supper every time they met together. This meal reminded them not only of their union to Christ, but of their union to one another.

Finally, they devoted themselves to “the prayers.” The use of the definite article “**the** prayers” indicates that the early church was probably using a prayer book to guide their prayers, most likely the Psalms. As we read the book of Acts, we see that they understood the Psalms to be pointing to Christ. However, we do find other places throughout the book of Acts where the believers are offering more impromptu prayers, often in conjunction with quoted portions of the Psalms (see for example Acts 4:24-31). Therefore, it is probably best simply to observe that the early Christians devoted themselves to prayer and that their prayers were informed by Scripture. They were desperate for the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. And the Lord was faithful; He continued to add daily to their number those who were being saved (2:47). It is ultimately Jesus who is continuing to carry out the mission that He has begun to bring salvation to the nations.

***Group Discussion...***

- What was the means by which new believers entered into the faith community (2:41)?
- To what practices did the early church devote herself (2:42)? Can you say that you devote yourself to these practices within the context of the local church? How will you be more intentional about devoting yourself to these practices?
- Did the preaching of the gospel merely create individual isolated believers or a community of believer? What does this tell you about God’s redemptive plan?
- The early believers sold their possessions in order to give to their brothers and sisters in need. How can you sacrificially live out the gospel in this way?
- How do you think all of this affected the daily family life of those who were married and had children?

## Small Group Guide – Week 46

### ***The Acts of God through the Apostles***

*The Church at Brook Hills*

November 15-21, 2010

Acts 9

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.

### ***The Acts of God through the Apostles (9:1-31)***

As we saw in Acts 1-8, the gospel is now progressing with ever-increasing strength and diversity. Until chapter 7, the church had been mostly contained in Jerusalem. But after Stephen's martyrdom the church was forced to scatter. It is at the scene of Stephen's martyrdom that we are introduced to a new character, Saul. Saul was a law-abiding, prominent Jewish man who was present and approving at Stephen's stoning. Chapter 8 begins with the fact that *"Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison."* We see here that Saul had quickly become the Church's greatest enemy.

### ***Study the Text . . . (Read Acts 9:1-9)***

Chapter 9 begins with Saul seeking to extend his persecution of the Church by going into other towns and cities to find believers. The first thing we should notice is this: there are Christians in Damascus. The Apostles have been preaching the gospel in various towns, but there is no record of them going to Damascus. It is incredible to see that the gospel was spreading simply by those who had scattered from the persecution and those who had heard Peter preach in Jerusalem in Acts 2. Saul's attempt to stamp out the Church had actually done the opposite. As Tertullian, an early Church Father said: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

Now, while Saul was on his way to Damascus to begin his persecution, Jesus appears to him. Notice the words of Jesus: *"Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"* What is Jesus saying here? Was Saul actually persecuting Jesus? It is important to note that by saying this Jesus is identifying Himself with the Church. As Saul persecutes the Church, he persecutes Jesus Himself, because the Church is the body of Christ.

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- Take time to discuss the impact of martyrdom on the Church. Stephen's death was one thing that God used to send and grow His Church, and He has done it many times since. In a country where death is not much of a threat for sharing the gospel, it is easy for us to grow cold to the realities of martyrdom around the world. Is your treasure found so much in Christ that you would be willing to die to make Him known?

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- As you discuss the above truth, be reminded that Jesus identifies with us in persecution. He has said that we are His Body and that if anyone persecutes us, they persecute Him. How might that truth be comforting to us as we seek to share the gospel with others?
- How can we as a small group thank and praise God for the peace He has given His church here in the United States?
- How can we as a small group pray for our brothers and sisters that are being persecuted all over the world? If Christ identifies with them, do you think we should as well?

### ***Study the Text... (Read Acts 9:10-19)***

God's response to Ananias is essential for understanding the rest of the book of Acts. "Go [to Saul], for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry My name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name." God is fulfilling His promise in Acts 1:8 to take the gospel from Jerusalem, to Samaria, to Judea, and then the ends of the earth. The gospel had already been preached in Jerusalem and was currently being preached in Judea and Samaria. Now God begins raising up Saul to complete the initial stages of the gospel going forth by the Apostles, for he was appointed to take the gospel to the Gentiles in the ends of the earth. From this point on in the book of Acts, Saul will be the main character and the gospel going throughout the nations will be the theme.

### ***Group Discussion...***

- Consider the fact that within one year of Jesus resurrection, the gospel had progressed significantly. There are thousands of believers and the gospel has moved out of Jerusalem into the surrounding region. We can clearly see that the primary objective of the early church was to make the gospel known for the glory of God. Compare your small group to the mindset of the early church. Is your primary objective to make the gospel known for the glory of God among the people around you? How are you currently putting your strength and time into that purpose as a small group?

### ***Study the Text . . . (Read Acts 9:20-31)***

Four times in this short passage Saul is described as boldly proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is incredible that from the very moment he believed, he began preaching the gospel, clearly demonstrating that his life embodies the primary objective of the Church. This was not done without risk either. Remember that it was Saul who approved of the first martyrdom. The result of his bold preaching in both places was the same: they wanted to kill him. Yet Paul continued on, making known the good news of Jesus Christ that had saved his life from the sure judgment of God. Notice the result of Saul's conversion and preaching on the church: *"the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had*

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*peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied.”* The church was multiplying because of the power of the gospel.

***Group Discussion...***

- Take time to pray for the lost in your lives. Each person share one person they are currently sharing the gospel with and then pray for that person to believe the gospel.
- Take time to pray for the power of the gospel to permeate your small group and that God would make Christ known to others through you and your small group.
- Take time to pray for the multiplication of the redeemed in both your small group and our faith family at Brook Hills.
- How can you as a small group walk in the “*fear of the Lord*” (9:31)?

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## ***Study the Text . . .***

### ***Confidence in Salvation***

In his letters to the Thessalonians, Paul speaks clearly of the day of the Lord, giving assurance that it is coming. Not only is it coming, but it is meant to be a joyful day for Christians. While the church at Thessalonica was in many ways the model for Paul's church planting efforts, they still needed correction or assurance on several points. The second coming of Christ is the highlighted theme in Paul's letters to this church. It is referenced in nearly every chapter of the letters to the Thessalonians.

#### 1 Thessalonians 4:13-28

- What Paul and his company write is based on the authority of the word of the Lord (v15).
- They dispel any worry believers may have about those who have already died in the faith (v16).
- Ultimately all Christians past and present at the Lord's return will be united together with Christ and will be with Him always (v17).
- These promises give peace and confidence about the end to all Christians.

#### 1 Thessalonians 5:8-10

- Paul encourages Christians to be ready rather than fearing the day of the Lord. They are prepared with faith, love and hope for salvation (v8).
- For Christians this is a day in which they are confident. There is no fear because they know Christ has destined them for salvation (v9).

### ***Brokenness for the Lost***

If we as Christians have such unwavering confidence in the salvation Christ delivered on the cross, then we most naturally would be confident in the damnation of those who have not believed. We must also remember that many have not believed because they have not heard. This truth was heavy on Paul's heart when he carried the good news to new places. It was this heart heaviness that drove him to do that very thing. This was the business of Paul and his companions. They, like Christ, were about the Father's business of reaching out to the nations.

This is the portion of the passage immediately preceding what was just read as a comfort to Christians. Observe the contrasting description of the Day of the Lord when looking through the lens of a lost soul.

## 1 Thessalonians 5:1-7

- Paul says that for some the Day of the Lord will be unexpected and unwelcomed as a thief coming in the night (v2).
- Those who think that there is peace will be caught in inescapable pains (v3).
- When he refers to sleep and drunkenness in darkness, Paul is describing the unaware and undisciplined state of those caught in sin (v7).
- The lost, on the Day of the Lord, have no hope of salvation and are blind to the desolate end that will come of their faithless lives.

One great privilege we have in reading letters Paul wrote to the churches he had helped start is that we get to see the heart he and his companions felt toward the lost and those they had reached. 1Thess. 2:8 speaks of their affections and desires for them. Verse 19 of that same chapter calls them their “hope” and “joy” and “crown of boasting.” In Chapter 3, Paul tells of how they could not bear to be without news from them and that when they heard of their endurance of faith they were comforted even in the midst of great personal affliction. Paul said, “For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.” It is evident that Paul was not content with selfish peace of mind in the assurance of his salvation. The flip side of the assurance he had in Christ was utter hopelessness for those who had yet to hear such good news.

***Living Between the Times***

As followers of Christ we can all look back to a time when we were dead in sin. We know the truth of God’s grace and that we have been redeemed only by the completed work of Christ on the cross. We know the joy we have already received by Christ’s death and look forward with a guarantee of Christ’s glorious return and a future with him. While we live between the times of the incarnate Christ and the coming of Christ in glory, our hearts are filled with urgent peace. We are assured of our own salvation but burdened for those who have no hope. As we seek God’s face and He sanctifies us, we will be all the more confident in our salvation and our lives given to the work of sharing the Gospel with all nations.

***Group Discussion . . .***

- What emotions would you use to describe the way you typically feel about the second coming of Christ?
- What are some questions you have or have had from others that might cause you to think negatively about the return of Christ?
- What are some other scriptures you have memorized or are familiar with that give you confidence when looking forward to Christ’s return?
- Is urgent peace a concept that resonates with your soul? Do you find you lean more toward one over the other, urgency (for the lost) or peace (in your own salvation)?
- What is your motivation in sharing the Gospel? Do you see it as a duty or command? Have you experienced brokenness for the lost?
- How can you tangibly live in anticipation of Christ’s return?

## **Small Group Guide**

### **A Cross-Centered Community**

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*November 29 - December 5, 2010*

*1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5*

**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.**

## ***A Cross-Centered Community***

### ***1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5***

Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to a dysfunctional church. The church in Corinth did not know how to survive, much less thrive, in the hedonistic, narcissistic culture that was first century Corinth. The Corinthian culture tended to boast in all that served a person's self-exaltation. Popular philosophies, powerful personalities, impressive presentations of oratorical skills and intelligence, as well as excessive demonstrations of wealth or even religious or irreligious devotion determined the degree of esteem a person or group would receive from society. This staple trait of the Corinthian culture seeped into the young Corinthian church. As a result, the glory of Christ and His cross began to be depreciated within the newly-formed Christian community, which introduced a host of problems.

Every local church experiences tension in the relationship between the carnal-cultural atmosphere they have been saved out of and the eschatological-culture they have been saved into. This is certainly the type of situation Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians. Conforming the Corinthian believers' behavior to a Gospel-centered, Holy Spirit-empowered ethic proved to be a difficult task. The tentacles of the Corinthian culture latched onto the new community and threatened to extract authentic spiritual life from her midst and render her inept at fulfilling her mission. So, Paul opens 1 Corinthians with a resolute reminder of the centrality of the cross in the people's salvation, significance, and spirituality.

## ***Study the Text . . .***

### **The Centrality of the Cross**

Paul begins 1 Corinthians by greeting and encouraging the congregation (1:1-3). He then expresses gratitude to God for their faith (1:4-9). In 1:10-17, Paul proceeds to address the division and quarrelling that has come to characterize their community as a result of losing a cross-centered focus. He learned from Chloe's people that the congregation had begun dividing into camps devoted to a particular leader (i.e. Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and even a smug devotion to Christ). The factions occurred because the congregation assessed the men and their ministries based on a depraved set of

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criteria informed more by the Corinthian culture than by the cross of Christ. Members attached themselves to the prestigious gift sets of a leader and began drawing Christ-diminishing comparisons between themselves and other groups. Such elitist, tribalistic approaches to Christian community undermine the glory of Christ's cross. Paul further learned of several other issues that plagued the church—the compromised relationship between Christians and their surrounding pagan culture, the disordering of church practices such as head coverings and the Lord's Supper, the misuse of spiritual gifts, and matters of personal morality such as sex, marriage, celibacy, and the virtues. Paul writes a practical letter addressing each of these issues. Paul finds the remedy to the Corinthian ills in the central message of Christ crucified.

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 contains Paul's resolution to *re-establish* the centrality of the cross in the life and ministry of the Corinthian congregation. The cross of Christ is the central theme of today's text. But more important than being the central theme of a biblical text, the cross of Christ must become the central theme of every biblical community. Paul reminds his readers that their community was formed in response to hearing the message of Christ crucified (2:1-5). However, clearly they had pushed the central message of the cross to the fringes of their community. The message of Christ crucified became just another spoke in the wheel of their community rather than the unifying hub. Consequently, their community began falling apart. In order to retain God-honoring markers of unity, holiness, and humility, the centrality of the cross must be reasserted into the community of faith in Corinth.

- How many times does Paul mention the cross of Christ in 1 Corinthians 1:18-25?
- What does Paul encourage his readers to do in v. 26?
- How did Paul approach the Corinthians in 2:1, 3?
- What was Paul's resolution in 2:2?
- Paul's selected manner and method for ministering to the Corinthians contradicted their chief cultural values. Why do you think Paul approached the Corinthians in such a counter-cultural way?
- What implications should Paul's methodology have on how we minister in our own 21<sup>st</sup> century American culture?

### **Group Discussion . . .**

- If someone asked you, what is the central message of Christianity, what would you say?
- What might threaten to decentralize the message of Christ crucified from our community?
- How might we maintain a cross-centered focus in our lives? Faith family?
- Is it possible for our methods of ministry to undermine the message of our ministry? If so, how might we avoid doing so?
- How might we structure our ministry methods in such a way that reinforces the central message of Christ crucified?

## ***The Cross and Salvation***

### ***Study the Text...***

Here, Paul asserts that the “word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1:18). Salvation, then, comes to people who hear the message of Christ crucified. The power for salvation is found in the message spoken rather than the messenger speaking. This undermines the tribalistic practices of the Corinthian Christians acknowledged in 1:11-17. Scripture always attributes salvation to the power of God inherent in His word and never to a particularly gifted person or charismatic personality (1:3-5; cr. 3:5-9).

We live in a culture that collectively smirks when Christ’s death on the cross is proclaimed as salvific. Modern advancements in science and technology along with Post-Modern developments in philosophy and sociology have served to swell the Western ego. Many people consider the cross of Christ foolish, archaic, unsophisticated, barbaric, and/or unnecessary. Often times such salty sentiments are considered new perspectives that have risen in harmony with the sociological evolution of the human race. However, our 21<sup>st</sup> century, North American cultural context is not unique in viewing the cross of Christ with condescension. The Corinthian culture of the 1<sup>st</sup> century did the exact same thing. Because the cross of Christ is an affront to human pride, sinful human beings of every historical-cultural context have viewed its message with contempt.

The message of a crucified Messiah stands in sharp contrast with what customarily constitutes a Jewish sign or Greek wisdom (v. 24). Crucifixion was a crude method of execution. No Jew or Greek could have imagined ever worshiping a person who died on a cross. Yet, such a death was central to God’s plan of salvation. As a result, God accomplished salvation for His people in such a way that ascribes glory exclusively to Himself (v. 29, 31).

- How is the “word of the cross” described in verse 18?
- What is the Jewish response to the preaching of Christ crucified (v. 23)? Why?
- What is the Greek response to the preaching of Christ crucified (v. 23)? Why?
- Why is Christ considered the power and wisdom of God? (v. 24, cr. Romans 3:21-27)
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### ***Group Discussion...***

- How does the cross of Christ reveal the power of God?
- How does the cross of Christ reveal the wisdom of God?
- Why does the cross of Christ undermine human pride?
- In what ways does the message of Christ crucified prevent people from boasting in the presence of God?
- Why do you believe the gospel?

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*November 29 - December 5, 2010*

*1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5*

- If the power of salvation is primarily located in the message rather than the messenger, then what effect does that have on our personal evangelism?

## The Cross and Significance

### ***Study the Text . . .***

Corinthian culture tied a person's significance to his or her social status. This tendency massaged its way into the Christian community in Corinth. Rather than boasting in the cross of Christ, Corinthian Christians imitated the Corinthian culture by boasting in a plethora of flesh-pleasing, eye-brow raising activities. They sought significance in the eyes of their peers by making sure they belonged to the "right group." As already mentioned, some members boasted in the oratorical skills of their preferred preacher (cr. 1:10-17). Other divisions were drawn between groups of people who were part of different socio-economic classes. Qualitative lines were drawn between the wealthy minority and the un-wealthy majority. Wealthier people assumed positions of authority and influence because they practically determined where the church could gather and how the church could serve. They erroneously considered members of a lower socio-economic class to be under their authority.

However, Paul encourages his readers to consider who they were before hearing the message of the cross (v. 26). He reminds readers that the cross of Christ renders boasting in any person, place, or thing other than Christ senseless (v. 31). Moreover, in verses 26-31, Paul calls attention to how God transformed them into His people in spite of the unimpressive status many of them held in society. In so doing, God renders significance obtained through ancestry, accomplishments, or affiliations illegitimate. The only significance that matters is that which comes to a person who is rightly related to the crucified Christ. In fact, such significance should be considered more than sufficient regardless of how a person is perceived or is treated by society.

- Who did God choose in vv. 27-28? For what stated purposes?
- Examine the themes of the lifting up of the down trodden and the reversal of human status found in the OT prophets (i.e. 1 Sam. 2:1-8; Isa. 61:1)
- Who is credited with having endowed the Corinthian Christians with significance (v. 30)?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- Where do people search for significance?
- How might we become more satisfied with our status in Christ so that we don't search for significance outside of Christ?
- Where are lines drawn between groups of people in our culture today? In our church?
- How might we erase lines that may be drawn between people in the church today?

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- In what ways can we reinforce each other's significance in Christ?

### *The Cross and Spirituality*

#### **Study the Text...**

Trusting in the death of Christ should not merely be considered the point in a Christian's spiritual experience, but the posture of a Christian's spiritual existence. Christ's death for our sins is the ultimate expression and embodiment of the power and wisdom of God. As such, in dying for our sins, Christ became to us righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (v. 30). He is the beginning, means, and end of true Christian spirituality. The Corinthians treasured a spirituality that was devoid of a Christ-centered nexus. They sought to grow beyond their need of Christ and His cross. However, true Christian spirituality never outgrows the cross of Christ.

The cross of Christ is the source of all God-honoring spirituality. When a Christian community ceases to focus on the centrality of the cross, the result is not exponential growth in spiritual maturity, but, instead, excessive expressions of spiritual immaturity. All the issues apparent in the life of the church at Corinth resulted because they lacked a cross-centered approach to their faith and practice. Exponential growth in spiritual maturity seeks to grow deep in one's knowledge of and wide in one's application of the death of Christ in day to day life.

- What did God make Christ Jesus to be for us in v. 30?
- What do righteousness, sanctification, and redemption mean?
- Spend time reflecting on the relationship between the cross of Christ and Christian spirituality (i.e. Why is it that we can approach God and benefit from the means of grace (i.e. prayer, Bible study, praise, preaching, etc)?)

#### **Group Discussion...**

- What does Christian spirituality look like?
- What constitutes spiritual maturity?
- How can/should spiritual maturity be gauged?
- Can the cross of Christ be detached from the spiritual life of the Christian? Why or why not?
- In what ways can we grow deep in our knowledge of the death of Christ?
- In what ways can we grow wide in our application of the death of Christ?

## Small Group Guide – Week 49

### Romans

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*December 6-12, 2010*

*Romans*

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.

### **Romans**

While in Corinth, at the close of his third missionary journey, Paul wrote a letter to the church at Rome informing them of his plans to visit after his return to Jerusalem (15:24, 28-29; cf. Acts 19:21). No doubt, Paul wanted to visit the Romans; but the mission-minded apostle really had his eye on Spain. He desired to visit Rome in preparation for future apostolic endeavors into Spain (Romans 1:10-13; 15:23-28). Paul's passion was to "preach the gospel in regions beyond" - to break ground where others had not toiled (2 Corinthians 10:16). Therefore, part of Paul's purpose in writing the Roman Christians was to make sure that he would have a solid base of operations from which to launch his mission endeavors into Spain.

However, this wasn't his only purpose in writing. The overarching purpose of his letter was to address the tension which existed between Jew and Gentile believers within the church at Rome. This tension was fueled by ethnic arrogance between the two groups as each believed they maintained certain perceived advantages over the other. The Jewish Christians boasted over their privilege as custodians of the law (Romans 3:27), while the Gentile Christians boasted over their receipt of the blessings rejected by the (non-believing) Jews (Romans 11:17-20). In other words, the Jewish believers felt they were superior in God's eyes to the Gentile believers, and vice versa. This perception led Jew and Gentile believers in the church to be puffed up and not accepting of each other. The following study unpacks how Paul practically and theologically dealt with the issues of "pride" and "arrogance" within the church at Rome.

### ***God's impartiality is revealed in His condemnation of "all."***

#### ***Study the Text . . .***

Paul first deals with the hostility between the Jewish and Gentile Christians by explaining the truths and ramifications of the gospel (chapters 1-11). This is no accident. In the first eleven chapters Paul isn't simply trying to write a theological treatise, but instead writes about gospel truth in order to address a very practical situation within the life of the church (i.e., ethnic arrogance). Therefore, Paul's purpose in writing chapters 1-11 is to show that God is impartial and shows no distinction between Jew or Gentile, instead before God's judgment bench both Jew and Gentile are equal. In other words, amidst all the talk about justification, propitiation, sanctification, election, and so on in these chapters, Paul's point is very simple: to show that God doesn't show favorites! Instead, He is just and righteous. The gospel levels both Jews and Gentiles as equals, none is better or superior to the other. In these first eleven chapters we see the impartiality of God revealed in two primary ways. First, in 1:18-3:20, God's impartiality is seen in the fact that both Jew and Gentile are guilty before God resulting in wrath and condemnation on "all" (both Jew and Gentile). In 1:18-32 Paul writes that "all" persons (Jew and Gentile) are accountable to God for sin. Then in

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2:1-3:8 Paul specifically addresses the Jew to make sure they understand that they too are included in this “all” and are also accountable before God’s judgment bench. Finally Paul uses OT Scripture to give a defense against both groups showing once again that “all” humanity (both Jew and Gentile) are under the power of sin and are guilty before God.

Read 1:18-3:20 and discuss the following questions. As you read the passage don’t get bogged down in all the details, instead just focus on the overall point Paul is making.

- Identify or circle every occurrence of the words “all” and “every.” (1:18, 2:1,9,10; 3:4,9,12,19,20)
- Within the context of the passage who is the “all” and “every” a reference to? (both Jews and Gentiles)
- According to the passage how does God respond to the ungodliness and unrighteousness of both groups? Give specific examples. Does He treat both groups in the same way? Does one group get off the hook or receive a lesser penalty? Why or why not?
- What does handing out the identical judgment to both groups reveal about God? Where does Paul explicitly state this within the passage?
- How does the fact that God is impartial in His condemnation of both Jew and Gentile alike address the issue of arrogance between the two groups within the church?

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- How does the truth of this passage help keep you humble before God?
- Do you ever subtly think in your mind that you aren’t that bad or guilty before God? Or that deep down you are really a good person? Why or why not? How does this sort of perspective impact your walk with Christ?
- In what ways does the truth of this passage keep you humble in your relationship to others?
- How does pride in your relationship toward God lead to pride in your relationship toward others?
- Do feelings of superiority over other believers ever creep into your heart and mind? Or do you ever subtly feel like you have certain advantages before God that other believers do not possess? Why or why not? What’s the proper way to deal with such attitudes?

***God’s impartiality is revealed in His justification of “all” who believe.***

### ***Study the Text...***

Not only is God’s impartiality revealed in the fact that both Jew and Gentile are guilty before God’s judgment bench (1:18-3:20), but it’s also revealed in that He declares righteous “all” (whether Jew or Gentile) who trust in Christ (3:21-4:25). When it comes to being justified before God neither group has certain advantages or shortcuts over the other. Both groups

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come to God and are declared righteous in the same manner, not through possession or adherence to the law, but through faith in Christ alone. It is this impartiality, found in the gospel, which “shuts out” all boasting between the two groups since the God of the nations (of both Jew and Gentile) justifies the “circumcision” and the “uncircumcision” by faith alone apart from works of the law (3:27-31). The example Abraham is a beautiful demonstration of this truth (4:1-25).

Read 3:21-4:25. Once again as you read don’t get bogged down in all the details of the passage but instead stay focused on the overall point being made.

- Circle or list all the occurrences of “all” in the passage. (3:22,23; 4:11,16)
- According to the context of the passage who is the “all” a reference to? (Jews and Gentiles)
- In verse 25 Paul writes that “God put [Jesus] forward as a propitiation by his blood”? This is an allusion to the “place of propitiation” or “mercy seat” from the Old Testament. How is this “mercy seat” different from that of the Old Testament? In other words, who now has access to this new and perfect “place of propitiation”? (3:26; not just the Jew but “the one who has faith in Jesus”, Jew and Gentile alike)
- What does the fact that Jew and Gentile alike now have access to the “place of propitiation” reveal about God?
- According to the passage why do Jew and Gentile believers in the church at Rome have no room for boasting?
- How does the example of Abraham in chapter 4 support Paul’s point at the end of chapter 3, namely that God shows no distinction and is impartial toward both Jew and Gentile?
- According to the passage what would have been the outcome if Abraham would have been justified by works? How is this particularly relevant to the situation between the two groups of believers at the church in Rome?
- According to chapter 4 who are the offspring and descendants of Abraham?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- How does the doctrine of justification by faith keep you humble before God?
- In what way does the doctrine of justification by faith help keep you humble before others?
- In what subtle ways do you ever find yourself boasting in your justification (as if you earned or deserved it)? How does this subtle arrogance hinder your walk with God? How does it hinder your relationship with fellow believers?
- How does this passage showcase the supremacy and glory of Christ, particularly within the church?
- Keeping the context of the passage in mind, how do we tarnish the glory of Christ when we (in the church) live in arrogance toward one another?

***Welcome “all”, as Christ has welcomed you.***

## **Study the Text . . .**

After eleven chapters of rich theological truths showcasing God's impartiality in the gospel, Paul transitions to show the practical implications of these truths. In chapters 12:1-15:13 he writes that this lack of distinction and impartiality displayed in the gospel should provoke Jew and Gentile Christians in the church at Rome to not think too highly of themselves but instead to humbly accept (or welcome) one another.

Read Romans 15:1-13. Please read this passage remembering how the practical exhortations given flow directly out of the previous truths we've studied in the first eleven chapters of the letter.

- A reference is made to the "strong" and "weak" at the beginning of chapter 15. Who are the "strong" and "weak" referring to? (the "strong" is a reference to the Gentiles, the "weak" is a reference to the Jews; see chapter 14 for the context)
- In verse 2 Paul exhorts "each of us" to please his neighbor. Within the context who is Paul writing about? (both Jew and Gentile)
- How does verse 4 specifically fit with the context of the passage?
- What is the picture Paul is painting in verse 6? The "you" is a plural pronoun and is referring to whom? Why is this a proper way to conclude this letter? How does God receive great glory from this picture?
- What is the significance of the plural pronoun "our" in verse 6? Who is this a reference to?
- What is the primary motivation for "welcoming" and "pleasing" others? Why is this important to remember and not lose sight of?
- How has Christ "welcomed" Jew and Gentile believers? What was his motivation for "welcoming" them? How should this motivate Jew and Gentile believers in the church at Rome to respond?
- How often is the word "glorify" and "glory" used? How is it specifically used within the context of the passage and why is this significant?

## **Group Discussion...**

- Within the context of the passage what does it mean to "welcome one another"?
- What does this practically look like?
- Have you ever found it difficult to "welcome" or "accept" certain people, personalities, races, etc.? Why or why not?
- How does the gospel specifically motivate us to "welcome" or "please" those who are hard to love?
- In verse 8 Paul writes that Jesus became a servant to the Jews and Gentiles. We think of Jesus in a lot of different ways, such as Lord, Master, Ruler, and so on. However, most don't think of Him as our "servant." Why is it important that we view Him as such? What are some ways we could take this too far?
- This week how can you practically and tangibly "please" your neighbor, rather than yourself, for their edification?

## Small Group Guide – Week 50

### A Life Worthy of the Gospel

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*December 13-19*

*Philippians 1:27-2:16*

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.

### ***Philippians 1:27-2:16***

After Paul's opening remarks in the letter to the Philippians, he turns to discuss how the Christians at Philippi should live. He describes the manner of life worthy of the gospel of Christ. He begins by explaining why it is so important to live a life worthy of the gospel (1:27-30). Then, he presents the main quality that each Christian should possess (2:1-4) before presenting Jesus Christ as our example and Lord (2:5-11). The section then ends with Paul providing an exhortation and challenge (2:12-16). Paul's message is that the salvation provided by God produces a radically changed life that distinguishes the Christ-follower from the unbeliever.

### ***Study the Text . . .***

***Christ-followers are united in faith as they strive together for the sake of the gospel (1:27-30).***

Paul's words to the church in these first four verses are encouraging but also challenging and a little terrifying. The standard he calls for is perfection. He calls the church in the city of Philippi to be united and working together or striving together for the sake of the gospel. This is not an easy task. The church in Philippi was very diverse. Today it is still difficult for Christians to find unity together, but unity is Paul's message and there is a reason.

- What is a clear sign to the enemies of the Christians of their destruction?
- What two things have been granted to the Christian for the sake of Christ?
- What conflict is Paul and the church at Philippi engaged in fighting?

When the enemies of God see God's children united and working together for the advancement of the gospel of Christ in the midst of adversity, they realize their lives are meant for destruction and that Christians are truly saved by God. Therefore, our manner of life and attitude towards one another is a clear witness of the power of the gospel of Christ. The church unites to be a witness to the world. Secondly, the church unites and strives together because we have been granted to not only have faith in Christ but also suffer for the sake of Christ. The way we suffer for Christ is also a witness to the world, but God does not desire for Christians to suffer alone. In the midst of suffering, we should find our comfort in Christ and His church. See 2 Corinthians 1:3-11. The third reason the church is to be united is because we are engaged in the same conflict that Paul is engaged in fighting. The church is at war against the forces of this world. We all know that a united army is stronger and more powerful than an army that is divided. Together as one united church Paul is calling the Christians at Philippi to take on the forces of darkness with the message of the gospel. To read a similar challenge by Paul to the church at Ephesus see

Ephesians 4:1-16.

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- Do you feel like it is difficult for the church to unite and strive together pursuing one purpose? Why or why not?
- Do we live as if our manner of life is a clear sign that our salvation is from God?
- How do you feel about suffering? Are you prepared to suffer for Christ?
- Have you ever thought about the difference between suffering alone, and suffering along side the body of Christ?
- What conflict are we engaged in along with Paul?
- Do we live like we are at war?

### ***Study the Text...***

***Humbly count others as more significant than yourself as you live united lives in purpose and love (2:1-4).***

Paul's focus does not change at the beginning of chapter 2. He is continuing to expound the manner of life that Christians are to live. He reiterates the importance of being of the same mind especially considering we all have the same love. Then, he commands us to not do anything out of rivalry or conceit but to humbly consider others as more important.

- Why is unity such a big theme in the writings of Paul?
- What does it mean to be humble?
- Why do you think Paul has to tell Christians to not do anything out of rivalry or conceit?
- What role does the Holy Spirit play in the life of a Christian who desires to be humble?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- How do you define humility?
- How important is humility in the life of a follower of Christ?
- How important is the Holy Spirit in a Christian's ability to be humble?
- Why do we struggle with rivalry and deceit in the church?
- Are there currently any rivalry or pride issues that we need to address?

### ***Study the Text . . .***

***Christ Jesus humbly made himself nothing and died on the cross to provide salvation for sinners and bring all glory to God (2:5-11).***

Verse 5 begins with Paul saying, "have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus." Paul is about to present Jesus Christ as an example of humility, and he says that we can be humble like Christ because of Christ. We can have that mind. Why?

## Small Group Guide – Week 50

### A Life Worthy of the Gospel

The Church at Brook Hills

December 13-19

Philippians 1:27-2:16

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Because Christ gives us the ability through His Spirit to live a humble life.

- How is Christ described in verses 6-8?
- Read Luke 2:1-7.
- Read Luke 23.

Jesus came into this world not in a palace but a barn. His first bed was a manger. He then died naked on a cross. He became a humble servant so that God the Father would be glorified. Because of his humility, God the Father exalted him above every name. Jesus is Lord and every tongue will confess this truth.

### ***Group Discussion...***

- During this season of advent, let us reflect on the birth of Christ and consider how the God of this world took on human flesh and became a man. Where was he born? To whom was he born?
- Jesus' life was not one of royalty but of faithfulness to His father. Looking at the life of Jesus, how do you define humility?
- Jesus did not humbly die on a cross because he was seeking to be the Lord of the universe. He already was. So why did he die?
- Why do we humbly serve Christ as he humbly served His father?

### ***Study the Text...***

***Christ-followers shine as lights in this world as they hold fast to the gospel of Christ (2:12-16).***

This passage ends with Paul reiterating his challenge for the Christians at Philippi to serve God together without grumbling or questioning. He challenges them to continue to obey, but he reminds them that God is the one working in them for his pleasure and glory.

- Why does Paul tell them to work out their salvation with fear and trembling?
- How do we hold fast to the word of life?

### ***Group Discussion...***

- In this dark and twisted world, how do we shine as lights of the world?
- Can we shine as lights or be humble servants without the power of the Holy Spirit?
- Is there any grumbling or division in the small group or among you and others in the church that needs to be resolved?
- How can we encourage and support one another as we work out our salvation with fear and trembling and hold fast to God's word?
- How does God use us working through divisions and conflict to work out our salvation and make us more like Christ?

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## **2 Timothy 3:1-9**

### ***Study the Text...***

The book of Second Timothy contains the final recorded words of the apostle Paul. Paul wrote this letter to his "beloved child" Timothy (1:2) from a Roman prison, where he was awaiting his execution. Church history tells us that Paul was martyred during the reign of Nero between A.D. 64 and A.D. 68. Although Paul was not Timothy's biological father, he was his father in Christ. Timothy was a young pastor into whom Paul had poured his life. This letter has the tone of a dying father who knows he may be speaking to his son for the final time. He doesn't waste any words. He tells his son what he most needs to hear.

### **Group Discussion...**

- Imagine that you are at the end of your life. You have only one shot to leave a final bit of wisdom to the people who are important to you, either members of your biological family or your faith family. What would you say to them? What do you think they would most need to hear?

In this section of the letter, Paul warns Timothy that perilous times will come "in the last days." Throughout the New Testament, we see that we are already living in the last days (see for example Acts 2:17). So, what Paul is saying is that the perilous times have already begun, and we need to be on our guard. These perilous times in which we find ourselves are defined by rebellious living (3:2-4) and false teaching (3:5-9).

### **Group Discussion...**

- The picture that Paul paints of the last days in verses 2-5 bears a striking resemblance to what we see in our own day. What are some ways that you see this godless mindset promoted in our society – in others AND in yourself?
- What does it mean to be "always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth?" (3:7) Where is ultimate truth found?

Paul wants Timothy to stand firm against the lies and godlessness of his time. In order to help him do so, Paul reminds Timothy of three truths:

1. The Reality of Suffering (3:10-13)

2. The Reliability of Scripture (3:14-17)
3. The Responsibility of the Saints (4:1-8)

## **I. The Reality of Suffering (3:10-13)**

### ***Study the Text...***

The first truth of which Paul reminds Timothy is the reality that in a sinful world the righteous will experience suffering. Suffering for Christ had been a normal part of Paul's Christian experience since he first met Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:16) and here Paul reminds Timothy that everyone who truly follows Christ will suffer hardship in this life (2 Tim. 3:12). We should not be surprised when we experience hardship in this life. Jesus promised us that in this world we would have trouble, but He also promised that he had overcome the world (Jn. 16:33).

### ***Group Discussion...***

- Spend some time studying and discussing the account of Paul's trials at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra recorded in Acts 13-14. Pay special attention to Acts 14:19-23. How was Paul treated in Lystra? How did he respond? How did God work through these trials? How did the church respond?
- What are some ways that you may experience persecution for following Christ?
- In this section, and really in the entire letter, Paul is reminding Timothy of the legacy that he is leaving him. It is a legacy of faithful endurance, even in the midst of suffering, for the advancement of the gospel to all nations. What is the legacy that you want to leave?

## **II. The Reliability of Scripture (3:14-17)**

### ***Study the Text...***

The second truth of which Paul reminds Timothy is the reliability of Scripture. The Bible is utterly truthful and sufficient to give us the strength that we need to persevere to the end. Paul commands Timothy to hold onto the truth of the gospel that he has already learned. This mindset stands in stark contrast to the false teachers who are "always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth." (3:7)

The world has not really changed much over the past two thousand years. Human beings still think that they know better than God, and so they continually seek to invent new ways to solve their problems. But God has revealed the ultimate solution to the human condition in the pages of Holy Scripture.

## **Small Group Guide – Week 51**

### **2 Timothy 3:1-4:8**

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*December 20-26, 2010*

*2 Timothy 3:1-4:8*

We can have full confidence in the Scriptures because “all Scripture is breathed out by God” (3:16). This means that the very words of Scripture are the very words of God. The Holy Spirit supernaturally led the men who wrote these books to write the exact words that He wanted them to write.

This means two very important things for us. First, it means that the Bible is absolutely true and without error. Since God cannot make a mistake, and since God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18), and since the words of the Bible are the very words of God, then the Bible must be absolutely true and without error. We can trust it completely.

Secondly, this means that the Bible is powerful. Paul tells Timothy that the Scriptures are sufficient to bring us to salvation (3:15), to teach, reprove, correct, and train us for righteousness (3:16), and to equip us for every good work (3:17). In other words, in the Scriptures, God gives us what we need to bring us to faith in Christ and to conform us to the likeness of Christ, so that we live like Christ. Throughout the Bible, we see that the Word of God is powerful, it accomplishes its mission. God created the universe by His Word (Gen. 1; Jn. 1:1-4) and Jesus Christ upholds all things by the Word of His Power (Heb. 1:3). Here we see that God’s Word has the power to change us and make us more like Christ and to give us the strength we need to hold onto Christ to the end.

### ***Group Discussion...***

- What are the means by which God makes us wise for salvation and equips us for every good work?
- If the Scriptures are the means by which God preserves our faith and conforms us to the likeness of Christ, then they are absolutely essential for our eternal well-being. Why, then, would we ever neglect the study of Scripture?
- How does knowing that the words of Scripture are the words of God give you confidence?

## **III. The Responsibility of the Saints (4:1-8)**

### ***Study the Text...***

The final truth of which Paul reminds Timothy is the responsibility of the saints. As Christ-followers, we have been given a commission to make disciples of all nations, and we need to keep this mission always in the forefront of our minds. It would have been easy for Timothy to begin worrying about his own safety at a time like this. His father in the faith, Paul, was about to be executed for preaching the gospel. In spite of this, Paul commands him to continue preaching the gospel, and to keep preaching the gospel, regardless of the cost. This is not always popular, even in the church. Verses 3-4 say that many people who outwardly appear to be believers will turn aside from the hard truth of the gospel and seek a “feel-good” message. But Timothy, and we, must continue to boldly proclaim the gospel that has been handed down to us.

## **Small Group Guide – Week 51**

### **2 Timothy 3:1-4:8**

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*December 20-26, 2010*

*2 Timothy 3:1-4:8*

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In verses 6-8, Paul shows us how he viewed his life, and how we should view ours. We are drink offerings to be poured out to God, and whether we live or die, the goal is that God would be glorified. Paul's one desire is to fight the fight, to finish the race, to keep the faith, and to take hold of the crown of righteousness laid up for him in heaven. May God give us all grace to live with such a single-minded focus!

### ***Group Discussion...***

- How will you follow Paul's command in 2 Timothy 4? While we may not all preach on a stage on Sunday morning, we are ALL called to make disciples of all nations. Think of specific ways you can obey these commands, even when it is difficult and unpopular?
- Verses 7-8 show us the key to Paul's endurance: he was looking forward to his eternal reward. How does living with eternity in view change the way you live now?

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## ***The Revelation of Jesus Christ to John the Apostle (21-22)***

Finally: the judgment, restoration, and culmination of all things. After almost 20 chapters of judgment upon the nations we have arrived at the end, or should we say, the beginning. The people God had chosen before the foundations of the world are finally all together, in one place, worshipping Him for all of eternity. Everything that was broken in Eden has been healed. After thousands of years, God’s people will finally see His face. There will be no more pain or suffering, only the pure joy of full and clear worship of the One True God, forever and ever. As Matthew Henry describes, “...the prophecy of this book has presented to us a very remarkable mixture of light and shade, prosperity and adversity, mercy and judgment...now, at the close of all, the day breaks, and the shadows flee away; a new world now appears, the former having passed away.”

### ***Study the Text . . . (Read Revelation 20:11-21:8)***

These verses are some of the most terrifying in all of Scripture. God is not being patient with sinners for a moment longer. He has gathered all who have ever lived to Himself for judgment and the books have been opened. All who have rejected Him in direct rebellion or by waiting to turn to Him perish under His wrath in the lake of fire. The weight of the reality of eternal suffering for many is almost too much to bear here. But from a heavenly perspective, God is glorified greatly in His justice. This can humble and awaken our slumbering human minds. 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 says, “...in flaming fire, [He will inflict] vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might....” Many times this year we have seen the joy of obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now we see the ramifications of refusing obedience.

### ***Group Discussion . . .***

- One day, we and everyone we have ever known will be judged by God. We will be judged for every thought and every act. Consider together the weight of this truth. Take time to pray and confess together to God our lack of merit before His holy law. Then praise God together for His eternal love for us, shown most brightly in the gospel of His Son, Jesus.
- As you ponder eternity, consider this truth from CS Lewis’ “The Weight of Glory”: “...Remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to will one day either be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to

worship, or else a horror and corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare. All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or the other of these destinations...There are no *ordinary* people. You have never talked to a mere mortal." If we truly believe this, it will change everything about how we interact with people.

- Based on Rev. 20:15, talk together about what the image of a "lake of fire" brings to your mind. What would existence in a place like this be like? Discuss together about how burdened your hearts are for the eternal destinies of the people around you. If you find that they are not burdened, spend time in prayer together asking God to stir up your hearts affections for His glory among the lost.
- Based on Rev. 21:4, have people in the group share the specific burdens they carry today that cause them tears, mourning, and pain. Then have people meditate on the fact that each of those specific burdens will be fully lifted when Jesus returns. Think through and have people process how the return of Christ specifically addresses each one of the burdens that they have just shared. Help shepherd the hearts of the people in the group to find their hope, joy, healing, and peace in Christ and His return.

### ***Study the Text... (Read Revelation 22:1-17)***

We now transition from some of the scariest verses in the Bible to some of the most overwhelmingly beautiful. God has removed evil from the earth and His redemption is complete. Consider the promises in this passage. There will be no darkness. He will write His name on us. We will reign with Him forever. We will see His face. Here the gospel is likened to streams of living water for washing our garments and quenching our thirst. As it closes, there is a sobering but exciting transition back to the present. Jesus has not come yet, but He will. Come Lord Jesus, come quickly indeed. We long to be with you.

### ***Group Discussion...***

- Consider verse 14: "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates." What does it mean that they will "have the right" to eat of the tree of life? Have they earned the right to live forever? If not, discuss how anyone would have "the right" to be clean.
- The New Testament is full of encouragements and commands to place our hope in the return of Christ. As we embark on a new year, we must remember that we will be tempted to allow our lives to get busier and busier with insignificant things. Ask this question of yourself: do you truly and daily long for the return of Jesus? Is your hope placed firmly in the end of all things? Or do you find your satisfaction largely in this world? Consider and discuss together the implications of your hearts affections. If your hope is not found completely in the return of a triumphant Christ, take time to ask where your hope *is* found.

## Small Group Guide – Week 52

### Revelation 21-22

*The Church at Brook Hills*

*December 27, 2010 – January 2, 2011*

*Revelation*

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- Have your group notice in Rev. 21:2 that the healing at the end of human history will be for “the nations”. Discuss what implications this verse has on how we, as those who have already been redeemed, should think, feel, and live for all nations (people groups). Discuss the fact that the ultimate healing for the nations will be when Christ returns. Help your people to process the fact that Jesus is the healer of the nations, and that only He can accomplish this.
- It is fitting for us to remember what God has done in us over the past year. Take some time to talk through the highlights of your time together as a small group in 2010. What were your favorite discussions? What has stuck with you the most? What was your greatest challenge as a group? What was your greatest joy as a group? What should the group be praying for and doing this next year?