

Small Group Guide THE SINFULLNESS OF MAN

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

February 17, 2013

Romans 3:12; 3:23; 6:23

This guide is a tool to help you lead your group into spiritual transformation. Use it as a resource to train your group into potential disciple-makers and lead your group in discovering, owning, and applying the truths of God's Word. There may be aspects 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 an aspect of their relationship with God. Your role is to help facilitate this encounter with God in His Word with His Body, not just to complete the guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid group task list.

Relate . . .

Begin your group time by engaging in relational conversations and prayer that may include the following elements:

***Welcome**—a simple, brief time to greet one another (especially new friends), enjoy refreshments, and make announcements.*

***Review**—a time to review the truths discussed last week and report on how members have had success or frustrations in applying those truths during the week. (The leader will want to provide encouragement and shepherding during this time.) Periodically, the leader will also want to review the gospel and allow members to share reports about opportunities they've had to share the gospel. Occasionally, the leader will want to review the vision for the group and discuss ways to accomplish that vision better.*

***Prayer**—a time of general prayer with the whole group praying for struggles regarding the application of truths, for those with whom the group is sharing the gospel, and for understanding of today's truths.*

Reflect . . .

Use the following summary and questions to review this week's message and reflect on its implications for our lives. (As a training tool, leaders might want to have various members summarize the teachings in their own words each week sharing how they think the Scripture applied to the original hearers and how the principles apply to us today.)

Message Outline

THE SINFULLNESS OF MAN

Romans 3:12; 3:23; 6:23

Encouragement...

- Be authentic...
 - Fill natural conversations with supernatural truth.
 - Embody the life of Christ as you talk about the love of Christ.
- Be obedient...
 - Sharing the gospel leads to others' eternal salvation.
 - Sharing the gospel leads to our personal satisfaction.
- Be bold...
 - The Spirit of God empowers us to speak.
 - The gospel of God has the power to save.

The Sinfulness of Man...

- Knowing this Gospel Thread...
 - We are each created by God, but we are all corrupted by sin.

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- We have rebelled against God. (Romans 3:12)
 - We have all turned away from God to ourselves.
 - Manifested in self-indulgence.
 - Manifested in self-righteousness.
 - What we thought would lead to freedom has led each of us into slavery.
- We are separated from God. (Romans 3:23)
 - The effects of our sin are varied...
 - Guilt
 - Shame
 - Fear
 - What we think is a relatively minor issue is actually an infinitely major problem.
- We are dead without God. (Romans 6:23)
 - What we thought would lead to life has led each of us to death.
 - Eventual physical death.
 - Eternal spiritual death.
 - We are completely unable to save ourselves.
- Weaving this Gospel Thread...
 - Speak respectfully to and about all people as individuals created in the image of God.
 - Look intentionally for opportunities to encourage others by the grace of God.
 - Share confidently in view of the regenerating power of God.
 - Talking about our rebellion...
 - Acknowledge the reality of sin in and around you.
 - Acknowledge the root of sin in and around you.
 - Speak honestly about our propensity to sin.
 - Talk about sin in all of its forms.
 - Talk about sin in light of its force.
 - Talking about our separation...
 - Speak humbly about the seriousness of sin.
 - Let the effects of sin inform the way you talk about salvation...
 - In conversations about guilt, talk about forgiveness in Christ.
 - In conversations about shame, talk about honor in Christ.
 - In conversations about fear, talk about freedom in Christ.
 - Talking about our deadness...
 - Respond to the death of non-Christians...
 - With appropriate honor, biblical honesty, personal humility, heart-breaking anguish, and life-giving resolve.
 - Respond to the death of Christians...
 - With profound sorrow, abiding joy, sincere worship, and unshakeable hope.
 - Constantly point to our dependence on God.
 - Constantly point to our desperation for God.

Digging Deeper

As we continue with the *Threads* series, remind your small group that evangelism is not a specialized calling for certain Christians who have the gift of evangelism. Rather, God calls *all* believers to be His witnesses and to make disciples. While some people in your small group may already be actively sharing the gospel, there are likely some in your group who are just now taking steps of obedience in communicating the gospel or who are still disobedient in this area.

As a small group leader, do you know where each of your people are at with regard to their obedience and comfort level in telling others about the good news? As we walk through this sermon series, spend time during and outside of small group learning the testimonies of everyone in your small group as well as asking them who are the nonbelievers they are committing to pray for and to share with. Doing this will also help you gauge how you can better equip and encourage those you shepherd in the area of personal evangelism.

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During this sermon series, take time each week for people to relay to the small group opportunities that God provided to share the gospel in the previous week. Ask the people what steps they are taking to weave the gospel into their conversations with their family, co-workers, classmates, teammates, friends, and strangers. Continue to pray as a small group for the lost in your lives and for boldness in proclaiming the gospel to them, and celebrate and praise God together for how He is working in people's hearts, drawing them to Himself. Remind the group that success in sharing the gospel is not necessarily measured by the person's response. Success in evangelism involves obedience in proclaiming the gospel.

For those in your small group who do not have many interactions with non-believers, brainstorm together how they can initiate these relationships. For example, they can regularly visit the same places around the town each week and actively pray for God to open doors for organic relationships with the people that work and frequent those locations. Doing this can create numerous opportunities to share the gospel and to develop authentic relationships with non-believers. People in your group likely already have places they visit consistently - grocery stores, parks, gyms, coffee shop, or restaurant. Also, encourage people to open time in their schedules for the purpose of developing relationships with non-believers. Carving out time to care about people and to know and be known by non-believers can create clear openings for us to begin incorporating gospel threads in our conversations.

In discussing the sinfulness of man with your small group, identify reasons why this has become an increasingly difficult and unpopular topic. Why are we tempted to downplay this component of the gospel or ignore it all together? If we are to faithfully communicate the biblical gospel, it must be accompanied with an honest look at human nature. If we do not view human nature in contrast to the infinite worth and holiness of God, we will have a skewed understanding of ourselves. Discuss with your small group how a high view of God will always lead to a humble view of man.

Challenge your small group to think through how they can humbly and faithfully proclaim this gospel thread. What are transitional questions that you can ask that would turn a conversation to spiritual things? One way includes asking questions to find out what an individual believes about man's goodness and worth. What beliefs do they have about human nature? Do they believe that man is basically good? Do they believe that as long as their good outweighs their bad, they will go to Heaven?

Why are such opinions contrary to the truth of Scripture? Help your small group think through biblical responses to these ideas. Memorizing the Scripture associated with each gospel thread is a great way to encourage faithfulness to the gospel as well as readiness to express the gospel. Encourage the members of your small group to develop accountability with another person in the group as they seek to memorize God's Word.

Brainstorm with your small group members what types of questions a believer could ask to find out what a non-believer believes about essential human nature. Spend some time thinking about how the first gospel thread, the Character of God, directly leads into the Sinfulness of Man. Also, think through how you can respond to people who cannot understand how God can love and forgive them despite what they have done. How would you respond to people who feel like they must first clean themselves before they can come to God? How would you engage with a person who is a "cultural Christian"? How would you react to someone who does not want to give up their sinful lifestyle in order to follow Christ? How would you counter someone who does not believe in such a thing as right and wrong? How can you answer someone who does not believe that their sins are "that bad," especially when compared to what other people have done? How would you answer someone who asks why God would create humanity if He knew that Adam and Eve would sin? What would you say to someone who questions why there is so much evil in the world and why God allows terrible things to happen?

Spend some time practicing how to proclaim the following truths in conversations with non-believers over the next week. What Scripture could you learn and share to help you communicate these truths? How would you explain "church" terms related to the sinfulness of man such as sin, spiritual death, eternal death, original sin, the Fall, depravity, etc.?

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- **Created by God but Corrupted by Sin:** Among all creation, people have the unique privilege of being created in the image of God, and as image-bearers, individuals should be treated with dignity and respect. However, the Fall has corrupted all people, and while all people are created by God, all people are responsible to God for their sin.
- **Rebelled Against God:** All men have sinned against God. Sin is any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature. In all of creation, only humans have the audacity to look at God and tell Him “no.” If we do not believe this truth, we will never see sin for what it is. Additionally, we will fail to realize sin as a continued offense to God.
- **Separated from God:** The Fall corrupted human nature. God is perfect and demands perfect obedience. Scripture tells us that God for us to be holy as He is holy (Lev. 20:26; 1 Pet. 1:16). All people have failed to conform to God’s standard. As a result, we are separated from God. Without the realization of this separation, we will never see the need to be reconciled to God. Additionally, we will never see the seriousness of our sin.
- **Dead Without God:** The direct result of sin is death. Without God’s direct intervention, all men will die both physically and spiritually. Without belief in this truth, we will not see the dire results of our sin and our desperate need for God’s mercy and grace.

Discuss the implications of these four truths with your group. Think about how to humbly express these truths to people. 1 Peter 3:15 encourages believers to always be prepared to share their faith, but to be sure to do so with all gentleness and respect. Process how you can express difficult truths with love, gentleness, and respect.

One way to approach sharing this gospel thread is by sharing your testimony. Even if the people we are sharing with do not agree with us, most people like hearing personal stories. How can the people in your small group incorporate a humble view of man into their own testimonies? Encourage your small group members to split up into smaller groups to concisely rehearse their testimonies with each other and to specifically highlight their own depravity in their story telling.

This gospel thread will likely cause a believer to reflect on their own sinfulness. Incorporate into your small group time for confession and prayer, and remind the group of God’s faithfulness to forgive those who confess their sins to Him (1 Jn. 1:9). In speaking honestly about our propensity to sin and acknowledging the root of sin, this topic might also lead to group members confessing their sin to each other and requesting accountability for sins with which they struggle. Be sensitive to the Spirit’s direction as you facilitate this small group and recognize that there might also be unbelievers sitting in your group.

Message Summary

This week’s message is the third in the *Threads* series. Last week introduced the first of five gospel threads: the Character of God, and this week’s message deals with the second thread: the Sinfulness of Man. Because many people have ideas about human nature that do not square with the truth of Scripture, this thread is increasingly unpopular. We must not ignore this essential thread but boldly and obediently proclaim it to sinful men and women. All people are created by God but are corrupted by sin. We have all rebelled against God, and as a result, we are separated from Him and are dead without Him. If people do not realize the sinful state of their own hearts, they will see little need to turn from their sin and to trust in God. As we share with people, we must express hope and confidence in the truth of the Bible. Therefore, we should seek opportunities in our conversations to speak about the sinfulness of men with non-believers.

Group Discussion

Use the following questions to help review the application of God’s Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

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- How does earnestly praying for lost people naturally overflow from belief in Jesus? If you are not regularly involved in praying for lost people, what does that reveal about your belief in Jesus? In groups of 2-4, have each person share the names of 1 or 2 lost people for whom they are praying. Pray for the salvation of these people and for opportunities and boldness to proclaim the gospel to them.
- Why is it important for our life to reflect Christ as we tell others about Him?
- How does sharing the gospel lead to our personal satisfaction? If someone has the privilege of leading another person to Christ, have him or her share that experience with the group.
- What does it mean to be made in God's image? How would you explain this concept to someone who has limited or no understanding of Christianity?
- What traits of human nature reflect the gracious work of God in all people? What traits reflect our sin? How can you begin to weave the answers to these questions into the conversations you have with non-believers?
- Sin causes us to focus on ourselves, and sin often manifests itself in self-indulgence and self-righteousness. Define these two terms? How does self-indulgence and self-righteousness manifest itself in our lives? With which do you struggle? In what ways do you struggle with it? How can you combat these sins and equip others to do the same?
- Read Genesis 3. What does this passage teach about temptation, man's sin, and the effects of sin? How would you share these truths with a nonbeliever?
- We have a dangerous tendency to view some sins as minor and less offensive to God. Many people think that if they are generally good and do not commit "major" sins then God will accept them. How is this position contrary to the truth of Scripture.
- We are completely unable to save ourselves. How does this truth relate to the first thread of the gospel (the Character of God) and ultimately lead us to the next thread (the Sufficiency of Christ)?
- All people are made in the image of God, as such all people deserve inherent dignity and respect. As we share this gospel thread, why is it essential that we demonstrate respect and care for people? What effect does disrespectful behavior, such as gossip, have on our gospel witness?
- In our conversations this week, how can we acknowledge the reality of sin in the world and point people to Christ?
- All sin begins in the human heart. How can we faithfully address the root of sin? How do you identify the root of sin in your own heart? How do you help others discern the root of sin in the world and in themselves?
- In discussions about guilt, shame, and fear, what Scripture could you learn and share with people who struggle with these three areas?
- What is a biblical response to the death of non-Christians? How should we respond to the death of Christians? How can we use both events to express our belief in the gospel?

Respond . . .

Encourage your group to break out into smaller, same-gender groups where they will respond to the truths of today's study. These groups will share with one another based on the following questions and then close in prayer:

- What are some of the main truths that God wants you to know from this study?
- How do your thoughts need to adjust to align with these truths?
- According to the truths from this study, what does God want you to desire/value?
- How do your values need to change to align with His values?
- What actions does God want you to take according to the truths of this study?
- What is an action that you can start to implement today or tomorrow?
- What is going to be the most difficult aspect of this study to personally apply?

Close this time by praying for each other, specifically for strength to apply these truths, for personal needs, for the lost people with whom you are seeking to share the gospel, and for our weekly prayer focus as a church.

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Weekly Prayer Focus ... (from our worship guide)

- *Church:* Praise God for His Truth revealed in His Word. Pray we would all value God's Bible over our own ideas and preferences. Confess your sinfulness to God. Ask for His forgiveness. Praise him for His grace and mercy. Thank Him for His readily available gift of eternal life through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ.
- *Local:* This week we are joining thousands of church across the world praying and fasting for the lives of the unborn during The 40 Days of Life emphasis. We are also praying for the ministries of Sav-A-Life and Her Choice as they seek to reach out to pregnant women with the gospel, life skill counseling, and pro-life counseling. This week we are also praying for Divine Faith Baptist Church and Christ Stewart, Pastor.
- *Global:* This week we are praying for Brook Hills Long-Term Missionary, Melissa Garner in South Sudan. Melissa serves on a team and supports a Long-Term family by teaching their children. She also serves at a local college for students training to become teachers in Southern Sudan. Join us as we pray for Melissa this week.