

Small Group Guide

THE NECESSITY OF FAITH

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. David Platt

March 3, 2013

Mark 1:15; Romans 10:9

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

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Mark 1:15; Romans 10:9

Confusion Over Faith...

- We can so dilute faith that we don't actually have it.
- We can so complicate faith that we can't ever know if we have it.

The Necessity of Faith...

- Knowing this Gospel Thread...
 - We can be restored to God only through faith in Jesus.
 - We can be restored to God...
 - We can be acquitted before God the Judge (He will cancel our guilt).
 - We can be adopted by God the Father (He will remove our shame).
 - We can be assured by God the King (He will overcome our fear).
 - Only through faith in Jesus.
 - Jesus is the basis of salvation.
 - Faith is the means of salvation.
 - Works are the evidence of salvation.

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- We turn from our sin and ourselves. (Mark 1:15)
 - We confess our sinfulness.
 - We die to our selfishness.
- We trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord. (Romans 10:9)
 - We believe in Jesus as the Savior who died for us.
 - We submit to Jesus as the Lord who rules over us.
- An initial moment of faith in time leads to inevitable growth in faith over time.
- Weaving this Gospel Thread...
 - Take advantage of every opportunity you have to tell your story.
 - Keep it simple.
 - Keep it focused...
 - On the greatness of God.
 - On the threads of the gospel.
 - Keep it understandable.
 - Be humble and prayerful.
 - Be passionate and be yourself.
 - Talking about restoration...
 - 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 turning...
 - Point to the mercy of Christ when people around you see their sin.
 - Point to the presence of Christ when people around you come to the end of themselves.
 - Talking about trusting...
 - Encourage people around you to see the lordship of Christ.
 - Urge people around you to receive the love of Christ.
 - Talking with children about faith...
 - Maximize interaction.
 - Utilize illustration.
 - Use repetition.
 - Constantly emphasize the threads of the gospel.
 - Continually encourage a posture of turning and trusting.
 - Talking with cultural Christians about faith...
 - Ask thought-provoking questions.
 - Avoid (or at least clearly define) over-familiar terms.
 - Invite them to study the Bible with you.
 - Expose them to good, gospel-saturated community and resources.
 - Boldly and graciously call them to turn and trust.
 - Intentionally and humbly weave gospel threads.

Digging Deeper

As we continue to study threads of the gospel, use this time to talk with every member of your small group about their salvation and to equip them to share these gospel threads with others. Depending on the size of your small group, utilize other mature believers in the group to aid in this process. If they have not done so already, encourage small group members to write out their testimonies and, after doing so, to go back through and analyze if they wove in discussing who God is, who they are as sinners, what Christ has done, how to trust in Him for salvation, and how this relates to their eternity. How clear is their communication of the gospel? Could someone with no exposure to Christianity understand what they are saying? Could a child understand it?

Continue to provide opportunities for those in the group to share their testimonies during small group time. This could be done as a whole group or in pairs or triads during small group time. Giving opportunities for

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practice builds confidence and a person's comfort level in verbalizing what God has done, what they believe, and why.

During this sermon series, encourage small group members to email threads@brookhills.org with stories of opportunities that God has provided them to weave gospel threads into conversations. Also, they can send in their own accounts of how God saved *them*. These Threads stories will be used in various ways during this sermon series to edify the Body.

Also, challenge your small group to memorize the twelve verses of Scripture that accompany the bridge diagram we have been using during this series. Practice weaving in these Scriptures as you share the five threads of the gospel.

Regarding this particular gospel thread, discuss with the small group how there are different levels of faith. For example, James 2:19 states that even the demons believe in Christ, but obviously, they are not saved. So what is the difference between their faith and saving faith? For those who grew up in church or who grew up hearing about God, it can be especially challenging to delineate between knowledge *about* God and knowing Him *personally*. How would you explain trusting in Christ for salvation to someone who already has knowledge of who Christ is and what He has done and who already believes that He is a real Person who lived, died, and rose again?

In explaining faith, consider it to include three levels: knowledge, assent, and a trusting relationship. All three of these levels *together* are necessary for salvation.

- **Knowledge** - With knowledge, a person can understand and be familiar with what the Bible says and even know about Jesus – what He taught, what He did, and about His death and resurrection. While it is necessary to have some knowledge of who Christ is and what He has done, knowledge alone is not enough to save someone.
- **Assent** – Assent involves more than knowledge. It includes agreeing with the Bible that God exists and Christ is who He says He is. James 2:19's statement fits the demons in this category. Acts 26 presents another example of someone who had knowledge about Christ, approved of what he knew, yet was not a Christ-follower. While King Agrippa believed in Christ, even *he* recognized that he was not a Christian (Acts 26:26-28).
- **Trusting Relationship** – We can know about famous people such as President Obama, George Clooney, Taylor Swift, etc. We watch them on the news. We read about them in magazines or on the Internet. They are real people, and we have some knowledge about their lives. But when George Clooney has a bad day, we are not the ones he calls to discuss it with. Why? Because we do not have a relationship with Him. Saving faith involves knowledge about Christ, agreement with what Scripture says about Him, and actually *turning* to Him to save you. Such dependence on Him necessitates a relationship with Him. Saving faith includes a decision to rely on Christ to do what you cannot do (save you) and to commit your life to Him. At Brook Hills, we often use the phrase giving a "blank check" to God. Would you give a blank check to someone you did not trust completely? Because they have the opportunity to fill in whatever amount they choose, we give a blank check only to people whom we trust. Trusting in Christ for salvation involves trusting in Him to save us from the punishment of our sin but also trusting Him enough to submit our lives to Him.

Do the people in your small group understand the distinctions among knowledge, assent, and trusting relationship? Are they able to clearly verbalize these distinctions to others? Direct their attention to Matthew 7:21-23. Challenge small group members to consider if they simply have knowledge about Christ and agree with what the Bible says or if they have actually trusted in Christ for salvation. Do not assume that just because the people in your group attend church, come to small group, read the Bible, and know the answers to your questions that they are saved. This is why taking time to get to know your small group members and to ask them about their testimony is so crucial!

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When conversing about faith, the relationship between faith and works often arises. Discuss with your small group how to navigate conversations with works-driven people. Works does not contribute to our salvation, for we are saved by grace through faith, not by works (Eph. 2:8-9). We cannot earn our salvation by doing enough good deeds, for no matter how many good things we do, we still sin and deserve God's judgment. How does this connect with James' position that "faith apart from works is dead" (Jas. 2:26) or with Paul's exhortation to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12)? How would you explain the connection between faith and works to Muslims, Hindus, and even Catholics?

Ask your small group members to voice other questions they have encountered with regards to faith, works, and salvation. Questions may include how one can have assurance of salvation, whether or not a person has to pray a prayer (like the "sinner's prayer") in order to be saved, and how people in the Old Testament were saved. Examine Scripture to determine how to answer such questions. This could be something that you do as a whole group, or you could divide the group into pairs or triads and give a question to each smaller group. After allowing time for them to search in Scripture and to process a response, walk through each of the questions and responses. Allow the rest of the people to ask questions and to contribute to the discussion. For additional resources regarding the sinner's prayer, read Pastor David's posts on "The Sinner's Prayer and the SBC" on the Radical Blog (radical.net/blog).

A point of tension that may arise when discussing faith and repentance with believers is whether conversion occurs at one point in time or is a process. In short, a person may spend a considerable amount of time growing in knowledge and understanding of Scripture, Christ, and salvation. But regeneration () occurs in a particular moment of time. Now, there may or may not be any dramatic feelings associated with this moment, and although our emotions will be involved, our conversion is not based on emotion. A believer may not necessarily remember the precise day and time of their spiritual birthday. However, we do not decrease in our lostness over time until, one day, we are saved, and no one is born saved. While the Holy Spirit does work in the lost by giving them understanding of the Word, by convicting them of their sinfulness and their need for Christ, and by drawing them to Himself, there is a definite moment of response where someone becomes a Christ-follower and goes from being an enemy of God to being a member of His family. Find out what your small group members believe about this topic and gently address any misconceptions that are expressed.

Trust in Christ and repentance act as two sides of the same coin. Ask your small group how they would explain repentance. Is it merely recognizing your sinfulness and feeling guilty for sinning? Is it simply asking God to forgive you for sin? Repentance involves forsaking our sin, and in doing so, we turn away from our sin to trust in Christ. It is a 180-degree change. Turning to Christ for salvation necessitates that we *recognize* our sinfulness and the judgment we deserve, that we *feel* contrition or sorrow over our sinfulness, that we *admit* our sin to God and seek His forgiveness, and that we *forsake* our sin to walk in obedience to Christ. Also, discuss the difference between repentance that occurs when trusting in Christ for salvation and the repentance that should occur throughout our lives as God continues to sanctify us.

Question your group about how they can recognize whether or not someone is ready to repent of their sins and to trust in Christ for salvation. How should they respond if an individual says that they do not want to trust in Christ for salvation? If a group member is witnessing to someone who likes what they hear about Jesus but who is not yet ready to give up a particular sin, what can they say to that person?

Ensure that your small group knows how to explain "church words" associated with the necessity of faith such as: convert, conversion, repentance, faith, regeneration, being born again, and sanctification. Guide the group to avoid or at least to explain these terms when conversing with unbelievers.

Message Summary

In the previous weeks of the *Threads* sermon series, we studied the character of God, the sinfulness of man, and the sufficiency of Christ. But how do we receive the grace that God offers to us? Just because God has done all of this for us in Christ does not mean that salvation is immediately applied to our lives. This leads to the study of the fourth gospel thread – the necessity of faith. We must avoid diluting faith by intentionally

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communicating that restoration with God occurs only through trusting in Christ and turning from our sin. We must also be wary of complicating faith to the point that people do not even know if they have salvation. We can weave this gospel thread into conversations by sharing our story and by specifically talking about turning from sin and trusting in Christ as Lord and Savior. As we communicate to others about faith and repentance, ask them questions, utilize illustrations, use repetition, avoid (or at least explain) unfamiliar terms, and boldly and graciously urge them to turn from their sin and to trust in Christ.

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?).

- In what ways do we dilute and complicate faith? How can we avoid either of these extremes when we are sharing the gospel?
- How does knowing that restoration with God is the goal of the gospel – not Heaven, happiness, peace, etc. – shape how you present the gospel to others?
- Why is *faith* the means by which God saves us?
- What is the relationship between faith and works?
- Our awe and adoration for God should drive our service to God, and we put the cart before the horse if our service to God comes before our worship and delight in Him. How should this knowledge transform our hearts and our actions? In your life, are works an overflow of your relationship with God, or do you have some other motivation behind what you do? Regarding your motivations, what sins do you need to confess to God and repent of?
- How would you explain “saving faith” to an unbeliever? What does it mean to submit to Christ?
- How would you explain the difference between repentance involved in trusting in Christ for salvation and the repentance that should take place throughout a Christian's life because they continue to sin? How would you explain this to an unbeliever? To a child? To a cultural Christian?
- How would you respond to someone who does not remember a particular day/time when they became a Christian? Does this mean that they are not saved? There is a specific point in time when a person turns from their sin and trusts in Christ, but it may not be as discernable for some people (such as a child who grew up hearing the gospel). Also, as our faith grows we will come to greater realizations about who God is, what He has done, and what it means to submit to Him.
- If you have one minute, five minutes, or ten minutes to share the gospel with someone, do you know how to maximize your time? As a small group, practice sharing your story simply and concisely with each other. Challenge each other to share the gospel with at least one person this week.
- How can you keep your story simple when you are sharing it with another person? Think through the following questions when writing your testimony:
 - What characterized your life before you became a Christ-follower?
 - How did you come to a point where you turned from your sin and trusted in Christ for salvation?
 - What has your life been like since you made that decision?
- Guilt, shame, and fear are effects of sin. When talking with people about restoration with God, in what ways do people express feelings of shame, guilt, or fear? What could you share with someone who feels guilt? Shamed? Fearful? What does the Bible say regarding how God wipes away our guilt and sins? What does Scripture say about how God restores honor to people who are shamed? How does God provide freedom from fear?
- In talking with people about trusting in Christ for salvation, we should urge people around us to receive the love of Christ. We are not fully sharing the gospel if we are providing information without urging people to respond. If you struggle with calling for a response when you share, what prevents you from doing so? Why? Pray for boldness for yourself and for others in the small group as they share the gospel.
- Asking open-ended questions (not yes/no questions) allows you to better discern what another person understands about Christ and the gospel. What types of open-ended questions could you ask as you engage in conversations with people about the gospel?

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- What illustrations can you use as you share the gospel? How can you make different gospel threads, terms, and concepts more concrete?
- How can we avoid manipulation when sharing the gospel? What does it look like to manipulate or to coerce someone, particularly children or internationals?
- What are characteristics of cultural Christians? What are issues related to sharing the gospel with this particular demographic? Who are cultural Christians in your sphere of influence that you can be praying for and sharing the gospel with?
- If you are inviting a cultural Christian to study the Bible with you, what could you study? Why? If you are exposing a cultural Christian to resources, what types of resources could you give to them? Is your small group community “gospel-saturated”? Why or why not? In what areas does your small group community need to change?
- As a small group, take time to pray by name for the lost people whom your group members are trying to share the gospel with. Pray for the individuals to be sensitive to the Spirit, to be convicted of their sin, and to desire a relationship with God.
- Pastor David gave two challenges in this sermon:
 - Write out your story of how you became a Christ-follower and share it with someone.
 - During this sermon series, send your story to threads@brookhills.org.

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..

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

- *Church:* Ask God to grant us a right understanding of faith and belief apart from simple knowledge or affirmation of fact. Pray for God to grow us in our faith and to transform us through the renewing of our minds. Pray for all those around you who do not believe. Ask God to graciously grant them the faith to believe as you share the gospel with them. Pray we would all see the God-ordained relationship between faith and repentance. Ask God to sustain us when tempted with doubt and for our perseverance to develop even deeper faith and trust in Him.
- *Local:* This week we are praying for the new mentoring opportunity at Success Academy, a two-month Saturday School in March and April at Ossie Ware Mitchell

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Middle School in East Lake. We are also praying for Twenty Third Street Baptist Church South and P.B. Hatcherson, Pastor.

- *Global:* This week we are praying for Brook Hills Mid-Termers Craig M., Josh M., and John W. serving in Southeast Asia. This team of guys is currently serving with a Brook Hills field partner. Their main goal is to engage unreached university students through sports. Praise God for how He is working Southeast Asia and for using our team of Mid-Termers to make His name known. Join us this week as we pray for Craig, Josh, and John.