

Small Group Guide

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE?

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. Jim Shaddix

April 7, 2013

Acts 2:36-47

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

"Where Do I Go From Here?"
Best Practices for New Disciples
Acts 2:36-47

What you received...

- You received Jesus as your Lord. (Acts 2:36)
- You received forgiveness for your sin. (Acts 2:36,38)
- You received the gift of God's Spirit. (Acts 2:38)

How you respond...

- **Identify with the body of Christ.**
(Acts 2:41; cf. Acts 5:14; 11:24)

What did it look like?

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- They were baptized into the local church.
(Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12)
- They were united with the local church.
(Acts 5:13-14; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13)
- **Invest in the body of Christ.**
(Acts 2:42-47)

What did it look like?

- They studied God's Word together.
(Acts 2:42; cf. Matthew 28:19-20; 1 Timothy 4:16; 2 Timothy 2:1-2; 3:14-15; 1 Peter 1:25 - 2:2)
- They did life together...
(Acts 42-47; cf. Acts 4:32-35)
- They took communion together.
(Acts 2:42; cf. Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:26; Revelation 19:9)
- They prayed together.
(Acts 2:42; eg., Acts 1:14,24-25; 3:1; 4:23-31; 6:4; 13:1-3)
- **Invite others into the body of Christ.**
(Acts 2:47)

What did it look like?

- They lived an attractive lifestyle.
(Acts 2:42-47; 5:13; 6:7)
- They lived in reliance on God's power.
(Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2:1-47; 4:29-31)
- They lived to tell everyone about Jesus.
(Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 4:29-31; Romans 10:14-18; 1 Thessalonians 1:8)

Message Summary

By studying the picture of the early church in Acts 2:36-47, this last sermon of the *Threads* series focuses on next steps for new Christ-followers. The actions of believers should flow from a response to Christ's demonstration of love, goodness, and grace in sacrificing His life for the sake of sinners. Where we go next and why we seek to grow closer to Christ stems from who He is and what He has done for us. We respond to God's grace and blessing by identifying with the body of Christ through baptism and through uniting with a local church. We also respond by investing in the body of Christ by studying the Word together, by living life together, by participating in Communion together, and by praying together. Lastly, Christ-followers invite others into the body of Christ. This includes living an attractive lifestyle, relying on God's power as we share the gospel, and explicitly telling others how they too can become children of God.

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Digging Deeper

Having studied the five components of the gospel as well as how to sew gospel threads in conversations with cultural Christians and with people entrenched in humanistic thought, this last sermon in the *Threads* series focuses on next steps for new believers. As a small group leader, you may have new believers in your group, and this sermon and passage of Scripture provides foundational understanding of baptism, the church, and obedient living. For those in your group who have been believers for a while, use this content to grow their understanding, and focus attention on how they can share this with new believers in their sphere of influence. Reiterate that God calls all believers to be His witnesses and to be disciple-makers, and this information better equips us as we disciple new believers.

Since Acts 2:36-41 rehearses the gospel, take this opportunity to review the gospel threads with your small group. One idea would be to draw the bridge diagram, and without looking at the *Threads* booklet or their Bible, have the group walk you through the words and Scripture associated each word. For example, after you draw the bridge picture, the first word is “holy,” and the verse associated with holy is Isaiah 43:15. Then have the group explain to you what they would say if they were to explain God’s holiness to someone else. Encourage the small group to remember that the conclusion of this sermon series does not mean that we put away these verses and the bridge diagram. We should continue to review it and to share it with those around us.

In Acts 2:38-41, the Apostle Peter instructs the crowd to repent and to be baptized. Because of how verse 38 sentence is structured in our English translations, it could be easy for people to read it and think that one must repent and be baptized in order to be forgiven for sins. Discuss with your small group how baptism does not save people. If it did, then salvation would be works-based instead of by grace through faith, which does not align with what we studied in Scripture regarding the necessity of faith. Explain the purpose of baptism and help those in your small group think through how they would describe baptism’s importance to someone who is unfamiliar with the concept. An example that Pastor Jim alludes to in this sermon is that of a wedding ring. Wearing a wedding ring does not in itself make a person married, but it does symbolize the decision and commitment a person has made in marrying someone. Likewise, baptism does not save, but it is an outward reflection of an inward commitment to trust in Christ as Lord and Savior. Also, clarify that the gift of the Spirit is different from the *gifts* of the Spirit that are discussed in Galatians 5:22-23.

There are likely some believers in your small group who have never been baptized, even though they have been saved for several years. Do you even know who in your group has been baptized and who has not? Take time one-on-one to learn this information about small group members and to follow up with those who have not been baptized. Walk alongside them, encouraging them to be obedient and helping them through the baptism process. At The Church at Brook Hills, information regarding the baptism process can be found at brookhills.org/baptism. As a group, think through common reasons for why people do not follow through with baptism, and using Scripture such as 1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 2:6-13; and Romans 6:1-4, highlight what Scripture says regarding baptism.

Also, there might be people in your small group who come from different backgrounds and have different beliefs regarding the meaning or practice of baptism. Biblically, baptism is by immersion, and the Greek word *baptizo* literally means to dip, immerse, and wash. Plus, this is the picture we see in the New Testament when Jesus is baptized by John the Baptist. Depending on the group’s makeup, you might get questions from topics such as sprinkling, infant baptism, or the baptism of the Spirit. As a result, you can either choose to discuss this as a whole group or to follow up with the person outside of small group regarding their specific questions. If you need particular resources specifically regarding baptism, listen to Pastor David’s sermon “Baptism: Identification with the New Covenant” from March 2009 (radical.net/media) or read Wayne Grudem’s section on baptism in his *Systematic Theology*. On the baptism website (brookhills.org/baptism), there is also a “Baptism and Membership FAQ” document that addresses particular questions regarding our church’s stance on whether or not baptism is required for church membership, baptizing children, who is permitted to baptize at Brook Hills, etc.

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In the sermon, Pastor Jim also discusses the importance of church membership. When someone becomes a Christ-follower, they are added to Christ and become part of His body. Because all Christ-followers are one with Christ, they become part of the same physical representation of Christ – His body, the church (see 1 Cor. 12:12-13). While Acts does not explicitly tell us *how* people joined the early church, Acts 5:13-14 informs us that there was a definitive way that new converts identified with the believers. Do not assume that every person in your small group is a covenant member of a local church, and this would be something to discuss individually with small group members. As a whole group, discuss reasons why some Christ-followers do not commit to a local church body and why church membership is important. Emphasize that progress in our spiritual growth is directly related to regular involvement and participation with other believers in a local church. Ask if anyone in the group has questions regarding church membership. For questions specifically related to church membership and The Church at Brook Hills, visit brookhills.org/impact.

As we walk alongside new Christ-followers, we encourage them to identify with the body of Christ through baptism and church membership, but we also urge them to *invest* in the body of Christ. Acts 2:42-47 highlight four particular areas in which the early church invested in the body: studying the Word together, living life together, taking Communion together, and praying together. Notice the word “together.” To clarify, just because we do these things together does not preclude us from individually practicing spiritual disciplines such as prayer and studying Scripture. This sermon and this passage simply focus on the corporate practices of believers, but personal spiritual practices are also crucial to spiritual growth.

Together, use Acts 2:42-47 to evaluate your small group. In what areas can the group grow? What ideas do group members have about how they can sacrificially serve each other, pray for each other, proclaim the Word together, and worship together? One senior adult small group at Brook Hills has several group members who are ill or homebound. One way in which they recently demonstrated care for these particular group members is by taking communion to them. Since these particular group members are unable to attend worship gatherings because of their health, they miss out on participating with our faith family when we come to the Lord’s table. Therefore, this small group took the elements to them, and they were able to take part in this expression of worship and remembrance.

People who have children know that their kids learn how to talk, walk, tie their shoes, etc. by observing the adults in their life and by others explicitly teaching them how to do such things and helping them along the way. As we fellowship together, we see examples of how other Christians study Scripture or pray or parent or love their spouse. We learn these things by their example, and we learn these things by mature Christians intentionally teaching them to younger Christians. Does everyone in your small group know how to study Scripture or how to pray? They might know that they need to read the Bible, but they may not know what that involves or tools that they can use. In this particular small group meeting or over the course of several small group meetings, consider having different group members share how they study the Word, how they praise and worship God, how they intercede for others, how they memorize Scripture, etc. We all do things different, and those whom we disciple may not learn or think just like us. Therefore, learning how different people practice spiritual disciplines can better equip us in discipleship, but people might also share personal practices that could be something the whole group could try during small group time.

We encourage new believers to identify with the body of Christ, to invest in the body of Christ, and also to invite others to the body of Christ. Throughout this sermon series, we have focused on gospel threads and how to sew them into conversation with unbelievers. For new believers, highlight how our verbal evangelism should also be accompanied by lifestyle evangelism, for our lives should align with Scripture. With your small group, identify what it looks like to live an attractive lifestyle according to Scripture (see Acts 2:42-47; 5:13; 6:7). In what ways do our lives look more like the world than like Christ? What changes need to be made in order to be more accurate representatives of Christ in this world? Also, discuss what it means to rely on God’s power as you share the gospel. As Christians, we have the Holy Spirit in us, but His effects are not automatic. Through prayer, His power and influence are realized. We need His strength, power, boldness, and guidance in what to say as we witness. Therefore, we should pray for those things both individually and corporately. Take time as a small group to pray for these things as you send each other out this week.

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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?).

- What next steps should a believer take after they have trusted in Christ as their Lord and Savior? What foundational things should they learn? What beginning steps should they take to grow?
- What questions or fears do you have about how to help a new believer continue in their relationship with God? In what ways do you need to be growing in order to better walk alongside a new believer?
- In the sermon, Pastor Jim mentions that the Christian should always be asking how he or she should respond to Christ's goodness and grace. With where you are right now, how should you respond to what Christ has done? What does this practically look like in your life?
- In Acts 2:38, the Apostle Peter informed the crowd that they would receive the "gift of the Holy Spirit" if they repented of their sins and turned to Christ to forgive them. What is this gift of the Spirit? What does the Holy Spirit do in the life of a believer (see Jn. 14:15-30; 16:4-15; Eph. 1:13-14)?
- In Acts 2, Peter appealed to the crowd to turn from their sin and to trust in Christ. Throughout the *Threads* sermon series, we have been encouraged and equipped to share the gospel with those around us. Whom are you praying for and verbally urging to accept God's gift of salvation? Take time during small group to pray over the lost whom the small group members are engaging with the gospel.
- In Acts 2:41 and 47, Luke who wrote Acts informs us that people were "added" or "added to their number." Read Acts 5:14 and 11:24 and discuss what these new converts were added to. What is the significance of being added to the Lord?
- In Acts 2:38, Peter urges the people to be baptized. What is the significance of baptism? What questions do those in the small group have regarding baptism?
- When individuals trust in Christ as their Lord and Savior, they are united with the church (see 1 Cor. 12:12-13). Why is it crucial for Christ-followers to commit themselves to membership in a local church body? What questions do group members have regarding church membership? Why do some Christians balk at the concept of being part of a local covenant community of believers? What does Scripture say regarding the church? How can you respond to questions or concerns that people have about the church?
- Acts 2:42-47 present a picture of the early church, and it shows them being continuously, steadfastly devoted to four particular actions: studying Scripture together, living life together, taking communion together, and praying together. Why did the early church participate in these specific, intentional events? How did these four activities contribute to their spiritual growth and to the growth of the church? Use this passage to evaluate areas in which your small group needs to grow.
- Your spiritual growth directly relates to your involvement with other Christ-followers in a local church. How does God use His people to contribute to our spiritual growth? Why do some Christians not participate in the local church or in a small group community? How can you encourage such fellow believers? What is your attitude towards the people in your small group or the people in the church you attend? Does your attitude align with Scripture?
- God's Word is one of the primary things that the Holy Spirit uses to grow us. Without consistent study of Scripture, believers will become stagnate in their relationship with God because they are not spending time with Him. Ask the small group if anyone has any questions regarding how to study Scripture. Consider having different individuals in the group share what they do when they study Scripture. Is everyone in the group equipped to teach others how to study the Word and be self-feeders?
- Acts 2:4-47 depicts the early believers living life together. Their time of fellowship consisted of more than potluck dinners. How does Scripture describe the activities of these early believers? What did their time together consist of? How should this inform our time together with other believers? How is your small group sacrificially caring for each other? How is your small group praying for each other? How is your small group on mission? Even if you are not all serving in the same place, how are you encouraging each other and aiding each other as you all minister?

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- Acts 2:42 describes the early church as “breaking bread” together, which refers to them participating in the Lord’s Supper together. What is the purpose of Communion? Does anyone in the small group have questions regarding the Eucharist?
- If God already knows our needs, why do we pray? What questions do group members have regarding prayer? Is everyone in the small group comfortable with praying? If not, why? How can small group members help each other grow in these areas? How do you teach a new believer to pray?
- Every Christ-follower is a disciple-maker, even a new believer. This involves inviting others into the body of Christ by living an attractive lifestyle, relying on God’s power, and telling everyone about Jesus. Identify personal strengths and weaknesses in each of these three areas. Evaluate whether your lifestyle points people to Christ or looks just like the world, particularly in how you use time, how you spend money, how you treat people and value relationships, how you parent or treat your spouse, what you say, what you watch, etc. How do you rely on God’s power? Are you faithful in witness? What steps do you need to take to develop in each of these three areas?

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:** Praise God for those He has brought to faith through the weaving of gospel threads throughout this series. Pray for those with whom you are still sharing the gospel to come to faith. Pray for God to renew within each of us a passion for and devotion to His Word. Ask Him to unite us together more fully as a church. Reflect on all Jesus Christ has accomplished through His death and resurrection. Ask the Spirit to intercede on our behalf, helping to clarify and focus our prayers for ourselves, one another, and those who are lost.
- **Local:** This week we are praying for international high school students coming to Birmingham through student exchange programs, and for the families hosting them. We are also praying for Antioch Baptist Church, Pratt City, and Q.E. Hammonds, Pastor.
- **Global:** Throughout the month of April, our faith family is committed to praying for the Hui, a Muslim people group in China. There are around 13 million Hui in China

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and up until recently there was no Hui church established among them. This week we are praying for International Workers serving among the Hui. The Hui are not easy to reach and sharing the gospel is difficult. Join us this week as we pray for the individuals and families who have committed their lives to making Christ known among the Hui in China.