

Small Group Guide THE BLANK CHECK

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

August 31, 2014

Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciple-makers, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge (Main Truth) to understanding (Why It Matters) to application (Now What Do We Do?). Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

GETTING STARTED

Before Small Group

Weekly Readings for September 1-7

1 Samuel 25-31, 2 Samuel 1, and 1 Corinthians 6-12

Where We Are In The Story ~ Old Testament (1 Samuel)

Background of 1 Samuel: Originally, 1 and 2 Samuel were one book but were divided into two books (probably because of length) in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament. 1 Samuel spans Israel's history from the era of the judges to the establishment of a monarchy in Israel, and Samuel, Saul, and David stand as the main characters in this book. While we do not know who wrote 1 and 2 Samuel, one common conjecture assigns 1 Samuel 1-24 to Samuel and the rest to Nathan and Gad who were two prophets and contemporaries of King David.

Structure of 1 Samuel:

- 1 Samuel 1-7 describes the life of Samuel, the last judge of Israel.
- 1 Samuel 8-12 expresses the establishment of a monarchy in Israel with Saul as the first king.
- 1 Samuel 13-15 records the circumstances that led God to reject Saul and his line as rulers in Israel.
- 1 Samuel 16-31 chronicles the life of David beginning when God appointed him as the next king of Israel and concluding with the death of Saul when David assumed the throne.

This Week in 1 Samuel: In our readings for this week, Israel's first king is falling off the ledge, and the anointed successor is a fugitive. Samuel had been their prophet, priest, and judge, the proverbial glue holding the fledgling nation together during the reign of its first monarch, and 1 Samuel 25 opens with his death. What would happen to the nation of Israel now? It would be akin to the questions and emotions faced in the U.S. after the death of George Washington.

In light of Samuel's death, David fled to the wilderness of Paran (1 Sam. 25:2). Without Samuel around, who knew what Saul would attempt to do to David. While in the wilderness, David and his men had provided protection and assistance to the shepherds of a wealthy man named Nabal (whose name means "fool") while they were shearing the sheep. David had requested that Nabal extend kindness to them in the form of food, but Nabal scorned David and denied his request. Nabal's wife Abigail realized the folly of spurning the future king of Israel, and she sought to make things right with David and his men. She urges David not to take matters into his own hands but to entrust his life and any vengeance to God, and he recognized that God used Abigail to restrain him from needlessly shedding blood. God did judge Nabal by striking him dead, and David took widowed Abigail as his wife. While polygamy was an

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acceptable practice in the Canaanite culture, God condemned it (Deut. 17:14-17; 1 Cor. 7:2), for it went against His design for marriage to be between one man and one woman. However, the people of Israel, particularly its monarchs, often sinned by having many wives and concubines.

1 Samuel 26 provides further evidence of a splintered nation as the Ziphites (the Israelites who lived in Ziph) reported David's whereabouts to Saul. Again, David had an opportunity to destroy Saul, but he relayed to Abishai (the brother of his captain Joab) that God would be the one to remove Saul from leadership and that He had forbid David from interfering. Often, we try to "help" God along by manipulating circumstances to bring about our desired end, but David demonstrated faith in God by waiting on God's timing and by resisting the impulse to try to "control" the situation. Instead, David took Saul's spear and water jar to demonstrate that, once again, he could have taken Saul's life but that this was not his intent. If Saul had not been so paranoid and unreasonable, he would have understood that the conflict with David was one-sided, for David meant him no ill will.

While Saul proclaimed peace towards David for the moment, David knew that Saul's good will would not last because of his unstableness, which is why David fled to the Philistines. The Philistines recognized that David would be the next king of Israel, and they probably desired to seek an alliance with him, which is why King Achish responded favorably towards David and his men and gave them the town of Ziklag to settle (1 Sam. 27:1-7). While the Philistines thought that David and his men were raiding Israelite cities, they were actually striking other enemies in the land (1 Sam. 27:8-12). This subterfuge nearly got David into trouble when the Philistines gathered to fight the Israelites and wanted David to join them (1 Sam. 28). However, the Philistines had not forgotten that it was David who had slaughtered Goliath and thousands of other Philistines, and because they did not trust David to make war with his own people, the people urged King Achish to order David and his men *not* to join them in battle (1 Sam. 29:4-11).

When David and his men returned home to Ziklag, they discovered that their wives and possessions had been taken by the Amalekites (1 Sam. 30:1). Both Saul and David face tragic circumstances at the end of 1 Samuel, but they respond in two distinct ways. Saul resorts to seeking a medium, and David "strengthened himself in the LORD his God" (30:6). Because of Saul's wickedness, the Philistines would defeat Israel, and Saul would die in battle. In contrast, David and his men would regain their families and possessions.

In the face of the Philistine threat and knowing that David was among the Philistines, Saul tried to seek the Lord to no avail (1 Sam. 28:5-6). Why did God not respond, particularly when His people were threatened? Saul had tried other avenues to get an answer from God – dreams, Urim, and prophets, but God had not sent any dreams or prophets with a message. And why would He respond through Urim (a means used by priests to determine God's will) when Saul had earlier slaughtered many of God's priests (see 1 Sam. 22)? 1 Samuel 8:18 provides some clarity as to why God did not answer Saul, but God's silence in this particular situation ultimately demonstrates His rejection of Saul as king.

Desperate for direction, Saul turns to a medium even though he had earlier evicted all mediums and necromancers from Israel (1 Sam. 28:3). How sad that he would turn to the dead for direction (see Isa. 8:19)! Regarding the subject of mediums and witches, we know that there are dark powers at work in this world (see Eph. 6:10-20), and the Gospels and Acts demonstrate that the demons can possess power and influence in the world. At the same time, the Bible forbids God's people to engage in demonic practices, and passages such as 1 Samuel 28 show that God has authority over all other powers and can even use them. We saw this with Balaam and Balak in Numbers 22-24, for no matter how many times Balaam tried to prophesy curses on God's people, God would only let him utter blessings on Israel.

Where We Are In The Story ~ Old Testament (2 Samuel)

Background of 2 Samuel: Originally, 1 and 2 Samuel were one book but were divided into two books (probably because of length) in the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Written

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by an unknown author, 2 Samuel chronicles the reign of King David from the death of Saul to his census of the people.

Structure of 2 Samuel:

- 1 Samuel 1-5 describes the transition of leadership from Saul's family to David.
- 1 Samuel 6-7 includes God's covenant with David.
- 1 Samuel 8-20 contains descriptions of God's faithfulness to Israel as well as God's judgment of David for his sin.
- 1 Samuel 21-24 records David's praise of God and his response to punishment for his sin.

This Week in 2 Samuel: 1 Samuel closes with the death of Saul, and 2 Samuel picks up with David's response to the news. Although the anointed successor of Saul, David lacked the full support of the twelve tribes of Israel. As a result, David established Hebron as the seat of authority for the first seven years of his reign, which began in 1011 BC, for at this point in history, Jerusalem was not part of Israel. In fact, it was David who defeated the Jebusites and retook the city of Jerusalem (see Judg. 1:8-21). Initially, David was named king of Judah (1 Sam. 2:1-7), and it took seven years for Judah *and the rest of Israel* to recognize him as the king.

Where We Are In The Story ~ New Testament (1 Corinthians)

Background of 1 Corinthians: Acts 18 records Paul's initial visit to Corinth where he met Priscilla and Aquila, testifying to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah, reasoning with the Gentiles about Christianity, and facing opposition from the Jews. Despite the opposition, a church formed, and although Crispus the ruler of the synagogue was part of this local church, it consisted mostly of Gentiles (see 1 Cor. 12:2). Believers in Corinth also represented many different social classes – tradesmen like Priscilla and Aquila as well as rich householders like Crispus, Stephanus, and Gaius (Acts 18:1-4; 1 Cor. 1:26). Sexual immorality, Pentecostalism, disunity, and pride plagued this young church, which necessitated the writing of this epistle, and throughout the letter, Paul makes mention of various reports he had received regarding behaviors and beliefs among the Corinthians. Therefore, Paul targeted three specific problem areas in his letter: peace and love among the Corinthian believers, adherence to the gospel, and holiness in the world.

Structure of 1 Corinthians:

- 1 Corinthians 1-4 describes divisions in the Corinthian church and the wisdom of the gospel.
- 1 Corinthians 5-6 addresses the Corinthians' sexual immorality and lawsuits against one another.
- 1 Corinthians 7 contains instruction on singleness, celibacy, and marriage.
- 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 uses the issue of eating food offered to idols to segue into a discussion on rights, Christian freedom, and idolatry.
- 1 Corinthians 11:2-34 discusses the behavior of men and women in worship and abuses with the Lord's Supper.
- 1 Corinthians 12-14 focuses on the purpose and appropriate use of spiritual gifts in the body.
- 1 Corinthians 15 provides an explanation of the resurrection of the believer.
- 1 Corinthians 16 details Paul's travel plans and final instructions to the Corinthians.

This Week in 1 Corinthians: 1 Corinthians 6:12 serves as a transition point in the letter, and in 1 Corinthians 6-7, Paul addresses sexual ethics and the erroneous theology that led to such immoral actions among the Corinthians. Two particular thought processes contributed to their actions: (1) "all things are lawful for me" and (2) "food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food." Even in our culture, we encounter the worldly viewpoint that sex is an appetite, and like we feed our bodies when they are hungry, we should feed our sexual appetite. At the other end of the spectrum, there were some Corinthians who were practicing celibacy, even though they were married. So Paul starts his rebuke of the Corinthians' social mores by debunking the beliefs that undergirded their behavior, and in 1 Corinthians 6, he begins each of his three rebuttals with the question "Do you not know?" (vv. 15, 16, 19).

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Singleness, marriage, and divorce are the topics of 1 Corinthians 7, and with regards to questions about these topics, a helpful resource are the sermons on 1 Corinthians 7 preached by Pastor David and Pastor Jim during *The Cross and Christian Community* sermon series (see radical.net for these sermons). However, the guiding principle of this chapter is to remain as you are whether single or married and to be faithful to God (1 Cor. 7:20). This is how the topics of circumcision and slavery fit into this same chapter. Paul does not condone slavery or encourage circumcision.

Paul's focus in 1 Corinthians is related to the topic of Christian freedom – what are we free to do and how to exercise freedom responsibly and in a way that honors Christ and encourages the body. This relates to his discussion about food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8 and the continuing thoughts in 1 Corinthians 9. As new believers who converted to Christianity from idolatry, they naturally had many questions as they figured out what to let go of from their old life and how to live faithfully moving forward. In *Theology of the New Testament*, Dr. Frank Thielman describes the situation in this way:

Some among the Corinthians, therefore, prided themselves on the knowledge that 'an idol is nothing at all in the world' (8:4) and concluded that they had the 'right' (*exousia*; 8:9) both to eat in the idol's temple (8:9) and to eat anything sold in the marketplace without asking questions about its origin (10:23, 25). 'Everything is permissible for me' (10:23; cf. 6:12) was the watchword of this group. Not only did they claim the right to eat such food, but they claimed that their knowledge that this food was permitted to them made them superior to others who did not share this knowledge. In an odd reversal of the normal Jewish and Christian posture on this issue, they apparently claimed that eating such food, because it revealed a superior knowledge, somehow brought one nearer to God—eating food offered to idols was not merely a neutral issue to them but decidedly better than abstaining (8:8).

By describing his rights as an apostle (1 Cor. 9:1-14), Paul demonstrates to the Corinthians how they also should waive certain felt rights for the benefit of others. His conversation about food offered to idols leads to a warning against idolatry as a whole (1 Cor. 10), and he grounds his warning in the history of Israel by demonstrating that God does not condone His people worshipping anyone other than Him.

Head coverings, the Lord's Supper, and spiritual gifts serve as the topics of 1 Corinthians 11-12, and these issues in the Corinthian church affected their corporate worship, their relationships with each other, and their witness to the world. We do not have enough information to get a clear picture of what was occurring in the Corinthian church regarding head coverings, but a traditional understanding involves the women leaving their heads uncovered when praying or prophesying in the church. We do not know what led the women to do this, but if it involved the head coverings worn by married Roman women in public settings, it would have been culturally scandalous for Christian married women to be seen without them. This would make the issue one that negatively affected how unbelievers perceived the church and the gospel.

During Small Group

Welcome – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

Looking Back – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster

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deeper relationships among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

Looking Up – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other's families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group's prayer time.

Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- *Pray for Our Lives: Praise God for His divine guidance in our individual lives as well as our corporate faith family to impact the nations with His gospel. Pray for Pastor David, Heather, Caleb, Joshua, Mara Ruth, and Isaiah as they enter into this time of transition. Ask God to grant Pastor David great strength and courage through His presence as David leads the International Mission Board. Pray for our Elders as they continue to lead our faith family in glorifying God by making disciples of all nations. Ask God to grant them wisdom in discerning the steps He has established for us in the coming days. Confess to God your willingness and desire for your life to be spent for His glory among all peoples.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for the ministry of Brother Bryan Mission (brotherbryanmission.com) as they minister to the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of homeless and impoverished men in the Birmingham area. We are also praying for Mountain Brook Independent Church and Jim Ethridge, Pastor.*
- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for Brook Hills Mid-Termers Rhodes and Jessica Roberts serving in Haiti. Rhodes and Jessica serve with Vapor Sports Ministries where they are part of developing and operating the Haiti Vapor Center. Rhodes and Jessica have two children and together they continue to learn language, culture, and how best to meet urgent physical and spiritual needs across Haiti. Join us this week as we pray for the Roberts family.*

MAIN TRUTH

Message Summary

While the previous two sermons have challenged us to give God a blank check for our lives, how do we know what God specifically wants to write on our check? In this sermon, Pastor David provides the back-story of what led him to accept the position of president of the International Mission Board (IMB), and in doing so, he uses his journey to illustrate how surrendering our lives to Christ and abiding in Christ enables us to obey and to follow the Spirit step-by-step as He leads us.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

As the leader, there are at least three directions the small group can take in light of the current Bible reading plan. Knowing the people in the group, prayerfully consider what would be the best route to help those in your group grow. The group's meetings could also vary with each week, so if one week's sermon prompts a lot of thought and discussion, option one could be what the group does that week while the next week could be different. As the leader, feel the freedom to take all or just some of the content in this guide and do what is best for your group.

- *Using the discussion questions below, the small group time can focus on discussing the sermon and how to apply it.*
- *The group can discuss the Bible readings from the past week. If choosing this route, ensure that the group does not simply discuss information but also focuses on how to apply what they have learned from the Bible readings. The information in the "Where We Are in the Story" section can assist the leader in knowing the background and context for the readings.*
- *Using the REAP (read, examine, apply, pray) outline for studying Scripture, the group can take one or both passages from that day's readings and discuss them. So if the group meets on Monday, then you could pick one or both of the passages for Monday. This also helps those who are new to studying the Bible or who struggle with reading it learn how to do so. To assist the group with REAP questions, download the Guide to Personal Worship from brookhills.org.*

If you are a small group at The Church at Brook Hills, then you will likely have group members who are processing the news about Pastor David accepting the position of President of the International Mission Board (IMB). Pastor David's letter and video to the church about this decision can be viewed at brookhills.org/new/davidmessage.htm if anyone has not yet seen it, and in this sermon, Pastor David shares more about the journey that led him to this point.

There are likely many questions that people have about what will happen at Brook Hills in the days ahead, but it is also exciting to consider what God has in store for us all. For this week, you may consider taking a break from discussing the Small Group Guide in order to share and pray together. Some questions are provided below in case some groups want to continue with discussing the sermons and the Bible reading, but we trust you to lead with sensitivity to the Spirit and to do what is best for the people in your group.

If you do decide to discuss the sermon, focus attention on the two words that Pastor David emphasized in the sermon: surrender and abide. We cannot talk about blank checks, surrender, and abiding in Christ, without also focusing on the implications for our lives and how our lives need to change in light of these truths. So spend time as a group discussing "now what" or what you are each going to do with what you have heard.

While the group may want and need time to process together the news of Pastor David's transition, be attune to the tone of the conversation and guide the group towards contemplating how God will potentially use this to further His kingdom both here in Birmingham and around the world. Remind the group that if this is God's will, then it is His best for His glory, for the IMB, for the Platt family, for The Church at Brook Hills, and for each member of this faith family. Encourage the group to continue trusting in God, abiding in Him, and surrendering everything to Him, and talk through how the group members can come alongside each other in this. Also as a small group, take time to pray for Pastor David and his family, and pray for The Church at Brook Hills, particularly our Elders and staff as they lead our church in the days ahead.

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

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?).

- Read Acts 12:1-3; 16:6-10; 20:22; 21:3-4. How did the Christ-followers in these passages know where God was calling them? Read Romans 15:17-33. How did Paul know what was the best use of his life for the spread of the gospel? In these passages, what are we *not* told regarding how the Holy Spirit expressed God's will to the Christians?
- How do you know what God wants you to do? How do you discern what God is writing on your blank check?
- **Surrender**
 - What does it look like to fully surrender to Christ?
 - Read Luke 9:23-24. What do these verses express about surrendering to God?
 - Why should we surrender everything to Him?
 - If there is a hesitancy about surrendering, identify the reason for it. What are possible reasons for why a Christian would be hesitant about surrendering? What does hesitancy about surrendering to God indicate about your view of Him?
 - What does God want you to surrender? What are you holding on to that you need to release to Him? What needs to change in your life? What needs to be your priorities?
 - What is the best use of *your* life for the spread of the gospel?
- **Abide**
 - What does it mean to abide in Christ? How do we abide?
 - Why doesn't God give us a flashing neon sign that gives us the specifics about His will in a particular situation? How is abiding in Christ better for us and for our relationship with God than a flashing neon sign?
 - If we do not abide, how will that affect us as Christ-followers? If we do not abide, what does this say about our view of God and our value of Him?
 - In your own life, what needs to change in order for you to grow in this area?
 - What hinders Christians from abiding? What hinders *you* from abiding?
 - How do we discern whether or not we want *God* more than we want an answer to our prayer or direction for our life?