

## Small Group Guide

### WHEN FAITH IS HARD AND THE BURDEN IS HEAVY

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. David Platt

February 26, 2012

Matthew 11

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

#### WHEN FAITH IS HARD AND THE BURDEN IS HEAVY Matthew 11

#### Four Portraits of Jesus...

- He is the promised Messiah.
  - John doubts Jesus...
    - The anatomy of doubt...
      - Difficult situations.
      - Unmet expectations.
      - Limited perception.
    - The answer to doubt...
      - Biblical revelation.
      - Joyful submission.
  - Jesus defends John...
    - He was the greatest prophet.
    - We have a greater privilege.
  - Like Jesus and John...
    - We will be opposed by this world.
    - We will be criticized in this world.

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- He is the authoritative Judge.
  - Jesus will condemn the unrepentant.
  - Jesus will damn the indifferent.
- He is the sovereign Son.
  - Jesus alone knows the Father.
  - Jesus alone reveals the Father.
    - By divine grace.
    - Through human faith.
- He is the gracious Master.
  - An explanation of Christianity...
    - We give all we have to Jesus.
      - We give Him the full weight of all our sin.
      - We give Him our complete and utter inability to obey God.
    - Jesus gives all He has to us.
      - He gives us full pardon for all our sin.
        - We rest with peace before God.
      - He gives us His complete ability to obey God.
        - We work in peace with God.
  - The invitation of Christ: When faith is hard and the burden is heavy...
    - Repent of sin.
    - Renounce yourself.
    - Rest in Christ.
    - Rejoice forever in Him.

#### Message Summary

Doubt in God can arise in the believer as a result of difficult life situations, unmet expectations, and a limited ability to see and to understand why God allows circumstances to happen. While imprisoned, John the Baptist questioned Christ's identity, and in response, Christ directed him to the Word and urged John to trust Him. When struggling with faith, this passage points believers to read and to trust the Word and its Author.

Believers possess the privilege of proclaiming Christ to the world but in doing so will face opposition and criticism. Christ will come and judge the unrepentant and the indifferent, and only those who know Him as Lord and Savior will be spared from this judgment. In contrast to this judgment, Christ offers rest from the burdens of works-based salvation and from the cares of this world to those who choose to trust Him. In giving all we have to Christ, He gives us all that He has, exchanging our shame and guilt for a full pardon from sin. When faith is hard and the burdens of life are heavy, we can respond to Christ's invitation by repenting of sin, renouncing ourselves, resting in Christ, and forever rejoicing in Him.

#### 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?).

- Have you ever doubted God? If so, what were root causes of that doubt? How do believers faithfully struggle with faith in the midst of difficult circumstances of life? What does it practically look like to trust Christ in the midst of difficult times?
- Matthew 11 presents four portraits of Jesus: the promised Messiah, the authoritative Judge, the sovereign Son, and the gracious Master. Does your perception of Jesus include a balanced view of each of these portraits, or do you lean more heavily on one of these portraits?
- How does your perception of Jesus affect your faith in Him? How has it affected your ability to face difficult situations, unmet expectations, and limited perception?
- Why does God allow people to face difficult situations, to experience unmet expectations, and to have limited perception? Why is faith often hard? (Sometimes our situations are the result of sin – either personal sin or sin's presence in the world. God also permits us to undergo trials because such

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circumstances push us to exercise faith. As with a muscle, faith either strengthens or atrophies, but without faith, it is impossible to please God and to grow in a relationship with Him (Hebrews 11:6.)

- When mired in difficult situations, how can we as believers have an eternal perspective even when we do not know why God has allowed our circumstances to happen and when we only see one part of what God is doing? Where in Scripture can we turn for comfort and for answers?
- Read Isaiah 29:18-19, 35:5-6, and 61:1. During His earthly ministry, how did Jesus fulfill these prophecies? Why would Jesus allude to these prophecies in his response to John's messengers?
- In response to John's doubt, Jesus directs attention to the Old Testament and states that those who trust in Him are blessed. Remembering the promises of God and how God has kept such promises in Scripture and in your own life bolsters faith. Share with each other promises found in Scripture. Recount how God has shown Himself faithful to His people in the past. Remember how He has faithfully worked in your own life. Praise God for His faithfulness throughout all generations. We overcome doubt by fighting with faith in the Word and in its Author.
- When difficult situations arise, to whom or to what do you first turn? Do you have a "sinking sand" as Pastor David mentioned that you go to instead of the Word? What does your response to difficult situations indicate about your relationship with Christ and your trust in Him?
- Read Matthew 11:11. How do we have a position of greater privilege than John the Baptist? Why is our position greater? Explain the difference between John's position in redemptive history and our position.
- Pastor David quoted D. A. Carson who wrote, "So often Christians want to establish their 'greatness' with reference to their work, their giving, their intelligence, their preaching, their gifts, their courage, their discernment. But Jesus unhesitatingly affirmed that even the least believer is greater than Moses or John the Baptist, simply because of his or her ability, living on this side of the coming of Jesus the Messiah, to point him out with greater clarity and understanding than all his forerunners ever could. If we really believe this truth, it will dissipate all cheap vying for position [in this world] and force us to recognize that our true significance lies [simply] in our witness to the Lord Jesus Christ." Knowing what the Messiah has done, we are privileged to proclaim Christ. What does it look like to live as though this is a great privilege? Are you being faithful in proclaiming Christ through your words and actions? Do you truly believe in all that Christ has accomplished?
- Read Matthew 11:16-17. How do these two verses fit into the flow of what Jesus is teaching regarding the people's complaints that John the Baptist and Jesus do not meet their expectations and follow their ways?
- How can you prepare and fortify yourself now to stand strong in the midst of opposition and criticism from the world?
- Christ indicated that lack of repentance and indifference to His Word are worse than Sodom's immorality. Is your heart hardened towards Christ or submitted to Him? Believers, are you indifferent to the commands of Scripture and to the needs of others? Are there areas of stubbornness in your life, things you are holding on to and refusing to let go, bitterness towards God, or a hardness of heart in response to Christ's commands? Is your life characterized by obedience to the Word or indifference to it? What sins do you need to confess and repent from? How will you respond to this wake-up call from the Word that Jesus will judge the unrepentant and indifferent?
- Explore the imagery of the yoke that Christ uses in Matthew 11:28-30. What is your yoke? Are you weighed down by the "curse of Christendom," of trying to be holy and to reform your life apart from His grace in and through you? Do you rely more on what you can do for Christ rather than relying on what Christ has done for you? Have you affirmatively responded to Christ's invitation to come into His yoke with Him?
- How do we as believers rest in the Faithful One? How do we rest in Christ in our struggles with sin, our battles with temptation, and in our sufferings from various trials? How do you rest in Him and use these situations for His glory?

***Respond . . .***

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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 ...

- *Lives and Church: This Sunday, Matthew portrays some of the misunderstandings surrounding the teachings of Christ and highlights the rising tide of opposition toward him. Jesus' ministry was not corresponding to many of the Jewish messianic expectations; even John the Baptist had perceived this and wonders whether Jesus is who he claims to be. This skepticism and opposition open the door for some important teachings and affirmations about Jesus truly being the long awaited for Messiah. In what is one of the most beautiful passages of Matthew's gospel, Jesus beckons those who are hurting to come into relationship with him, where his yoke is easy and his burden is light. Pray that as we proclaim the true Messiah, others would see his works and repent and believe in him. Pray that God would cause us daily to seek rest for our souls in Christ. Pray that our church would see clearly and follow the God-man whose yoke is easy and burden is light.*
- *Local: This week we are joining thousands of churches across the world praying and fasting for the lives of the unborn during the 40 Days of Life emphasis and for the ministry of Sav-A-Life Shelby as they seek to reach out to pregnant women with the gospel, life skill counseling, and pro-life counseling. We are also praying for First Baptist Pelham, Mike Shaw, Pastor.*
- *Global: This week we are praying for our short-term teams serving in South Asia. We are also praying for Brook Hills' field partners Brian and Lisa A. serving in East Asia. Brian, Lisa, and their three children have served for over six years. Their main purpose is to engage the lost in a city whose urban core of 3 million hosts over 35 different people groups from dozens of nations. The task can be difficult in this area where the government is hostile towards the gospel, but they continue to work.*