

Message Discussion Guide

THE GOSPEL: WHY IT'S IMPORTANT, The Danger of Spiritual Deception

The Church at Brook Hills . Dr. David Platt . March 30, 2008 Matthew 7:13-27

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions 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 their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Connect . . .

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

Option 1

Remind the group that David momentarily talked about research that reveals those persons who claim to be Christians do not act differently than non-Christians. Ask the group why they think there are so many nominal Christians in America?

Invite the group to give examples of traditional phrases that they have heard pertaining to salvation that are not in the Bible, i.e. "walk an aisle," "ask Jesus into your heart", "accept Jesus as your Savior," "invite Jesus into your heart."

Ask the following questions:

Did any of these phrases affect how you viewed the message of the gospel? How?

How do these phrases represent how we still present the message of the gospel to others?

How could our presentation of the gospel lead many to live nominal Christian lives?

Option 2

Read the following short story to the group:

One day as I was finishing up some tasks at home, my phone rang. I casually picked it up, welcoming the distraction from chores. Barely giving me time to say hello, the lady on the other end began asking, "Where is the prayer? Where is the prayer?"

I immediately recognized the voice as my friend, Erin. Erin had been building a relationship with one of her co-workers and had recently been sharing more specific ways that God has been working in her life. Erin had asked me to pray that she would have an opportune time to share the gospel with her co-worker.

I asked Erin, "What prayer are you talking about?" She replied, "The one you pray to get saved. Where is it in the Bible? My co-worker thinks she might want to be a Christian, and I can't remember what she needs to say. I don't want to mess this up."

My heart sank as I realized that Erin didn't really understand what salvation meant.

After reading the story, ask the group the following questions, discussing answers.

- Have any of you ever been in the situation as one of these three people? What did you feel?
- How would you respond to Erin's question?

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- How do we impact a person's view of the gospel by our presentation of it?

Review the Message . . .

The Danger of Spiritual Deception

Remind your group that this passage is Jesus' wrap-up for His famous Sermon on the Mount. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught His followers about what being a true Christ-follower looked like. He wasn't merely teaching the twelve men who we think of as His disciples, but all of the people who had been following Him—some who were believers in His words and some who were simply curious. Most of these people were sincerely religious. As Jesus finishes up this teaching time, He clearly indicates the characteristics of a true follower and uses the imagery of two roads, two trees, and two foundations to illustrate His requirements of being a Christ-follower, not merely a religious person.

- **We gravitate toward that which is easy and popular.**
 - **The way of Christ is hard to follow.**
 - **The way of Christ is hated by many.**

Discussion Questions

- Enlist a volunteer to read Matthew 7:13-14.
- Remind your group that David mentioned that the meaning of the words translated "narrow" in the original language carries the idea of groaning and tribulation. Considering this statement, what was Jesus really telling His disciples about following Him?
- How does this meaning affect the way that we can view following Christ?
- Remembering that Jesus was speaking to religious people, in which following the religious demands of the day was popular and necessary, how do you think they would view Jesus' statement that few will find life?

Application . . .

- What kinds of religious ideas do we carry around that make us think that following Christ should be easy? Where did we get those ideas?
 - How easy is it to be involved in religious activity without truly following Christ?
 - How can our religious activity keep us from becoming true Christ followers?
 - Why is it so hard to accept that some people may not like us if we are truly following Christ?
 - Do you think that even other church members may hate us if we follow Christ? Why?
 - In America, do we really know what it's like to be harmed or hated for following Christ? Why or why not?
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- **We can profess publicly what we do not possess personally.**

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- **The way of Christ is always fruitful.**
- **The way of Christ is always faithful.**

Discussion Questions

- Enlist someone to read Matt. 7:15-23. Emphasize again that Jesus was speaking to religious people.
- Jesus warned His listeners about those who are unrighteous, but who appear to be righteous. Based on verses 16-18, what did He say would identify His true followers from those who are false followers?
- Ask: Based on Verse 21, what did Jesus say is the fruit of a true Christ-follower?
- Knowing that this illustration is part of a larger message, what other fruit has Jesus been pointing out that would mark His true followers?
- Read Verses 22-23 again. Ask the group to think of the religious people who were in the crowd listening to Jesus. How do you think they reacted to hearing verses 22-23?
- Overall, what does Jesus say about religious activity to His religious listeners?
- What does He tell them that He really expects from His followers?

Application . . .

- Can a person pretend to be a Christ-follower and fool everyone around them? How?
- If a person can do all of the right “church things” and appear to produce fruit, what does that say about how we have designed “church?”
- Jesus said that obedience to God’s will is the mark of a true follower of Christ. How does this truth affect our view of the gospel message? How should this affect what we tell people about the gospel? About following Christ?
- David mentioned that this passage indicates that our works have somewhat of a role in our salvation. But how does that fit in with our belief of salvation by faith alone?
- If we dig deep inside, is this passage disturbing to us? Why?
- Do Jesus’ words bother us perhaps because maybe we’ve given into a false evangelism ourselves?
- How does that last idea affect how we should live around others?

- **We assume salvation without biblical foundation.**
 - **The way of Christ is dependent on His Word.**
 - **The way of Christ is obedient to His Word.**

Discussion Questions

- Enlist someone to read Matt. 7:24-27.
- If both of these houses appeared to be the same, what was the difference in their survival? (*When viewed, both of these houses appeared to be soundly constructed, but one was built on a false foundation.*)
- Ask the group to explain the difference between the two men in the story. Emphasize that both men heard Jesus’ words but only one of them acted upon them.

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- Invite the group to compare this passage with Verse 21. By looking at both of these, what did Jesus mean that a person “acts” on His words?
- Based on this passage, then, what is the foundation for salvation?

Application . . .

- Do you think it's possible that we, in the church, have traded in internal transformation for traditions and external regulations and standards? Why?
- What effect can this trade-in have on our salvation? Our family? Our friends? Our mission?
- Can we pretend to be Christ-followers and fool everyone around us? How?
- If we are doing religious things, but our foundation is not set properly, what does Jesus say that means about our salvation?
- If following Christ is dependent upon His Word, what does that say about the Word in our lives? Do we reflect its importance by our time with it?

The Path to Spiritual Authenticity

Remind your group that David encouraged and challenged us to participate in the following three instructions throughout this series on the gospel. The questions below each instruction can help guide you to complete each one.

- **Listen to your Savior.**

How do our traditions and beliefs line up against the words of Christ?

Are we listening to and obeying His words?

Application- Spend some time this week reviewing Jesus' Words from this message asking the Holy Spirit to give you understanding.

- **Examine yourselves.**

Application- Meditate this week on these questions:

Do I have a biblical foundation and a life of obedience? 2 Cor. 13:5

Does the fruit of my life show the presence of Jesus?

Do I understand the biblical definition of salvation? Of the gospel?

- **Pray for your souls.**

Application- Spend some extra time with Christ this week praying about your salvation. Answer these questions:

Are you depending upon yourself or following traditions for salvation, or God?

Do you have faith in His power and desire to draw you to Himself?