

Community Group Guide

thankFULL: witnesses

The Gathering

Paul Jenkins

November 13, 2011

Hebrews 12:1-3

Community Groups are the primary vehicle for discipleship at The Gathering. It is through the interaction that takes place in each of these groups around our area that will enable people to begin to move from being drawn to God to a life that is being deepened by God. Use it as a resource to 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 through His Body, not just to complete the guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid group task list.

HEY!

Begin your group time by engaging in relational conversations and prayer that may include the following elements:

Greet each other—a simple, brief time to greet one another (especially new friends), enjoy refreshments, and make announcements.

Week in 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 revisit the vision for the group and discuss ways to accomplish that vision better.

Opening 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.

SAY!

Use the following summary and questions to review this week's message and reflect on its implications in our lives:

Message Summary

In the first week of our new series, "thankFULL," Pastor Paul focused on how easy it is to become discouraged in our journey with Christ, which the author of Hebrews compares to running a race. Drawing on his numerous experiences in distance road races, Pastor Paul encouraged us that we could find hearts full of gratitude even in the hardest times if we would do 2 things from the first 3 verses of Hebrews 12.

First, we need to understand the situation. We often make rash and unwise decisions simply because we don't grasp the situations in which we find ourselves, and the author of Hebrews gives us 3 insights that can help us understand where we are: we are surrounded, we are seen, and we are supported. A great cloud of faithful witnesses are aware of our race, and like a crowd cheering marathon runners, they see us – even in our struggles – and they are for us! Knowing this should change the perspective we have of any situation we find ourselves facing.

Second, we need to utilize the strategy. Anyone who runs a race maps out a strategy for how to perform, and the Bible offers us a strategy for our race, too. We need to run light, run long, and run looking. Instead of being so surprised that we struggle with sin, we need to recognize its danger and quickly throw off what can slow us down. This is done through repentance. We need to run long, and in order to do this we must have perseverance. Finally, we are to run looking with our eyes fixed on Jesus. Seeing Him and His endurance of the cross and harder things than we'll ever face is what can help us not give up.

Community Group Guide thankFULL: witnesses

The Gathering

Paul Jenkins

November 13, 2011

Hebrews 12:1-3

When we do these things, we will find ourselves living out our faith with greater confidence, perseverance, and thankfulness. Just as Pastor Paul shared about his brother Stephen overcoming obstacles in his race at the Special Olympics, so we will find ourselves less and less distracted by hurdles we may face, all because we have witnesses that cheer us on and point us to the ultimate prize: Jesus Christ Himself!

Discuss

Use the following questions to review and apply the points learned in the message.

- Why is it apparently so easy for our enemy to convince us we're alone?
- Many times in Scripture (some are Deut. 1:21, 31:8; Joshua 1:9, 8:1, 10:25; 1 Chronicles 22:13; and 2 Chronicles 20:17) we are commanded to not be discouraged. Why would God command this?
- What does David tell us to do in Psalm 43:5 when we feel discouraged?
- Describe how it feels when someone encourages you in a low moment.
- Have you ever needed encouragement and not received it? How important is it that we make sure others don't experience that?
- What are the things that so easily entangle you?
- According to Hebrews 10:36, what are some benefits of not giving up in the race?
- Describe a time in your life when the joy at the end made the process worth any hardship you had endured?
- How does what Jesus endured give us perspective in our struggles?
- What are the promises in Hebrews 12:3 for us when we see the witnesses pointing us to look at Jesus?

PRAY!

Encourage your group to break out into smaller, same-gender groups where they will respond to the truths of the message. 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 the message?
- How do your thoughts need to adjust to align with these truths?
- According to the truths from the message, what does God want you to desire/value?
- How do your desires/values need to change to align with His desires/values?
- What actions does God want you to take according to the truths of this message?
- What is an action that you can start to implement today or tomorrow?

Close this time by praying for each other, specifically for strength in the application of these truths and for the lost people with whom you are seeking to share the gospel.

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

- **Lives and Church:** Pray for the provision of jobs.
- **Local:** Pray for Albemarle Mayor, Elbert L. "Whit" Whitley, Jr. This week we are also praying for Boomerang Church and Senior Pastor, Bryan Wright.
- **Global:** Pray for the newly planted church in the Ragpickers Slum in Delhi, India, and Pastor Abhisek