

BIG IDEA SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Small groups that focus on the Big Idea for the week can use this guide to apply the message to life and take action. Feel free to use whatever parts of this guide best fit your group personality and time frame. All verses, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version (NIV).

12.27/28.08 // PREACHING CHRIST AND NOT OURSELVES

// Ice Breaker _____

Option 1: Describe a time when you felt you had to prove yourself to someone.

Option 2: How did your first meeting with your potential or future in-laws go?

// Questions for Discussion _____

What are some pressures Christians may feel when it comes to living for Christ? What kind of fears do we have of messing up?

Read Romans 2:17-24

...if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; **18**if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; **19**if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, **20**an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth— **21**you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? **22**You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? **23**You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? **24**As it is written: "God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

This was written to Jewish people who relied on the Old Testament Law for their righteousness. But the point was that they (and all of us who rely on our own efforts) did not keep all of these Laws. They tended to hold others to standards they themselves were not able to keep. How do you think we tend to be judgmental and hypocritical like this?

Mark Essick said: "I think others should be like me, that their faith should look like mine, and that is where we truly begin to 'preach ourselves.'" **Meanwhile, the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:23,** "We preach Christ crucified...." **How do such people end up showing people how to be more like "me" instead of more like Christ? How can we end up making ourselves the measurement of what a person ought to be, instead of making Christ the measurement?**

Read Ephesians 2:8-10

8For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— **9**not by works, so that no one can boast. **10**For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Is our salvation based on all the good things we do (our activities and ministries), and all the bad things we avoid? If we are saved by grace, why do you think so many still try to "prove" themselves to God with every word and action?

Yet, our faith will result in deeds. Our deeds are the evidence of our faith. How would brothers and sisters in Christ describe your faith and deeds? Read James 2:15-17

15Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. **16**If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? **17**In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

How would unsaved people who know you describe your faith and deeds? Read James 2:18

18But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

Can you think of some ways that Christians can place expectations on others (either Christian or not) to become more like them, that God does not expect? Examples can include the personal preferences of musical styles in worship, or even where the "communion table" is located....

Mark said, "So let us love before we speak, let us love before we judge, let us love before we condemn...." We can pray for the unity that Jesus prayed for in John 17:17-21 (NLT).

17 "Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. **18** Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. **20** I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. **21** I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me."

Do you think Christians really pray this prayer, and want to be one, or do we want others to be like me? Why is it difficult to talk to people who are different, and get to know them (whether believers or unbelievers)?

How do you think people would describe the level of difficulty talking with you?

Why do you think reading the truth of God's Word will help us to better be like Christ?

God does not call on us because we are strong, smart or successful. Why do you think God has called on you? Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

26Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29so that no one may boast before him. 30It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

// Prayer_____

Pray for unity

Pray that you can boldly speak about Christ