

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).

3.07/08.09 // THE STORY OF EVERYTHING: THE NEVERENDING STORY

BiG iDEA: The final chapter of the story is when time as we know it comes to an end at the second coming of Jesus. This is the point in the story where each person's story becomes never ending, leading to an eternity with Jesus or without Him.

// Ice Breaker _____

Option 1: What is one of your favorite movie endings (one you can watch over and over and never get tired of)? What is it about the ending that you love?

Option 2: In the past, how have you imagined eternity? How do you picture heaven? What will we be doing there?

// Questions for Discussion _____

What experiences or teaching have influenced your thoughts about heaven? How does it differ from what you learned in the weekend message? What are some different names for this new "place"?

Read Revelation 21:1-4

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"

When Jesus creates the new heavens and new earth, we're taken out of the physical realm which is then destroyed by fire (it may simply renew and purify the universe while destroying the earth...or it may consume the whole thing). He makes a new outer space and earth, the eternal home of righteousness (Is. 65:17, 66:22, 2 Pet. 3:13, Rev. 21:1) How does heaven sound like a return to the beginning of STORY OF EVERYTHING in Genesis 1 & 2? What similarities are there to the Garden of Eden?

Read Revelation 22:1-5

¹Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. ³No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

Life in heaven is described in Revelation in various ways (e.g. "a re-created earth", "new bodies", "responsibility of stewarding God's creation"). C.S. Lewis, in his book, *The Great Divorce*, described our new bodies as "more solid, more real, more substantial" than our present bodies. He meant that they will be more consistent with God's original intent. They will not be subject to disease, deterioration, decay or suffering. They will represent the ultimate restoration of God's creative reality that existed in the first chapter of our story. Heaven is the ultimate restoration of God's perfect community. When we understand God's dream for us, we realize that we were created by love, for love, to love. We can experience the beginning of our forever life in this world. We experience a measure of heaven right now. The Kingdom of God is within/among us. So heaven

will be a fuller realization of relationship we already have with Christ. We will experience fuller worship, fuller glory, fuller rest, serving will have fuller meaning. Only the righteous will have a quality of life called "immortality". How do you feel when you think about Heaven in this way?

We all will be able to enter Heaven solely by God's grace—no one will earn their way in. However, it does appear that there will be "levels of reward." How do you think this may work?

Read 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

¹²If any man builds on this foundation [of Jesus Christ] using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

But what about hell? People have many misconceptions about hell. Some think it's the place where God sends people who don't do what He says, an abyss where people are sent screaming to their end while God looks on and tells them they blew it. How do you picture hell? Who do you think should be there? Who deserves it?

Read Romans 1:18-20, 32

¹⁸The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

³²Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Read Romans 3:10-12

As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

How does it differ from what you learned in the weekend message about hell?

Read Matthew 25:41

Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

Read Matthew 25:46

"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

If hell does not result in reform, what is it's value? Judgment has several purposes:

Public separation of the "good" (saved) and bad (unsaved)(Matt. 13:24-30)

Public examination of the records for all so that God may be shown to be completely fair and just, all are judged according to their deeds (2 Cor. 5:20, Rev. 22:12)

Public vindication of God's justice and mercy.

Public allocation of rewards and punishments.

But Scripture is not clear on this question: Do you think there will be "degrees of punishment" where people like Hitler enter a more "severe level" of hell than others? Why or why not?

Read Matthew 10:15

[Jesus] "I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town."

We need to remember what we've learned about the relational nature of sin. If we use our freedom to pursue other things, we put a distance between God and ourselves. We understand that hell is self-chosen trajectory. It is not God's plan for anyone to end up there. If God really doesn't want anyone to spend their eternity in hell, why do you think people end up there?

Read 2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

John Lennon sang, "Imagine there's no heaven..." Then he described how the world would be a utopia if we all just lived for today? Do you think that would happen? How does believing in an

afterlife where we have to give an account before God, impact the way we live? If heaven and hell did not exist, would it make sense to serve God? Why or why not? How can having an increased awareness of eternity affect your present day-to-day life?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:3-5

"I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself. My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time, each will receive his praise from God"

Have you had someone close to you die and were not sure of their salvation? What can you do to change that answer for people you know right now?

Read Matthew 28:19-20

19Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

// Personal Application_____

Read and commit to memory 2 Peter 3:9

"God is not willing that anyone should perish, but that everyone would come to repentance."

You have heard the truth. You know the choices set before you. If you have chosen to enter into a relationship with Christ what will you do to help other people enter into that relationship too? What will be the next chapter in your spiritual story?

In light of eternity we must make what is eternal important and what is not eternal unimportant. God does not value the same things as we do. What do you need to re-evaluate?

// Prayer_____

Pray asking God to show you how you can better reach the people in your life to help them make their decision for Christ.

Pray that you feel the sense of urgency to Win Downriver to Christ.