

DC403 (Last updated: July 2016)

A reminder: The chapter references in the DC books reflect the 1st edition of Boyd & Eddy's book. The 2nd edition incorporates the Appendix and changes the chapter numbers: chapter 6 disappears, moving chs. 7-12 to 6-11; and chs. 15-18 to 14-17; chapter 14 on baptism becomes ch. 12—and ch. 13 remains the same.

Another reminder: If you haven't already done so, think about whether and how you want to do "graduation". See the end of this part of the Leaders Guide for things to think about.

1-2.) Denominations

-Have them read and sign the covenant again.

-If you haven't done so already, this would be a good week to start asking some of your group members to "stretch" on their Scripture memory. This week, it's pretty easy—putting Ephesians 4:2 together with 4:3. But they could consider adding 4:1 as well. In future weeks, other opportunities will present to combine past memory verses or easily add in another verse or two.

-People often miss the direct context of II Chronicles 7:14—God's people, not the country or "the World".

-As with our discussion of cults and world religions, it is important to distinguish between the doctrines and practices of the religion as opposed to its supposed adherents. In particular, there can be vast differences between the doctrinal beliefs of the denomination, especially those who self-identify as mainline Protestants. See the following provocative tables from Barna's research on beliefs and practices within denominations:

<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=92>

<http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=93>

see also: <http://pewforum.org/news/display.php?NewsID=11281>

-Make sure to connect doctrinal differences (many of which we have studied) to denominational differences.

-Try to wrestle with any emphasis on or aversion to creeds in your circles.

-Week 3 is relatively heavy. If you have the ability to stretch to two hours for a meeting for that week, consider doing so. In any case, warn your group members and encourage them to work ahead during these two, lighter weeks (or to enjoy the break).

1-2.) Denominations (cont'd)

-Joke: A woman goes to the post office to buy stamps for her Christmas cards. She says to the clerk, "May I have 50 Christmas stamps please?" The clerk replies: "What denomination?" The woman says, "God help us. Has it come to this? Give me six Catholics, 12 Presbyterians, 10 Lutherans, and 22 Baptists."

-From comedian Emo Phillips:

I was walking across a bridge one day, and I saw a man standing on the edge, about to jump off. So I ran over and said "Stop! don't do it!"

"Why shouldn't I?" he said. I said, "Well, there's so much to live for!" He said, "Like what?"

I said, "Well...are you religious or atheist?" He said, "Religious."

I said, "Me too! Are you Christian or Buddhist?" He said, "Christian."

I said, "Me too! Are you Catholic or Protestant?" He said, "Protestant."

I said, "Me too! Are you Episcopalian or Baptist?" He said, "Baptist!"

I said, "Wow! Me too! Are you Baptist Church of God or Baptist Church of the Lord?" He said, "Baptist Church of God!"

I said, "Me too! Are you Original Baptist Church of God, or are you Reformed Baptist Church of God?" He said, "Reformed Baptist Church of God!"

I said, "Me too! Are you Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1879, or Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915?" He said, "Reformed Baptist Church of God, Reformation of 1915!"

I said, "Die, heretic scum!", and pushed him off.

Another joke: The heads of several Protestant denominations were debating which denomination Jesus would join when he returned. Discussed raged heatedly for awhile until someone noticed that the head of a small Baptist group had not yet spoken. "Well, what would you say?", the others asked. "I'd say I don't know why he'd leave ours in the first place."

-Good supplemental resources: any edition of *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, eds. Frank Mead et. al.; *Pocket Dictionary of North American Denominations*, eds. Blankman and Augustine; *The Complete Guide to Christian Denominations*, Ron Rhodes; and <http://www.thearda.com/Denoms/Families/trees.asp>.

-Nice articles:

<http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=24-04-023-v>

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2014/march/lament-for-divided-church.html?paging=off>

http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2015/april/shared-savior-split-traditions.html?utm_source=booksandculture-

[html&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=11153998&utm_content=351521566&utm_campaign=2013](http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2015/april/shared-savior-split-traditions.html?utm_source=booksandculture-)

-Other resources / charts:

http://truthforsaints.com/Christian_Denominations/denomination_history/denomination_history.html

<http://www.bing.com/images/search?q=chart+of+denominations+of+christianity&qv=chart+of+denominations+of+christianity&FORM=IGRE>

3.) Eschatology I: Millennium and Rapture

-Memory Verse for Week 3: Ask those with the optional verse to recite their verses first.

-Recommend (and considering reading yourself) C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce* as optional reading over the next two weeks. It's a relatively easy read—both in the sense of length (about 100 pages) and writing that is not as thick as typical Lewis.

-This may be the toughest week for most facilitators to lead. In some cases, it may be a lack of knowledge and discomfort with what can be immensely confusing. As such, do the best you can, tell them that you're no expert, and stick to the larger points (how we see God and how we should live). In other cases, it may be “too much” knowledge and not giving group members enough freedom to wrestle with these issues earnestly. In this latter case, I would encourage you to consider not sharing your eschatological views with group members—particularly if your views will carry a lot of weight with them. Along those lines, it would be ideal to present the material in a way where members can't tell what your views are. In fact, you may want to bias your presentation slightly to counter whatever the predominant bias exists in your group.

-1a: As with other key doctrines (e.g., free will and pre-destination), among other things (especially, hope), our eschatology is correlated to a general pattern of Scriptural interpretation. Beyond that, Revelation is very useful in providing Christians with an eternal perspective and a substantive hope (especially in the face of persecution).

-1b: The debatable components can largely be reduced to matters of timing and order. The matters beyond debate are listed in question #7b.

-1c: It matters too much to ignore, but we must give others freedom within debatable issues. The book of Revelation is often studied for details about the end times, the anti-Christ, and so on—when its primary purposes are identical to the rest of Scripture: to learn what it reveals about God and to learn how to love others.

-2: Revelation 20 is clearly figurative in part (e.g., key, chain, bound) and past tense, but what does that mean? What does it mean that Christ ties/tied up “the strong man” in Matthew 12? Note also that Matthew 16 refers to the church on offense—against the gates/“defenses” of Hades.

3.) *Eschatology I: Millennium and Rapture* (cont'd)

-3a: historically...

-pre-M: dominant thru Roman Empire (pre-Constantine/Augustine); after that, Chris Hall's "a distinguished but minority perspective" until recently; gained recent widespread popularity in the 19th Century, esp. thru the work of Ryrie and Scofield; in general, more prominent in times of historical pessimism (in times of war, late-19th Century America when Protestants were losing control with the influx of Catholics, late-20th century America when Christians were losing control of the culture)

-a-M: dominant from Augustine to Reformation; still popular since then

-post-M: rarely the dominant view, but popular throughout history; in America, dominant until WWI and esp. WWII—but much more rare today; popular outside of America and Western Europe today, given Christianity's aggressive growth; in general, most prominent after times of spiritual revival and optimism about the influence of Christianity

-3b: on the strengths and weaknesses of each viewpoint—theologically or with respect to "hermeneutics" (biblical interpretation)...

-Post-M's focus on the power of the gospel to redeem all parts of life and our call to be salt and light in the world. This parallels the increasing dominion/abundance for which we are designed. In contrast, pre-M implies that the world will degenerate—vs. idea elsewhere that God will start and finish a good work (Phil 1:6, Is 9:6-7). Thus, the emphasis of pre-M tends toward "rescue" and the gospel as fire insurance. Putting it another way: will the Gospel and God's Kingdom fade or expand over time? Is God's plan mostly/largely about future victory in Heaven or, in large part, focused on current victory on Earth?

-Pre-M stems from as literal and chronological a reading as is possible of Revelation—a big strength in relying on "the plain sense of the text". But is reading Revelation like prose appropriate when its style is apocalyptic? (And ironically, pre-M relies on a figurative interpretation of Dan 9:24-27 as a 70th week Tribulation with a 2000-year (church age) gap after 69th week.) In contrast, post-M respects the idea of literary type (perhaps too much) in recognizing that apocalyptic is different than prose.

3.) *Eschatology I: Millennium and Rapture* (cont'd)

-3b: on strengths/weaknesses—theology and “hermeneutics” (cont'd)...

-Pre-M is consistent with God’s other judgments—sudden but when only when things got *so bad* that they could not be reconciled (Gen 6:5, 15:16, Gen 18-19). But pre-M typically requires two judgments/resurrections (unless one embraces a post-Tribulation view; see: Question #4)—before and after the millennium—when the text reads as if there is one.

-Pre-M often implicitly downplays impact of Revelation on early/earlier generations—only contemporaries of the End Times will *really* understand what John meant.

-3c: on the strengths and weaknesses of each viewpoint—with respect to holding a biblical worldview

-Pre-M’s have a proclivity for playing “the dating game”—trying to predict when Christ will return (see: origins of 7th Day Adventists in 1844 and JW’s in 1916)—and otherwise focusing in excess on minor details in Revelation (What is the mark of the beast and who is the anti-Christ? vs. details on the character of God/Christ and how the hope revealed in Revelation should motivate us to persevere in the faith)

-Pre-M demands a strong faith which looks to avoid compromise, and an especially eager anticipation of Christ’s return.

-A-M/post-M’s focus on Christ’s victory at the cross/grave—we’re not waiting for Christ to be Lord; He already is!

-Post-M’s tend toward optimism, but beyond that, to utopianism and being too earthly-oriented; pre-M’s tend toward pessimism, but beyond that to fatalism and being too Heaven-oriented; a-M’s reflect the post-M optimism about the gospel and the pre-M pessimism about the sin nature and the world

-A-M’s tend toward apathy, worldliness, and being too present-oriented. Post-M’s can more easily idolize government and the institutional Church as a means to godly ends; pre-M has often played out as social isolation.

-Pre-M’s focus more on saving individuals (or at least making sure that everyone hears a Gospel presentation); post-M’s emphasize the redemption of culture; a-M’s work to do the best they can, largely taking the culture as given.

3.) *Eschatology I: Millennium and Rapture* (cont'd)

-4a: The concept of “rapture” is not clearly mentioned in Revelation (except perhaps 17:14, 19:14), but note that the focus of Revelation 19-20 is the defeat of evil rather than the glorification of Christians. (Likewise, the White Throne Judgment of unbelievers is mentioned while the Judgment Seat of Christ—for believers—is not mentioned in Revelation.)

-4b: While Pre-M’s tend to anticipate and even embrace persecution and suffering, pre-tribs and mid-tribs tend to be escapist—where Scripture focuses more on character than circumstance. (See also: Dan 3, I Cor 7-11.) Mid-tribs and post-tribs may introduce a difficulty in setting up a “countdown” when the events of a literal Tribulation would be so obvious.

-5a: This covers three different senses in which the phrase is used biblically. More broadly, this relates indirectly to our discussion of the many meanings of “day” when we talked about Genesis 1-3 in DC401.

-5b: Note also the implications for foreign policy toward at least Israel!

-5c: If taking numbers figuratively and symbolically, the millennium’s 1000 years (for example) is 10^3 —a figurative of saying that the millennium will affect everyone and figurative for the devil being completely bound and believers completely victorious. (See also: Job 9:3, Ps 50:10b.) As Ray Robbins puts it: “These writers were not talking about how long the messianic reign would be. They were talking about what kind it would be.”

-5d: The “Kingdom of God” is the sphere of God’s rule—today (universal in one sense but limited in another sense) vs. future (completed).

-6: These verses are meant to provide an exercise in interpreting various passages in light of a particular eschatology.

-7a: Good people—today and throughout Church History—have held a variety of views.

-8: With respect to the beginning of chapter 17, Kathleen Norris talks about the power of Revelation to speak to artists and poets. It’s a bit tougher for linear thinkers and those who are more analytical, but not surprisingly, different parts of God’s word can speak powerfully to different sorts of people.

3.) *Eschatology I: Millennium and Rapture* (cont'd)

→ on the order of events...

1.) “distress”—Tribulation or tribulation (Mt 24:29)

2.) Christ’s return with “the church triumphant”—“the resurrection of the (Christian) dead” (19:11-16; Ps 49:15, Mt 24:30, Mk 13:27, I Cor 15:23,52a, I Thess 4:14,16)

-on latter, see: Lk 20:35, Phil 3:10-11; Acts 17:32, 24:21, I Cor 15:13,21,42, Heb 6:2; see also: Lk 14:14’s “resurrection of the righteous”

-prob. includes OT saints too

-single resurrection for C’s and non-C’s (Is 26:19-21, Dan 12:2, Jn 5:28-29; Acts 24:15?)

-presumably followed by judgment of C’s and non-C’s (20:11-15; 20:5?)

3.) “rapture” of the (Christian) living (Mt 24:31, Jn 14:3, I Cor 15:52b, I Thess 4:15,17)

→ on the order of events (cont’d)

4.) I Cor 15:24-26’s “then the end will come...”—defined as defeat/destroy all worldly authority and then, death (20:14; I Cor 15:54-57)

-the former all over Rev (11:15-18, 16:18-21, 18:21, 19:11-21, 20:7-9)

5.) all this followed by the new heavens & earth (Rev 21-22)

-A nice resource: “Understanding the Book of Revelation”—a laminated fold-out by Rose Publishing.

4.) Eschatology II: Hell

-With respect to the memory verse, some people may be confused about who “the One” is.

-The reading in Zechariah has a number of key passages: the accusations of Satan against Joshua in 3:1-5 and the messianic references in 9:9, 11:12-13, and 12:10.

-The Geisler article is an excellent overview, developing some themes that we don’t address in the study. The only weakness is his needlessly-strong and unsupported characterization of annihilationism (as we deal with in the study and the Boyd & Eddy reading).

-It may become clear in discussing the Geisler article—or perhaps later—that our discussions of “saved by grace” from DC402 are relevant this week as well.

-Suggest C.S. Lewis’ *The Great Divorce* as an enjoyable and short/easy read about Lewis’ speculations on heaven and hell (in a short-story/allegory format). The book is especially helpful in imagining question #2b and picturing question #6. Likewise, it is a great apologetic work, useful for distributing to some non-Christian friends.

-1a: a (spiritual) separation from God (perhaps surrounded by hell-ish people) and a (physical) place of darkness and agony; the importance of stressing the opportunity to be with God (vs. avoiding Hell per se) answers the second question and ties into 1b.

-1b: Fear is only “the beginning of wisdom”. See: Fear vs. love as prime motivators within relationships (e.g., parenting). See also: salvation as merely “fire insurance”.

-2b: The plural reference may refer more figuratively to the weight of the evidence against those who will be judged by their works or more literally as the amount of material that would go into a book on our works (John 21:25).

-2c: We must be careful that our understanding and explanations here do not degenerate into a works-based salvation/damnation.

-3a: A one-time, final judgment at the end, waiting for the defeat of death and evil—i.e., the resolution of the story. Maybe that’s all that stands in the way of the full experience?

-4: Hell is apparently both a matter of separation from God and a matter of judgment from God. To the extent that one is “godless”—uninterested in the things of God—perhaps their fate is best imagined as a matter of separation from God since they have chosen not to be involved in relationship with God. To the extent that one is “ungodly”—actively working for evil in this life—perhaps their fate is best imagined as a matter of judgment for the sins they have committed.

4.) Eschatology II: Hell (cont'd)

-4: Hell is both fire and “blackest darkness”?! This is possible as if going a mile deep within a lake or deep within a fire, but seems to read figuratively.

-5: Given the weight of tradition on this topic, it will be difficult for some to wrestle faithfully with the Scripture, theology, etc. Especially for those who are struggling, make the point that being able to enunciate this position may be helpful in removing a stumbling block within evangelism or ministry. As so many other difficult theological issues, one should be able to coherently make the case for more than one answer.

-5c: There are implications here for God’s justice and evangelism. On the one hand, evangelism seems less powerful in that Hell would be “reduced”. On the other hand, some people wrestle earnestly with the justice of eternal punishing in Hell. To them, annihilationism may provide a way around a potential stumbling block. At least two other questions come to mind: Can sin and evil last forever? And will God’s fire not destroy it? A larger issue here is the role of tradition in forming our beliefs.

-6: What is love? How would God be just without punishing evil? God doesn’t send but many choose to go—as God respects one’s dignity and freedom to choose not to have relationship with him. C.S. Lewis’ easy-to-read *The Great Divorce* is a provocative and enjoyable read—and a terrific apologetic—on this topic.

5.) *Eschatology III: Heaven*

-Next week is heavy, especially with respect to the reading in Boyd & Eddy. Consider warning your group members about this.

-The structure of Amos is interesting in that the prophet starts with “the pagans” before hammering the Southern Kingdom (Judah) and then, the primary audience, the Northern Kingdom (Israel). The book is also known for its emphasis on economic injustice, including a popular verse like 5:24.

-Both Amos (e.g., 4:4-5) and Micah (e.g., 6:6-8) underline a recurrent theme in the prophets and elsewhere—that ritual and sacrifice were supposed to point to greater realities, including God’s mercy and grace. (See also: Ps 130:5,8’s reference to salvation and redemption from sin.) In today’s language, the same critique could be leveled at those who implicitly believe that church attendance, a few dollars in the offering plate, Bible study, etc. are the sum total of what God requires from us.

-Ps 131 ties in nicely to the hope we have in Heaven.

-Randy Alcorn’s *Heaven*, is an excellent (lengthy but thorough) resource on this topic.

-1a: Focusing on life in the present is natural in that it’s more concrete. Greater focus on heaven, earth, or hell is a function of circumstances (as Eareckson Tada points out with the “Passports of Pain and Pleasure”), personality, and church tradition. It’s also helpful to point out that it can often be easier to have a hope for heaven for others who are suffering.

-3: Among other things, it is interesting to note that the Biblical hope is a confident assurance rather than merely wishful thinking. (For example, we often say things like “I *hope* it doesn’t rain today”.)

-4a: We’re looking for general perceptions (old/new, pleasant/unpleasant, light/darkness, magnificence, level of detail) and pictures (city, bride, Eden, the presence of God).

-6a: Why walls at all? (See also: John 14’s “rooms”.) They are necessary to provide measurements of a “city” (by definition) vs. an incomprehensible eternity. Walls imply physical proximity and the closeness that obtains from community. (In a similar vein, Lewis’ *The Great Divorce* paints a picture of those in Hell as those who want to get away from God & others—so much so, that they want to move infinitely far away from them.) Note also that the walls are transparent and that Zechariah 2:4 implies that there are *no* walls! In a word, remember that John is trying to describe the indescribable—using the pictures of a bride, a city, and a garden—so don’t take the city references too literally.

-6c: At the least, Revelation 21-22 resolves Genesis 1-3

-Good article on the Kingdom of God:

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/february/jesus-afterlife.html?paging=off>

6.) *Free-will and Pre-Destination*

-Since next week is one of the lighter weeks toward the end of DC, it's a good time to have current co-leaders come into your class to share their perspective about co-leading (opportunities and challenges) and answer any questions for next year's prospective co-leaders.

-Proverbs 16:9 seems to allude to general and specific parts of the will of God (next week's topic). It also may seem backwards from our usual perspective, but in any case, it combines the two concepts we're studying this week.

-Note the second verse of "Amazing Grace"—"*Twas grace that taught my heart to fear; And grace that fear relieved; How precious did that grace appear; The hour I first believed.*"

-On the seeming contradiction of free will and pre-destination, it might be helpful to refer to quantum physics and the fact that light is both wave and particle.

-A Veggie Tales video that might be useful: in the Angry Eyebrows episode, Uncle Alvin and his sidekick Lamp-e have come up with eyebrows that affix themselves on angry people. Larry-Boy is unable to help people unless they freely relinquish their anger; he cannot forcefully remove the eyebrows without their consent.

-See: overview of Arminius' followers' five points and the five-point response by Calvinists in the church history book by Jones.

-It's said that an enthusiastic follower of the Calvinist George Whitfield asked him if they would see the Arminian John Wesley in heaven. Whitfield said no: "*No, he will be so near the throne, and we at such a distance, that we shall hardly get a glimpse of him.*" Despite intense disagreement, these two men had profound respect for each other—the sort of relationships and thought life we'd like to cultivate.

-1: Our views on this affect and are affected by our views of God (and how we view us) and sin. It also points to the extent to which we hold ourselves responsible for sin and our tendencies to point to sin nature (internal struggles) vs. the world and the devil (external forces). An overemphasis on free will can lead to a human-centered view of life and salvation; an overemphasis on pre-destination can lead to fatalism, especially with respect to evangelism. Finally, one should note the cultural influences of being American (with its emphasis on the will and freedom) and various religious influences and traditions. Norman Geisler's *Chosen but Free* is effective at critiquing the two extreme ends of the spectrum on this issue. Kenneth Stewart's *Ten Myths about Calvinism* is a useful critique of Calvinists and Calvinist myths, from a Calvinist perspective.

6.) Free-will and Pre-Destination (cont'd)

-2a: Some degree of free will is necessary for love, obedience and virtue, faith and hope, and the dignity of the human person made in the image of God. God can be “blamed” insofar as this is His system, but free will underlines our accountability and His justice in judging our conduct and character. Free will is also important in that it focuses on the Biblical theme of “what we do with what we have”—character over circumstance. The most interesting passage for this question is probably Exodus 21—where God “lets [vs. causes] it to happen”. This sets up “the problem of suffering” (our topic in two weeks), but here, underlines the interplay between God’s sovereignty and our free will.

-2b: This concept points to God’s sovereignty and His “prevenient grace”—that God initiates and is responsible for our ability to embrace salvation. Ephesians 1 also notes that we are elected to a position but also for a purpose; we are chosen to/for God’s purposes.

-3: Someone has said that Romans 9 is about pre-destination; Romans 10 is about free will; and in Romans 11, Paul tries to reconcile the two before ending in worship. It may be useful to point to Matthew 22:14’s “chosen” while noting that the context of the parable is people choosing to attend the banquet or not!

-3a: All references are with respect to believers—who have already chosen God and been chosen by God. The concept is meant to provide hope to Christians without promoting pride in them or conveying a sense of exclusion to non-Christians. Matthew 22:14 is an especially interesting passage, distinguishing between the universal invitation (chosen in the larger sense!) and the subset who are “chosen”.

-3b: Again, God worked with them in a “special” way—but not to the exclusion of others. (See: Rahab, the Gibeonites, the “aliens among you”, Ruth, Solomon’s evangelism and God’s plan for Israel [centered on a popular trade route] to be “a light to the Gentiles”.)

-3c: God is going to accomplish his plan and hopes to use those who he “calls”, but will use others as necessary.

-3d: In addition to asking about these analogies, encourage them to comment on any of this week’s quotes. One other point as food for thought: God is both omnipotent and omniscient. He does not always exercise the former; does He always exercise the latter?

6.) *Free-will and Pre-Destination (cont'd)*

-3d: Ambrose Bierce on “Decide”:

A leaf was riven from a tree,
“I mean to fall to earth,” said he.
The west wind, rising, made him veer.
“Eastward,” said he, “I now will steer.”
The east wind rose with greater force.
Said he: “T’were wise to change my course.”
With equal power they contend.
He said: “My judgment I suspend.”
Down died the winds; the leaf, elate,
Cried: “I’ve decided to fall straight.”
“First thoughts are best?” That’s not the moral;
Just choose your own and we’ll not quarrel.
Howe’er your choice may chance to fall,
You’ll have no hand in it at all.

-4a: Tempering this tension is the point that C.S. Lewis makes about prayer—that it changes our hearts more than God’s. Likewise, prayer is necessary for relationship with God and the practice of lining our will up with God’s (see: next week’s topic).

-4b: Somehow, there is no conflict. Prophecy foresees without causation (perhaps in line with the analogies in #3d). This also illustrates why most prophecies are longer-term and somewhat vague/cryptic. (For a counter-example, consider Peter’s denial of Christ.)

-5a: Pre-destination and election emphasize God’s sovereignty and eternity (and our hope). The concepts keep God “big”; God must be beyond our comprehension or He wouldn’t be much of a God. They bolster the connection between faith and obedience (Rom 8:28). And they emphasize that it’s not just our decision/glory (Rom 8:29-30), promoting grace vs. works; it’s all about God and His love, not us and our choice. See also: Jn 15:16a vs. usual practice of choosing a rabbi who then approves the choice; no other rabbi would have chosen Peter, James and John.

-5b: This is probably the punchline to this week’s study.

-Good articles:

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/june/terrifying-grace-god-omniscience.html?paging=off>

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/election-is-for-everyone.html?paging=off>

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/december/wrestling-with-eternity.html>

-Good Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psVGYfK-qbo>

7.) *The Will of God*

-Warn them about the length (i.e., “suffering”!) of next week’s study. We have tried to compensate by lessening the reading load. If you have the ability to stretch to two hours for a meeting, consider doing so for that week.

-Durham article: In addition to the practical and theological difficulties (although not impossibility) of using fleeces, myth #2 can lead to a nice discussion of the differences between God opening/closing doors and us putting out fleeces. Myths 1&3 tie into next week’s topic. Another good article: http://www.biblestudytools.com/blogs/chris-russell/8-keys-to-knowing-god-s-will-for-your-life.html/?utm_source=bible+study+tools+weekly+-+biblestudytools.com&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=01/06/2015

-1a: God’s “general will” can be defined as the moral commands already revealed in His word. God’s “specific will” speaks to context-specific details and means to ends—to be discovered through God’s word, prayer, wisdom, experience, and godly counsel (Q #1b; see also: Eph 5:10; Mt 26 in Gethsemane). One’s views on this tie into views on the topics last week and next week. An emphasis on the general will leads to the Biblical theme of a focus on character over circumstance. An over-emphasis on the specific will of God can lead to paralysis and legalism. Note also that if you’re not in God’s general will, you’re probably not in his specific will either. And if you’re recruiting co-leaders for next year, it may be useful to point to God’s general will that they should be ministering, leading, and feeding in some capacity—but God’s specific will for them may or may not include co-leading a DC group next year. Finally, I’ve also found it useful to ask whether God has a will about whether I choose fish or chicken for lunch today. If not (always), it may turn out that some decisions that seem much larger to us (e.g., where we work and live) are the equivalent of fish vs. chicken to God.

-2: A word study on “the will of God” is how this week’s study questions were constructed. Among other things, note that the Bible’s focus is on the general will of God—perhaps an irony given the usual interest in God’s specific will. In any case, knowing God’s will requires knowing God well.

-3a: Among other things, Jesus modeled the process of putting God’s will first—and lining up one’s will with God’s—through prayer and lifestyle. His use of “thy will be done” is a popular phrase within our own prayers, but often it amounts to a cop-out (if God doesn’t answer affirmatively) rather than a submission to the unclear will of God.

-3b: God permits, performs, or prefers. God wants us to be with Jesus in Heaven and like Jesus on Earth.

-3d: Joshua 6’s specific vs. Joshua 8’s general with Joshua filling in the details.

7.) *The Will of God (cont'd)*

-3f: Among other answers, emphasize talk with God, read God's word and listen to God's people. Aside from the answers that emerge from the verses, you can include the prophets, lots and the Urim/Thummim, theophanies, visions, godly counsel, and historical events (as God intervened within Israel's history).

-4: Saved, Spirit-filled, sanctified, submit, suffer, and say. You may want to suggest "serve" as well! The II Samuel passage is interesting here in that it models David's desires and Nathan's initial agreement, but then God's clarification. Note also that God does not rebuke David for his desire or Nathan for giving his consent. We can feel tremendous freedom here—that if we're listening for God's voice, He will let us know if we're not going in a good direction.

-Book resource: In *Finding the Will of God*, Bruce Waltke argues that "finding the will of God" in the specific sense is a "pagan nation". Waltke observes that the NT never commands us to "discover" God's will but "tells" us God's will and encourages us to obey it.

8.) *The problem of suffering*

-Given the length of the study, the reading is briefer and largely covered within the study. So, aside from some coverage of Job, you won't need as much time to discuss the Bible reading this week.

-Littleton article: The distinction between testing and tempting is somewhat useful, but the far larger issue is how we respond to the difficulty—however classified. On the bottom of p. 99, Littleton says “God must know”. Actually, God already knows. Trials are for us and others—or from the reading, Job, Job's friends and the Devil. On p. 100, point #4, Littleton implicitly dismisses the possibility that one could go through a trial very well. A useful example here is when one goes through a trial so well that one doesn't notice that they were even in a trial—until someone pointed it out to them.

-two more good articles on this:

www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/TasteAndSee/ByDate/2006/1776_Dont_Waste_Your_Cancer

http://albertmohler.com/commentary_print.php?cdate=2007-01-22

-1a: Note that God has built us to handle only so much. Somebody once noted that he would feel far more if the last knuckle of his pinky was cut off than if he learned that 10,000 people in a far-away place died last night. If this weren't the case, we would quickly over-load with the pain and suffering of the world.

-1c: Stories here can be very interesting, but still be conscious of your time management.

-2a: The two questions are 2's “how long” (see: James 1's “perseverance”) and 3's “why”—both questioning how God is running His universe. The former questions God's wisdom and timing; the latter questions His justice.

-2b: Habakkuk agrees with God's ends, but disagrees with the means to those ends. Of course, this relates to many things in the Christian life—most notably, the way in which God offers to build our character through circumstances.

-3a: Lengthy trials are often necessary to get our attention and to exhaust our natural resources and resolve. “Length” also develops perseverance, makes the experience more memorable, and in an odd way, allows more error (more opportunity to respond in a marathon vs. a sprint).

8.) *The problem of suffering* (cont'd)

-3b: Jesus was “made perfect”—not in the sense of becoming sinless, but in becoming the perfect sacrifice. He was tempted in every way, but was without sin—and so, can empathize with us and be a complete substitute for us as his death/blood paid for our sins. (Consider that Christ could have come down to earth for a week, jumped up on the cross, been resurrected, and headed home!) Note also that Christ was a perfect model for us—with his fervent prayer and his reverent submission (vs. merely grunting his way through the trial).

-3c: They should have known better! By analogy, everything can look fine—until a storm appears. (See also: the C.S. Lewis quote on the next page.)

-3d: God promises not to tempt us beyond what we can bear—but it doesn’t always feel like that in the moment. (And we can tempt ourselves beyond what we can bear!)

-4c: Our dependence on Him is made more obvious.

-4d: We are often incapable of comprehending the whole; if not, God is not much of a God. And often, it doesn't help to know more anyway. God is glorified by our trust and dependency (I Cor 4:9). And whatever assistance God gives cannot be allowed to supersede our free will too much.

-p. 115: The C.S. Lewis quote here is part of the framework of the movie/play, *Shadowlands*. He delivers this line three times—once before, once during, and once after the crushing trial he endures during the movie. The words are the same, but they sound completely different given the context in which they are delivered.

-5a: Asking “tough questions” of God is fine—even desirable. Along these lines, recommend C.S. Lewis’ *A Grief Observed* as optional reading.

-5b: As does Job, Habakkuk turns from tough but legitimate questions to unreasonable demands (a la Crabb’s *Inside Out*).

-6c: Psalm 73:16-17 is the turning point, leading to the psalmist’s conclusions in 73:21-22 and 73:27-28.

-6d: This is an important take-away in terms of counseling those in grief. Often, as in the old Keith Whitley/Alison Krauss song, “you say it best when you say nothing at all”. Usually, our presence and our role as a listening board are far more important than our words.

-7c: His character, faith, and perspective—but not his circumstances or God’s plan

9.) *Sermon on the Mount*

-In preparation for next week, consider having the guys write 50 words or less about what they most valued from DC, how they grew, etc.

-Memory verses: Ephesians 4:1 is a nice verse to add. It's a great verse for one's prayer life, especially when informed by knowledge of its place with Ephesians. For three chapters, Paul has outlined our resources and position in Christ. Now, at the pivot point of the book, he turns to our responsibilities in Christ by encouraging his readers to "then, live a life worthy of the calling they have received" before getting to the more famous passages in chapters 4-6. This is the subject of a nice little book on Ephesians by Watchman Nee, *Sit, Walk, Stand*.

-Deuteronomy is a nice review of Israel's early history, a prophetic reminder of its future struggles, a useful wrap-up to the life and career of Moses—and thus, a fitting end to our Scripture readings in DC. Highlights this week include 1:39's "age of accountability" (along with Isaiah 7:15, the only explicit references to the concept), 4:7-8 and 4:32-37, 8:17-18, 10:16's NT-like reference to "circumcision of the heart" (as in 30:6 next week), and 14:26.

-This week's lesson benefits from—and nicely sets up—Dallas Willard's book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, a great "capstone" book for graduates of DC. Martyn Lloyd Jones and John Stott also have good books on this topic.

-1: This question should lead to quite a bit of discussion. One of the ironies of this passage is that it would have been so "fresh" to a contemporary audience, but it is among the most familiar (and potentially tired) to us today.

-2a: It's interesting that this takes place on the mountain—as if drawing a parallel to the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai. The direct audience is the disciples—although others were apparently allowed or even encouraged to listen, perhaps alluring some into the Kingdom which Jesus was describing. Note also that Jesus moves away from the crowd, requiring anyone who wanted to listen to make some sort of effort (to follow or listen carefully). Finally, the setting illustrates why "*Sermon on the Mount*" is a bit of a misnomer.

-2b: "Blessed" must refer to joy and peace within character vs. happiness in circumstances. Willard notes that the good news for Jesus' audience is that the kingdom—and being "esteemed by God"—is available (vs. unavailable) for the people in these categories. In contrast, the Old Covenant seemed to tightly connect obedience with material blessings (although stories like Job certainly introduced some wiggle room!), resulting in the assumption that the materially blessed were also spiritually blessed.

9.) *Sermon on the Mount* (cont'd)

-2c: The term “poor in spirit” denotes, among other things, humility, repentance, a dependence on God vs. self, and an ability to accept the grace of God. The term peacemakers implies those who (purposefully/aggressively) *make* peace—vs. merely being peaceful. (See also: Rom 12:17-18, Eph 4:3.)

-2d: We are called to be salt and light in an often rotten and dark world. (See also: I Pet 2:12.)

-3a: Jesus words here anticipate the likely complaint—that he was preaching heresy in diminishing or trashing the Law. (See also: Gal 1:8.) Connects to the Law, but disconnects them from the Pharisees as authority and their understanding of the Law.

-3b-3c: Romans 12:9-21 is a less-familiar passage with similar themes. If merely considered as a tougher standards, this could be taken as a new (and tighter) set of legalisms. Instead, Christ means this to point to the spirit of the law and the sort of life available to those living in God’s kingdom—both individually and corporately. Being results in doing—and so, the focus is rightly placed on the heart rather than external behaviors. (See also: the order of Gal 5:16 [as in Ian Thomas], the Willard quotes in this week’s study, and the “inside out” emphasis of Crabb’s book.)

-4a: The key phrase is “to be seen” in 6:1,5.

-6a: Judgment in the sense of discernment is all over this passage (e.g., plank vs. speck, wolves vs. sheep, narrow vs. wide), so Jesus clearly did not mean to throw away judgment of that sort. Rather, this is a warning to judge situations with humility and a recognition of our ignorance.

-6c,e: An application for both of these questions is the tension between the errors of legalism and libertine behavior.

10.) Conclusion

-If your church is also running DC202 groups—one year behind your DC403 group—strongly consider going to that group’s meeting and praying for them to persevere, etc. Very cool!

-Note also that II Timothy 2:2 speaks to multiplying disciples over four generations! Our goal: our kids “saved” vs. our great-grandkids as disciples of Christ.

-We were unable to obtain permission for a nice interview w/ John Ortberg in *Leadership* (Winter 2004, p. 22-27): <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2004/001/1.22.html>. Here’s a good article from Janie Cheaney in *World* http://www.worldmag.com/2012/12/advance_instructions.

-This is an obvious place to recommend Willard’s relevant book, *The Divine Conspiracy*. (Again, it is a terrific book to use as a postscript to completing DC.) The bottom of p. 138 seems to be built around a recent memory passage, I Thess 5:16-18.

-1-2: These questions are aimed at a common lack of competence and/or confidence when people consider leadership positions and mentoring relationships. Of course, we hope that people are in much better shape on both counts after completing DC.

-2b: What would we hope for Jeremiah to say in 1:6—given his reasonable fears? Quick and unconditional acceptance is perhaps worrisome, but excuse making on the other extreme is also problematic. Something in-between—accepting the task but asking for provision or questioning some aspect of the mission—is probably a preferred response.

-2c: Along with the passage here, the end of the first Lewis quote on p. 141 talks about “a secret society”—again, a helpful reference to the “conspiracy” of Willard’s *The Divine Conspiracy*.

-2d: If time allows, you may want to have a significant discussion of Exodus 18.

-2c-3a: Crabb’s quotes (p. 145, 148) lay out a vision for elders as true leaders/mentors in their church—well beyond attending committee meetings, picking out furniture.

-3b: Among other things, note Daniel’s nuanced responses to unrighteous rulers and his ability to switch kings and kingdoms. The integrity of Daniel in 6:4—neither negligence nor corruption (what’s the difference?)—is an especially high calling.

-4: Note the importance of seeing people for who they are as well as what they can be.

-5b: On I Tim 4:15’s progress, note that it does not say “perfection”. Moreover, progress implies improvement which implies past failure. Showing progress implies illustrating both past failure and current improvement/success.

DC Graduation Agenda

Schedule

- 6:00-6:30 fellowship
- 6:30-8:45 dinner and program
- 6:30 intro, opening prayer and dinner
- ➔ Dinner (send at least half up front): other churches; PM and SE Women; AM
- 7:15 Kurt—brief, spontaneous testimonies from graduates and wives (about themselves and the groups; we control the mics!)
- 7:30 speaker—an elder, deacon, pastor, etc.
- 7:45 Eric’s brief comments and emcee diplomas
- if all together (15-20 seconds per person): need list of grads by class; ladies and other churches first; make sure you know how to pronounce ALL names; Kurt/Debbie to congratulate and help up front
 - if by small groups (15-20 minutes per group): instructions to get diplomas, bless/thank; word of encouragement; short time of prayer
 - if so, mark tables by group—or encourage co-leaders to get the right number of chairs (and allow more room for extra seats); and big groups on the side
- 8:10 Kurt & Debbie—presentation (swords/pitchers in alphabetical order; get list!) to co-leaders (and photo)
- 8:20 Kurt’s PowerPoint presentation on the vision of DC and “next steps”
- DC as God’s word, small group, intensive (5 hours), time (21 months / 3.5 years), class participation (equally), aiming for go/multiply and lay-leadership development (lead self, family, others)
- 8:35 Popcorn prayer &/or circle prayer with laying on hands
- Kurt’s closing comments/prayer
- 8:45 picture of all graduates together??

Potential Gifts:

-for co-leaders:

-men: swords from By-The-Sword.com (was #40-910893, but now want a different sword/finish) or the XL1170 Tomahawk—with engraving (in Louisville) by "From The Vault" (502-893-0900)

-women: pitchers from Etcetera (502-425-9277)

-for grads:

-diplomas are on-line (feel free to add/substitute your church's logo); frames come "Get Smart Products" or retailers such as Target, Office Depot, Walmart, etc.

-consider books like Oswald Sanders on *Spiritual Leadership* or Dallas Willard's *Spirit of the Disciplines*

-www.steurerjacoby.com: a set of four (double-layer or single-layer) DC drink coasters retails for \$35, but the cost for DC'ers is \$22.50. They can also make luggage tags and Journal covers.

Things to consider doing:

-Send invitations—with RSVP, child care details, dress (jacket/tie).

-Make sure the speaker is *well-acquainted* with the DC program. If you don't do this, you're likely to end up with a "charge" to your DC'ers that aims far too low.

-Produce/distribute a card to promote DC and other options; emphasize shoulder-tapping.

-Consider place settings, gifts for graduates, count pregnancies and note other key events.

-Have wife and/or kids (if applicable) write a letter answering the following: here's how I've seen my husband/dad become more like Jesus / learn how to follow Jesus completely over the past 21 months

Finally; looking forward (if you're doing DC again)...

If you're interested, make sure to check out our on-line videos of training for co-leaders. We do two three-hour sessions—1.) with 1.5 hours on "shoulder-tapping" and the importance of shepherding within DC groups—and 1.25 hours on a simulation of DC101, week 2; and 2.) 1.75 hours on the Leaders Guide (intro through week 2 of DC101)—and 1 hour on a simulation of DC201, week 2.