

Small Group Guide

THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

April 14, 2013

1 Corinthians 1

Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciple-makers, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge (Main Truth) to understanding (Why It Matters) to application (Now What Do We Do?). Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

GETTING STARTED

Welcome – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

Looking Back – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster deeper relationships among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

Looking Up – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other's families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group's prayer time.

Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- Pray for Our Lives: Pray our church would be open to hearing the message from God in 1 Corinthians. Pray we will be reminded of and acknowledge all of the blessings we have received in Christ Jesus. Thank God for these blessings. Ask Him to help us better understand the importance of Christian community and to seek from His Word how to have that type of fellowship with one another. Pray for God to unite us as a local body around the message of the cross. Ask Him to grant us strength to persevere through the ridicule we will face from the world who views such a message as foolishness.*
- Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for the ministry of thirteen Brook Hills members who are working with children weekly on Sunday mornings at Diving Faith Baptist Church in Gate City. We are also praying for Sixth Avenue Baptist Church and John Cantelow, Pastor.*
- Pray for Our World: Throughout the month of April, our faith family is committed to praying for the Hui, a Muslim people group in China. There are around 13 million Hui*

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in China and up until recently no Hui church established among them. This week we are praying for believers among the majority people group, the Han, to reach out to their Hui neighbors and share the gospel. Historically this has not always been easy, so join with us this week as we pray for our brothers and sisters to be bold to share with the Hui.

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

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1 Corinthians 1

Why 1 Corinthians?

- As we grow...
 - We want to care for every single member of a relatively large church.
- As we go...
 - We want to be faithful to God's Word as God's people in a rapidly shifting culture.

The Church...

A Community Formed By The Cross

- The cross humbles us.
 - The contrast...
 - To those who are perishing, the cross seems absurd.
 - To those who are being saved, the cross evokes awe.
 - The cause...
 - Not the specific quality of those who are called.
 - Only the sovereign mercy of the One who calls.
 - The caution...
 - Recognize the initiative of God.
 - Remember the responsibility of man.
 - The conclusion...
 - We don't revel in the wisdom or the ways of this world.
 - We only revel in the grace and the glory of our God.
- The cross satisfies us.
 - Because of the cross, all of our guilt is gone.
 - Because of the cross, all of God's gifts are ours.
- The cross unifies us.
 - The cross erases any reason for division among us.
 - The cross exalts the only One who died for us.
- The cross transforms us.
 - Christ is our righteousness: He has saved us from sin's penalty.
 - Christ is our sanctification: He is saving us from sin's power.
 - Christ is our redemption: He will save us from sin's presence.
- The cross compels us.
 - We want to reflect the holiness of God.
 - We want to proclaim the hope of the gospel.
- The cross assures us.
 - The Christ who came to die on a cross is the Christ who's coming to usher in a kingdom.
 - The church is not living for our best life now; the church is living for our best life later.

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Message Summary

As we study 1 Corinthians in this new sermon series *The Cross and Christian Community*, we examine how the cross affects our individual lives and our relationships with fellow believers. The Corinthian believers struggled with living distinct lives from their surrounding culture, and Paul's instructions to these believers in the first century contain relevant implications for believers in the twenty-first century. 1 Corinthians 1 sets the theme for the entire book by emphasizing the linchpin of Christianity – the cross of Christ. The church is a community formed by the cross, for we recognize that the cross humbles us, satisfies us, unifies us, transforms us, compels us to obey, and assures us of the return of Christ and the consummation of His kingdom.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

While this sermon series is a shift from the *Threads* series that we wrapped up last week, this sermon series piggybacks on the last sermon of the *Threads* series, which focused on practical next steps for new believers. If you do have spiritually young believers in your small group who are not consistently studying the Word on their own, encourage them to study this passage in their personal devotional time with God. Do not take for granted that everyone in your group knows how to study the Word and to be self-feeders. Depending on the people in your group, you might consider taking time to walk your small group through how to study Scripture for themselves. Explain to them how you study God's Word, and while your way is not the only way to study Scripture, it does at least provide others with a helpful example to follow. If you need further resources on how to study Scripture, use the Secret Church on "How to Study the Bible" from November 2007 (radical.net/media).

As we begin this new sermon series on 1 Corinthians, take time to explain the context of this epistle to your small group. Use this opportunity to discuss the importance of researching who wrote the letter, the historical context, the situation of the original recipients of the letter, and the major themes of the book. Help the people in your small group to know what resources they can access to learn such information such as commentaries or New Testament survey books. Do not take for granted that they even know what commentaries are, how to use them, or that they know how to choose a solid commentary.

Paul wrote this letter to real people who were struggling with an assortment of issues, and it helps us to better understand 1 Corinthians and its present day application when we understand the circumstances of the original recipients of this letter. Included below is background information that is helpful for understanding 1 Corinthians.

- Acts 18:1-17 informs us that Paul traveled to Corinth after addressing the Athenians at the Areopagus (Acts 17), and it is here that he met Aquila and Priscilla who were fellow believers, tentmakers, and would become fellow missionary partners. While in Corinth, Paul attempted to reason with the Jews in the synagogues, but when they opposed him, he turned his attention to the Gentiles. He stayed in Corinth a year and a half but left after the Jews tried to bring before the local tribunal.
- Although Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue in Corinth, converted to Christianity (Acts 18:8), the Corinthian church consisted mostly of Gentile believers (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 12:2). Having pagan religious backgrounds and being in a city and culture where prostitution and homosexuality were rampant, these new believers struggled with forsaking their former practices such as incest, using prostitutes, and idolatry (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 6:12-20; 10:1-22). Their ignorance as well as their attempts at syncretism (merging their pagan practices with their new beliefs) motivated Paul to write this letter.
- The Corinthian church included believers from various social classes, and this contributed to conflict within the church. Wealthy men such as Crispus and Stephanus had households that likely included slaves (1 Cor. 1:16; 16:15), but the church also included the poor as well as manual laborers such as

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Aquila and Priscilla (1 Cor. 1:26). The varying economic state and social statuses of the Corinthian believers led to tension in the church, particularly with regard to the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34).

- Disunity existed in the church in the following areas:
 - Factions over which leader they followed (1:10-17; 3:1-23)
 - Believers suing each other in a pagan court (6:1-11)
 - The Lord's Supper (11:17-34)

Major themes of 1 Corinthians include instructions for holy living, for unity, and for adherence to the gospel. Why are these themes important? How are the people in your small group doing in each of these areas? Do they lead holy lifestyles? What areas of life are they not living gospel-aligned lives? Do they contribute to unity, or do they cause strife? What does it look like to live a cross-centered life? If a cross-centered life is the goal, what steps do they take to get to that goal? How does the cross of Christ transform our thoughts, our affections, our will, our relationships, our purpose, and our mission? Be as specific as possible with application and with identifying next steps that the people in your group can take as they seek to grow in their relationship with God.

Recognizing the differences that existed among the people in the Corinthian church, Paul focuses on the linchpin of this faith community – the cross of Christ. With your small group, identify what it looks like to be a community centered on the gospel. What should be characteristics of such a community? Do the group's descriptions describe the small group? Do they describe our faith family? If not, what are the discrepancies, and how can they be addressed in a Christ-like manner? Brainstorm together how the people in this small group can better care for each other.

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- How can we improve in our care for every single member of Brook Hills? How can each individual in the small group contribute in member care at our church? How can your small group grow in caring for each other? What steps can the group members take this week to know what is going on in the lives of each group member and to better care for each other?
- One motivating reason that our church is beginning this study of 1 Corinthians is to help us be faithful Christ-followers in our culture. As a small group, describe our culture. What are the pressures and challenges of being a Christian in a secular work environment? Of being in a family of unbelievers? Of being in a society that accepts and promotes sexual promiscuity, divorce, pornography, homosexuality, abortion, etc.? What challenges do you face as a Christian in this culture? How can you as a Christ-follower be faithful to God and to His Word in this culture? How are you distinct from the culture?
- What does it mean for the church to be a community formed by the cross? What implications does this have for your relationships with others in the church or your relationships with those in your small group?
- In 1 Corinthians 1: 1, 2, 9, 22, and 26, Paul describes how believers are "called" and "chosen." This truth should humble us. What does humility look like? In what areas do you struggle with pride?
- In 1 Corinthians 1:18, Paul explains that the cross seems absurd to unbelievers. Why would people think the cross is ridiculous? Have you encountered such people? How could you respond to unbelievers who think it is preposterous that God would become man, that the cross somehow saves people from eternal damnation, or that a man who proclaimed to be God and who died on a cross 2000 years ago has something to offer the independent American who has everything?

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- What causes some to look at the cross with awe instead of seeing it as folly is the sovereign mercy of the One who has called you to faith and who has enabled you to see the cross with awe. In recognizing the initiative of God and the responsibility of man in responding to God's initiative, how can you explain 1 Corinthians 1:2, 21? How can you explain to someone in simple terms how God's sovereign choosing and man's responsibility are both at work in salvation? Both unbelievers and believers wrestle with this question, and we ought to study and be equipped to walk alongside others who have such questions.
- As Christ-followers, we are not to revel in the wisdom or ways in this world. Describe the world's wisdom or thinking with regard to each of the following areas: the role of men and women, marriage, parenting, work, money, priorities, possessions. In what ways are you following the world's wisdom instead of the Lord's wisdom? What sins do you need to confess? How can you encourage each other in your small group to revel in the grace and glory of God instead of in the ways of this world (see 1 Cor. 1:28-31)?
- While the cross of Christ satisfies us and clears us of all guilt (1 Cor. 1:8), many believers still struggle with shame and guilt. Why is this? What reasons or things cause you to feel guilty? What does God's Word say about your guilt if you are a Christ-follower? How does the cross of Christ address your guilt? How can you live in light of Christ's forgiveness and freedom?
- The Corinthian church wrestled with disunity, but the cross unifies us Christ-followers. In what ways did the Corinthian church struggle with division (1 Cor. 1:10-17)? Is division an issue in your small group? Is division present in your relationships with believers outside of the small group? If so, what are the reasons for the divide? How can you take steps towards reconciliation this week in those divided relationships? What sins do you need to repent of regarding the role you have played in the disunity? How does the cross unify believers (see Eph. 2:11-22)?
- The cross exalts the One who has died for us and who transforms us. No man or woman can save you, for they are imperfect people who will eventually let you down. Discuss the dangers of putting your hope in other people whether that person is your pastor, your small group leader or discipler, a Christian leader, a parent, or even your spouse. If you have misplaced your hope in a person, confess this sin but also examine your heart to find the root of why you have trusted in them more than you have trusted in God.
- How has Christ transformed you? How is He continuing to transform your thinking? Your affections? Your will? Your relationships? Your purpose? If transformation is not evident in each of these areas, why? How are you nurturing your personal relationship with God? Are you consistently spending time in prayer, in studying Scripture, and in memorizing and meditating on God's Word?
- Christ has saved us from sin's penalty, sin's power, and sin's presence. Discuss the significance and the implications of these truths. Particularly, how does Christ empower us to battle against sin's power in our lives? Consider the specific areas of sin in which you struggle. How are you currently responding to temptation in those areas? What steps can you take in resisting temptation in these areas?
- The cross compels us to reflect the holiness of God and to proclaim the hope of the gospel. Is the cross your motivation for righteous living? If not, what is your motivation? In what ways do you reflect God's holiness? In what ways do you misrepresent God in how you live? What does it mean for you to be holy?
- 1 Corinthians 1:8 points us to return of Christ when He will usher in His kingdom. How we live now has eternal ramifications. Are you living in light of eternity, or are you focusing on temporal pleasures and pursuits? What changes need to be made in your life in order to live faithfully in light of Christ's impending return? How can your small group encourage and help you with making these changes?