

Small Group Guide THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE (PART 1)

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. Jim Shaddix

July 7, 2013

1 Corinthians 7:1-24

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: Praise God for His good gift of marriage. Pray we will all look to Scripture for our understanding of marriage. Pray for married couples throughout our faith family to be protected from temptations to unfaithfulness. Ask God to guide us all as we seek to relate to one another in love. Pray for parents as they teach their children God's plan for marriage. Pray married couples in our faith family will live in such a way that they serve as a model of biblical marriage for all those around them.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for three summer outreach initiatives in July through our urban Rock the Blocks with various ministry partners. We are also praying for New Community Baptist Church and Donnie Chapman, Pastor.*
- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for Brook Hills Mid-Termers Jeremy and Amanda H. serving in Southeast Asia. Jeremy and Amanda both teach English at a local university. They are using this job opportunity to engage unreached people groups in Southeast Asia with the gospel. We are also praying for our two Short-Term teams serving in Ecuador with the Brock and Coe families.*

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MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

The Cross and Christian Marriage (Part 1)

1 Corinthians 7:1-24

Good questions about sexual temptation...

- Should I get married and risk the temptation of adultery?
- Should I stay single and risk the temptation of fornication?
- Should I continue to have sexual relations with my spouse?
- Should I continue in a marriage relationship that isn't ideal?

Biblical answers regarding marriage...

- Monogamous, heterosexual marriage is a safeguard against sexual immorality. (1 Corinthians 7:2,9)
 - Get married for Proclamation. (cf. Ephesians 5:22-32)
 - Get married for Procreation. (cf. Genesis 1:28)
 - Get married for Partnership. (cf. Genesis 2:18; Ephesians 5:25-27; 1 Peter 3:7)
 - Get married for Pleasure. (cf. Song of Solomon; Proverbs 5:15-19; Hebrews 13:5)
 - Get married for Purity. (1 Corinthians 7:2,9)
- The delightful duty of sex within monogamous, heterosexual marriage is a safeguard against sexual immorality. (1 Corinthians 7:3-5)
 - Pay your debt.
 - Pay your debt gladly.
 - Pay your debt spiritually.
 - Pay your debt frequently.
 - Pay your debt passionately.
- The delightful duty of sex within monogamous, heterosexual marriage is a safeguard against sexual immorality for those to whom it has been given. (1 Corinthians 7:6-8)
 - Explore God's grace in your life seriously.
 - Express thanksgiving to God frequently.

Message Summary

Following two sermons on Christian sexuality, part one of "The Cross and Christian Marriage" presents 1 Corinthians 7's instructions regarding marriage and God's design for sex. In this passage, Paul responds to a question from the Corinthians about celibacy, for the believers in Corinth leaned towards celibacy as their response for how to glorify God with their body in a sex-crazed culture. However, Scripture teaches that monogamous, heterosexual marriage is one of many safeguards against sexual immorality, and it informs believers that God designed marriage for proclamation, procreation, partnership, pleasure, and purity. While sex is a delightful duty within marriage, not everyone will be married, and whether married or single, believers should frequently express thanksgiving to God for His sufficiency and for His sovereign plan for their lives.

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WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

The previous two sermons centered on sexual immorality and on God's design for sex, and in Corinth, the believers wrestled with how to live pure lives in such a sex-crazed culture. 1 Corinthians 7:1 indicates that they had written to Paul with questions concerning sexual purity and other issues, and from his response, we learn that the Corinthians had leaned towards celibacy, even for those who were married, as their method for fighting against sexual temptation. Paul teaches that abandoning sex and marriage is not the answer. Provide this context for your small group as you teach, and discuss how the thinking of Paul's original readers relates to the "good questions about sexual temptation" in the sermon outline.

Depending on the demographics of your group, you may consider dividing into same-gender groups to discuss some or all of this sermon because of the nature of the content. If your group consists of singles, please do not shy away from discussing the section on biblical answers regarding marriage. In fact, consider various reasons for why singles *should* learn what the Bible teaches about marriage.

Depending on the backgrounds, families, and experiences of those in the small group, group members were implicitly and explicitly taught a variety of attitudes towards sex. Ask the group to share if they were taught to view sex as a good, pleasurable part of God's design for the marriage relationship or if they were taught that sex is dirty, something to be endured, or something to indulge in whenever you feel like it. Ask how these attitudes have affected their perception of sex and of relationships. Why is it important to recognize and to address prior experiences and instruction regarding sexuality?

Sexual temptations do not go away once a person marries, and while marriage is a safeguard against sexual immorality, it is not the only safeguard. As a small group, share with each other how you each fight against temptation in your thoughts, desires, and actions.

- **For those who are single**, ask how they expect to battle sexual temptation well once they are married if they cannot consistently fight against sexual temptation as a single. What steps can they take to guard against sexual immorality as a single? What frustrations or challenges are they facing in their fight for purity?
- **For those who are married**, ask how the men and the women are guarding against sexual immorality. What frustrations or challenges are they facing in their fight for purity? What steps can they take to guard against sexual immorality and to protect their marriage?
- **For parents**, how are you equipping your children to fight against sexual temptation? Who is teaching your child about sexuality? What temptations is your child facing at his or her particular age? Does your child understand that not only is intercourse prohibited outside of marriage but so is oral sex, petting, etc.? Especially in an age of smart phone apps such as Snapchat (an app that deletes pictures and messages after 10 seconds of being viewed), encourage parents to talk with their kids about sexual immorality, the Internet, and sexting (sending sexually explicit pictures or messages via text). Use Pastor David's three types of relationships from the previous week's sermon to discuss with your child what is appropriate in their relationships. What are you explicitly and implicitly teaching your child about marriage and about sex? Often, kids hear about the things they should not do, but are they also hearing about God's *good* design for sex?
 - One resource for parents is the Faith Family Worship Guide that accompanies each sermon at our church. It can be downloaded from radical.net/media and is listed with each sermon under "Materials."

With such a culture of divorce in this country, the temptation is to avoid marriage because of a "high regard" for marriage that goes hand-in-hand with a fear of divorce or because divorce is assumed and is a hassle that can be avoided by not marrying. Either way, cohabitation *seems* to reap the benefits of marriage without the legal obligations, commitment, or label of marriage. But cohabitation goes against God's design for sex and

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for marriage. Please do not assume that everyone in the group is on the same page with Scripture when it comes to cohabitation. This past fall, I met with a young single (22-early 30s) who had started attending Brook Hills, and during our conversation, I learned that she was living with her boyfriend. She had recently become a Christ-follower, had not grown up in church or in the Bible belt, and did not know enough of the Bible to know what it says about living together outside of marriage. For such people, it is helpful to walk through the five reasons for why believers should marry and to also look at the Bible verses associated with each of the points. Even if your group consists of couples or of singles who know the Word, talk through the five reasons for marriage and why they are important. Ask if anyone in the group has questions regarding these reasons.

With regard to the section on “the delightful duty of sex,” one question that might arise is what it means to “pay your debt spiritually.” Throughout this sermon series, we have discussed how marriage presents a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:22-33), but how does sex fit into this picture? It depicts the intimacy that Christ desires to have with His people. Sex within marriage creates a oneness between a husband and wife and points to the oneness that God intends to have with His people. Explain that the oneness God intends to have with His people is not a physical, sexual act. Because of the intimacy sex represents and because sex in marriage between a man and a woman is God’s good design, Satan strives to pervert sex, to destroy marriage, and to lead us into sin. Satan does not want us to have intimate relationship with God, and He desires to wreck the spiritual picture sex presents. Also, when we have sex, we involve Christ-in-us in the physical union (see 1 Corinthians 6:15-20), and this reality should spur us on to sexual purity. 1 Corinthians 7:5 also references a husband and wife agreeing to abstain from sex for a season in order to devote themselves to prayer, but Paul also urges them to “come together again” afterwards in order to avoid the enemy’s attacks in the area of sexual passion, which demonstrates how sex within marriage acts as a safeguard against sexual immorality.

Utilize part of your time together to pray for the health of marriages in our faith family. Use the “Pray for Our Lives” portion above to guide this time of prayer. Pray for purity for those who are married and for those who are single.

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?).

- Whether single or married, how *can* you glorify God with your body in a world filled with sexual temptation? How *are you currently* glorifying God with your body? How are you guarding against sexual immorality? How can you guard against sexual immorality in your thoughts? In your desires? In your actions?
- What frustrations or challenges do you face in fighting against sexual immorality in your own life? How are you addressing these in your own life? What does Scripture say with regard to your frustrations or challenges?
- For those who are married to an unbeliever, to a spouse entrenched in sin, to a spouse you are not “in love” with, or to a spouse who is spiritually mismatched to you, how can you honor God and your spouse when this is the state of your marriage?
- Song of Solomon and Proverbs 5:15-19 speak of the physical fulfillment that sex provides in marriage. However, many families and contexts do not discuss this aspect of sexuality. Instead, they act as though sex is dirty, shameful, or something to dutifully endure (especially for females), or they emphasize pleasure and throw purity out the window. What were you taught about sex? How has your prior experiences affected your perception of sex and your relationships?
- Monogamous, heterosexual marriage is a safeguard against sexual immorality, but it is not the only safeguard. What other safeguards are there for women? For men?

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- In the sermon, Pastor Jim listed five biblical reasons for why believers should marry. If you are single, do you want to marry? If so, are these truly your reasons for desiring marriage?
- If you are married, how is your marriage proclaiming the gospel? In what ways, husbands, are you living out your role of servant leadership in your family? In what ways, wives, are you living out your role of glad submission to your husband? What challenges do you face in fulfilling your role in your marriage relationship? What steps can be taken to address those challenges?
- For parents, what are you explicitly and implicitly teaching your children about marriage? How can you talk to your kids about not just the prohibitions relating to sex (don't have sex outside of marriage) but also about the goodness of sex according to God's design? What questions do you have regarding teaching your kids about sex and marriage? How are you equipping your children to fight against sexual immorality in their own lives?
- Read 1 Corinthians 7:2. God's definition of marriage includes a monogamous, heterosexual relationship. This is the only type of marriage that guards against sexual immorality. Why are polygamy and homosexuality not true pictures of the gospel? Why do these relationships and any other redefinition of marriage *not* curb sexual immorality but instead foster it?
- Read 1 Corinthians 7:3-5. In marriage, sexual intimacy is a debt that is owed to your spouse. What thoughts, attitudes, and actions hinder husbands and wives from gladly serving and loving each other in this way? For those who are married, what sin(s) do you need to confess in this area? With regards to sexual intimacy, how can you better serve your spouse this week?
- In the sermon outline, believers are encouraged to "pay your debt spiritually." What does this mean? What is the spiritual component of sex?
- Read 1 Corinthians 7:6-8. Twice Paul states that he wishes everyone would remain single, and he calls singleness a "gift." What does this mean? How is singleness a gift? For those who are single, do you consider your singleness to be a gift or a curse? Have you made an idol out of marriage? How are you using your singleness for the glory of God? How are you making the most of your singleness for God's Kingdom and not just for your own pleasure?
- How are you pursuing gratitude in your heart for where God has you whether single or married? What specific things are you thankful for? If you struggle with resentment, regret, jealousy, or wishing for a different lot in life, how can you combat these temptations? For you, what is at the root of such struggles? How can you intentionally practice gratitude this week?