

Small Group Guide THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE (PART 2)

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. Jim Shaddix

July 14, 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: Pray for all the individuals and families in our faith family who have been touched by divorce to discover the healing for their hearts only God offers. Ask God to grant us a right, biblical understanding of divorce. Pray for struggling marriages within our faith family to be healed and restored. Pray for the reconciliation of broken marriages. Ask the Spirit to be an ever-present comfort to children of divorce and wise guide to divorced parents. Repent of how many of us have been guilty of not treating divorce with the gravity it requires.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for a new outreach initiative at Childersburg Work Release coordinated by Brook Hills member Jack Hausen. Jack is serving as the volunteer chaplain there five days a week there through We Care Ministries. We are also praying for Westwood Baptist Church, Alabaster and Matt Brooks, Pastor.*

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- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for the over 1.5 billion Muslims around the world participating in Ramadan. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. This year, it began the evening of July 8th and will last until August 7th. It is the holy month in which Muslims believe Mohammed received the revelation of the Quran. Muslims observe Ramadan by fasting from dawn until sunset and will work harder than any other time of the year to please their Maker and earn redemption for their trespasses. Join us this week as we pray for Muslims around the world and for Brook Hills partners who are serving among Muslim people groups. For more resources on how to pray during Ramadan visit radical.net/secretchurch/blog. We are also praying for our Short-Term teams serving in Namibia and in Cuba.*

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

The Principle of Status Quo

The gospel always makes radical change in your moral and spiritual life, but it doesn't always make radical change in your circumstances. Consider sanctifying your present situation before you consider changing it.

- General rule: Stay in the situation you were in when you were saved. (1 Corinthians 7:17,20,24)
 - Religious system
 - Social standing
 - Income stream
 - Job situation
 - Marital status
- God's character: God is sovereign and faithful in your current situation. (1 Corinthians 7:17,24)
- Gospel values: Remember grace, pursue holiness and reject entitlement. (1 Corinthians 7:19,22-23)

The Application to Marital Status

- If you're a Christian single...
 - ...Assume your singleness is God's will as long as your body is content. (1 Corinthians 7:8-9,36-40)
- If you're a Christian married to another Christian...
 - ...Assume your marriage is God's will as long as your spouse is alive. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11,39-40)

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- If you're a Christian married to a non-Christian...

...Assume your marriage is God's will as long as your spouse is content.
(1 Corinthians 7:12-16)

Additional Resource: For a fuller treatment of the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage—as well as a statement of our church's understanding on the subjects—see “The Gospel and Divorce” document drafted by the Brook Hills elders. Go to www.brookhills.org/new/beliefs and then click on “Family.”

Message Summary

This week is our second looking at the Cross and Christian Marriage. Paul addressed the Corinthian church and urges them to remain as they are called. While the gospel always radically changes us morally and spiritually, it doesn't always radically change our circumstances. Rather, God expects all of us to live as we are called as a general rule. God is sovereign and faithful in our present situations. Paul used this ideal to specifically address many beliefs and misconceptions about marriage, singleness and divorce. The principle of status quo is still valuable to us today as we seek to honor God as we have been called.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

This message marks week two of our study on the Cross and Christian Marriage. As this sermon builds off the last, take a few moments at the start of your time together to review the historical background of 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Why does Paul stop here to address the issue of marriage with the Corinthian church? What issue in the culture is Paul seeking to address? What specific issues were the believers in Corinth struggling with? How does the context of the passage help us to understand what the Holy Spirit is saying to us today? Do the members of your small group know how to investigate the historical context of a particular passage of Scripture? What do tools like Bible atlases, dictionaries, study notes, and commentaries add to the study of God's Word? How might these deepen and enliven our interaction with the Biblical text? Remind the group that while these tools are extra-Biblical and non-essential to the study of Scripture, but they are helpful in a variety of ways.

One central exhortation from this section in 1 Corinthians is to remain as you are or live as you are called. While the gospel will always radically alter our moral and spiritual lives, gospel grace is not always accompanied by a radical call to change your circumstances. Often times when a person is saved, their tendency may be to withdraw from other elements of their lives that do not seem ideal. What are the backgrounds of those who are in your group? What type of life did they lead before they became a Christ-follower? Consider having the group up into small groups of threes and fours and share their stories. Once they became Christians, did they retreat from these people and situations or continue in them to share the love and mercy of God with others? Keep in mind that there are likely a wide variety of pre-conversion situations among those present. Some may have been raised in the church so the circumstances of their life might not be very different after they were saved than from while others may have come from a situation that necessarily required a radical change in the circumstances of their life. How could we communicate the principle of status quo to those we are discipling or other new believers we come into contact with?

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Direct the group to consider what it would mean to sanctify their present situation; this may be particularly relevant if there are new Christians in the group. For example, when I responded to the grace of God in my life, I was living life with a radically liberal group of people. Many were and continued to be lost in sexual sin, most were atheist, and many carried some hostility or aversion to Christian faith. While I initially withdrew myself from many of the people and circumstances I was apart of, over time I left myself spend more and more time with these people. Because of my unique understanding of their thoughts, beliefs, values, and perspectives, God has blessed me many times, by allowing me to share the gospel message. Many, if not most, remain hard hearted, but God has used my relationship and mutual respect with many of my non-believing friends to soften their hearts and breathe truth into their lives by weaving gospel threads. Who are these people in the lives of the members of your group? How can God use your present life circumstances to share the gospel? Are there a particular group of people or many even two or three specific people that God has specifically gifted you to minister to? Remind the group that God is sovereign and faithful in their current situations. Pray that God would give everyone the wisdom to see whom He has given them the opportunity to share His love and grace with?

Consider how the gospel affects your present situation with regard to the following areas with regard to the principle of status quo:

- **Religious system** – Paul warns the Corinthians about circumcision. There is no amount of religious doing that can earn us favor before God. What might this look like in the contemporary world?
- **Social standing** – Who are the people God has placed within your sphere of influence? Have you considered that God has placed you in a specific task or job to share the love of Christ with people in those circles? Who in your social circles has God uniquely gifted you to speak the gospel to?
- **Income stream** – Some people may feel guilty because they are making too much or feel bound because they do not make enough to really impact the world. Do you let your finance stop you from serving God in a particular way? How can you most glorify God with your finances?
- **Job situation** – God has sovereignty placed people in their present employment situations. A new Christian's employment is never a surprise to God. How can we glorify God in a job situation that is less than ideal? How would you counsel a believer who is in a job situation where it is not possible to glorify God with their work?
- **Marital status** – Paul gives words of advice to three situations within the broader context of marriage.
 - **Those who are single** – Paul urges the Corinthians to stay in their present situation as long as their bodies are content. How can those who are single best live out their present situation from the Lord? How do you know when your body is not content anymore? How does this specifically relate to those who have been widowed? What does the Bible teach about divorce, and how does this principle relate to those who have been divorced for both Biblical and unbiblical provisions? How would you counsel a divorced new-believer?
 - **Those who are married to another Christian** – It is God's expressed will that two Christians who are married remain that way as long as their spouse is alive. What are reasons that Christians give for divorcing their spouses? What should we do if we find ourselves in a marriage situation that is less than ideal? What does it mean for God to be sovereign in your marriage?
 - **Those who are married to a non-Christian** - Christians should remain in these relationships as long as their spouse is content. How can we support brothers and sisters who are in this situation? Is anyone in the group in this situation? Why is it better to let a non-believing spouse go without much struggle if they become discontent?

Give specific attention to the marital status of those in your group. What does the rule of present circumstances say the members of your group with regard to their marital status? How does this principle of status quo affect them differently? Consider referring members of your group to the statement from our elders listed on the outline above if they are interested in reading a fuller treatment of this topic. It is currently a scrolling feature on the Brook Hills website.

NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

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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?).

- Often we think about status quo as a bad thing. What is the principle of status quo and how does it relate to the Christian life? How can this idea bring glory to honor to the Lord in the lives of new Christians?
- Consider reading these verses and taking special notice of how many times Paul uses the word "call" or "called". Read 1 Corinthians 7:17. What is Paul's rule to the churches? How can we live as we are called? What does that look like in your present situation?
- What was your life like when you were called by God to salvation? What things did you hold on to, and what things did you let go of? How do these things reflect the idea of status quo?
- How can you mobilize your current social standing to most effectively make disciples of all nations? Do you embrace your current social standing or do you seek to change it hoping a more ideal situation will come along? How does waiting for an "ideal" situation diminish the commands of Jesus in the great commission? Does waiting for something better ever keep you from doing what God has called you to do?
- God knows and is sovereign over our present circumstances. What does it mean to have a life assignment? What is your current life assignment? How can you use this to the glory of God? How does one respond when they are struggling in their present assignment? How can you appeal to God's character in your present circumstances? What attributes of God help us live and thrive in our present situations even if they are less than ideal?
- Read 1 Corinthians 7:19. What role does the pursuit of holiness play in the principle of status quo? What steps can you take to more fully pursue God in your present situation?
- As Christians, we should reject entitlement. How does entitlement diminish the message of the gospel?
- How do Paul's directions to remain as you are and live as you are called relieve anxiety and give comfort to those who are struggling in their current circumstances? Do you know anyone who is struggling right now that you can offer prayer and support to? Take a moment to pray for these brothers and sisters.
- In the first century as well as today, marriage is regarded as the norm in theory and in practice. How does the principle of status quo relate to our marital status? Does Paul see marriage as the norm? How does Paul address those who are single? Read 1 Corinthians 7:7-8.
- What is God's will for Christian married couples? If you are married how can you help you support and care for your spouse in your marriage? What if your marriage begins to feel like a less than ideal situation over time? How can we fight against this? To those who are single, how can you support and pray for your married brothers and sisters? What role does entitlement play in divorce?
- What is God's will for Christians with a non-believing spouse? Why is evangelism never a sufficient reason to get married? Why should we say no to missionary marriage and dating?
- How can you most glorify God in your present situation?