

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Jesus and the Cross 4: How it changes us



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: These sessions explore the many different meanings of the cross and, if possible, it is good if they can be used in order to help build up the picture of what it means.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

How do you know God loves you?

Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

When we see the beauty of the cross, it enables our lives to be changed in fundamental ways:

We are able to come to God with confidence and trust. “Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16)
Religion can be about how human beings build a bridge to God through a series of outward behaviours or sacrifices. This can lead to ‘performance anxiety’ – we are never quite sure if we have done enough to earn God’s favour. But through His life, death and resurrection, Jesus reverses this direction – God builds the bridge towards humanity and becomes the sacrifice. His “perfect love casts out fear.” (1 John 4:18)



We can be set free from guilt or shame at our core. In our Western context, we are familiar with the idea that our guilt has been dealt with through Jesus’ atoning death. But other Christians (from the more Eastern Orthodox tradition) have emphasised that the cross takes away the shame that creates distance from God and others. Most people in the world identify more with an honour/shame understanding than a guilt/innocence one, and the issue of shame is referred to far more widely in the Bible than that of guilt.

In a 'guilt culture' we could say that God deals with what I have done by taking its consequences away. In a 'shame culture' we could say that God restores who I am and my relationship with Him and others. This is the message of the lost sheep or coin that has been found, of the Prodigal Son who returns to His father and is restored to relationship.

Linked to this is being freed from the need to earn God's favour. The elder brother in the story of the Prodigal Son illustrates how difficult human beings can find it not to have a relationship with God based on a 'contract'. But the basis for becoming like Christ is knowing that God's favour is given to us without regard to whether we deserve it or not. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The most revealing aspect of our sinfulness can be the easy way in which we mentally judge or compare ourselves with others. But the more we understand the cross, and the more we see people as those for whom Christ died, the less likely we are to judge others. When Paul reminds the Philippian Christians of how Jesus, "humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross" he frames it by reminding them to "have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." (Philippians 2: 4,5,8)

We have the best motive for obeying and loving God. Genuine change comes not from fear, but from love for a Saviour. The more we realize how Jesus has done, the more we may desire to be like Paul who wanted to "live for God...who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2: 19-20)

Discuss: What is the biggest change the cross makes for you?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Luke 15: 11-31 the parable of the Prodigal Son

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of how you have embraced the gift of the cross.



Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



Group prayer (5 minutes)

Alleluia, sing to Jesus!
his the sceptre, his the throne:
Alleluia! his the triumph,
his the victory alone.
Hear the songs of holy Zion
thunder like a mighty flood:
'Jesus out of every nation
has redeemed us by his blood!'



Alleluia! not as orphans
are we left in sorrow now:
Alleluia! he is near us;
faith believes, but knows not how.
Though the cloud from sight received him
whom the angels now adore,
shall our hearts forget his promise,
'I am with you evermore'?

Alleluia! bread of heaven,
here on earth our food, our stay:
Alleluia! here the sinful
come to you from day to day.
Intercessor, friend of sinners,
earth's redeemer, plead for me,
where the songs of all the sinless
sweep across the crystal sea.

Amen



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