

JANUARY 30, 2022
LIFE GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
THE FOOLISH FULCRUM
1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-25
WINTER QUARTER WEEK 3 OF 13

Renewed by Grace

1. When you were a kid, what did you think was really fancy (but which really isn't today)?

Remember, I was a kid in the 70s and 80s (what some today are now calling "the late 1900s!" Say what, now?). Some of mine are - a two story house, a pool in the backyard, having a home computer, having Caller ID and voice mail on your home phone, a cordless phone, flying somewhere for vacation. Eating out.

How about for you?

Equipped as Disciples

Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

2. It seems that the longer someone is a follower of Christ, the more benign the cross becomes. What Jesus suffered seems to become somewhat sanitized, and the foolishness of God dying in such a manner seems to become somewhat minimized. Would you agree or disagree with this assessment? Why? If this observation is true, what general effects would you expect it to have in the life of a believer who has walked with God a long time? Finally, how can a Christian keep the difficult realities of the cross fresh in his or her life?

I know this is a wide-open question that could potentially lead your group to cover a lot of different topics and that could result in a number of rabbit trails being pursued. You'll have to use wisdom because there is important stuff to cover in the following questions.

I wrote this question based on my own personal walk with God and thinking about the cross. I tend to think about it on Communion Sundays, on Good Friday, and when it comes up in my time in the Word or in sermons like this. I don't tend to think about the suffering of Christ on a Tuesday at 2 in the afternoon because those thoughts are hard and uncomfortable to entertain. I don't think I'm much different than most Christians.

They say familiarity breeds contempt. That is clearly not the case with me, but familiarity does breed familiarity, and sometimes familiarity breeds numbness. Not all the time, of course. We say (or maybe it's only me?), "Yes, I know Christ died for my sins. Yes I understand it was a painful and humiliating death. Yes I am eternally grateful. But I already know this." A problem is that something that is central should always remain central, and how do you (1) keep it central, and (2) keep it fresh and meaningful? It can be done, and Christians inside of and outside of EFCC are doing a great job of it each and every day. And messages like this will certainly help all of us.

I liked the quote Ryan read from H. Richard Niebuhr, "A God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."

The more time that passes between today and when an event happened, the more we may tend to think differently about that event. Especially when that event is referenced by Christ as something we are to imitate as we follow Him. He died a brutal, humiliating, degrading,

humbling death. He suffered in ways we don't want to think about. He gave up rights which He had every right to cling to. He sacrificed for people who did not love Him. He seemed to let the enemy win. He was ridiculed and mocked. And this is the kind of life He calls us to also lead, or at least be willing to lead if and when it comes our way. No wonder we don't want to think not only about what He suffered as He died, but also what was signified by the form of death He suffered. The Romans and the Jews sent a strong message when they crucified Him beside two criminals. No one who heard about how He died would have missed the message being sent.

Followers of Christ were ridiculed for believing in the cross and its power and wisdom. Some were ashamed, so Paul writes to the Romans and says not to be ashamed. And somewhere along the line the cross became less scandalous and more "sexy" to the point that people, like me, wear a cross around their necks and aren't ashamed of it (and how much of that is because society doesn't understand anymore what a cross stood for in the first century?).

I don't know that we have a modern-day equivalent to the cross. If you can think of one, let me know.

The point in all of this is that the Christians of Corinth were following a God who died in a way that seemed to indicate He was a powerless fool. As we follow Him, are we willing to embrace that identity, if we're called to? That's what I'm thinking about as I interact with this question. And my willingness or unwillingness to do that is probably one thing that colors my thinking about the cross. As I look at my cross on my necklace, I think about what He did for me. And that's right and good. But now I need to also think about what the cross did to Him and what it means for me to follow well. The cross should make us more uncomfortable than it might currently make us.

As for the "How can we keep it fresh in our lives?" question, use that as a setup for the questions to follow!

3. Jesus calls us to take up our cross and follow Him (Matt. 16:24-26). Paul tells us exactly what that means in these verses. Referring back to your outline, review and discuss what each of the three are and what each of the three might mean in your life this next week.

Just so you know, I don't mention in discussion questions like this one what Ryan's points are because I don't want to give them away before the message. But for the Leaders Notes, I will mention them for obvious reasons.

(1) Reveals that our relationship with God is established through grace, not earning.

Here are some thoughts from Ryan's teaching notes -

- Accepting the cross as the means of salvation takes humility because implicit within the cross was that we could not make it to God on our own and that our sin deserves death.
- The cross shows us that God runs toward us when we are his enemies, confused, and obstinant. His love extends to the lowest and his grace to the hardest. The cross speaks a better word, but it also brings us low before it lifts us high. But when we see it rightly, grace and mercy fly off the page like an autostereogram.

It's always a good reminder to think about the fact that we did not have to earn God's love or God's salvation. That's like a cold drink of water on a hot summer day. Also, I do believe there are some unbelievers in our groups, and revisiting this is good for them as

God draws them to Christ. What I'm saying is to not discount this point just because you know it so well. This point is the heart of the Christianity and is what sets us apart from all the other religions in the world. And, thinking about what the cross does helps us live for Christ. It keeps the motivations pure and the head clear.

What might it mean for the people in your group to remember this week that their relationship with God is based on grace and not earning? What might it mean for you? Maybe there is a reexamination of why we "serve the Lord"? Maybe we ask Him to show us if or how we might still be trying to earn His love? Maybe don't do one thing this week that we feel obligated to do, but don't really want to do? Maybe we ask Him to show us when we are comparing ourselves to others and because of that we are questioning our value to Him, or feeling prideful because of our accomplishments? Maybe we....

(2) Opposes our desire for dominance and unveils power through sacrificial love.

More thoughts from Ryan's teaching notes -

- Like the Japanese martial art form of Aikido – where you use the attacker's momentum against them, Jesus' crucifixion reverses the power of the cross and turns our perception of power on its head. The devil took his best run at Jesus and Jesus used his own energy aglint him to turn it on its head. Jesus takes all of the energy of evil and uses it for OUR GOOD! This is part of the subversive power of the cross – it flips the way of worldly power on its head and shows that selfless LOVE is in fact the greatest power in the universe.
- Can we admit that we have a hard time believing the power (might and energy) of the cross? We have a hard time believing that the cross and the cruciform life can effect change.

There is a lot here. A ton of practical applications exist. Here are some you could ask the group to think about and discuss - How does this apply to our relationships? To our vocations? To how we approach "moving up in the world" or "advancing in our career"? To our engagement in the public sphere? To the unique callings and lifestyles that each of the people in your group have? I would hope people can take a look at their lives and find at least one area of application!

(3) Confronts conventional wisdom and shows that life comes through death.

More thoughts from Ryan's notes -

- The cross teaches us how to act and how to respond in certain situations and it gives us a decision-making lens. The way of the cross aligns us with reality. Confronts conventional wisdom and shows that life comes through death. The cross is the wisdom of God, not just to be known and appreciated, but also to be emulated. We feel the absurdity of the cross most when we understand that we are called to emulate it. What Thomas a Kempis called "the imitation of Christ." To believe that Christ died for us is one thing, but to come to terms with the fact that we are called to "take up our cross" – well that drives home the madness of the cross in a whole new light. We think we understand the cross UNTIL called to live it, then our understanding falls apart.
- We know and trust that eternal life came through Jesus' death, but if the cross is wisdom, it's showing us that it comes through letting go. Remember, Jesus said,

“24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” (John 12:24)

- He was certainly primarily thinking about his life, but he was also thinking about YOURS.
- His point is that the way of the cross is the way of wisdom. If you want to lose your life, try to control everything, try to remain on top, try to dominate – that’s the wisdom of the world. But the wisdom of God is cruciform wisdom – it teaches us that life comes through death. And here we see the cross as the wisdom of God. Not only is it brilliant in the way the cross defeated the powers of evil, but the cross also is in line with the way God designed the world to work.

Again, the opportunities for application are numerous...What’s one way we can die to ourselves this week? What’s one area? What’s an area where we can release control? Stop dominating? Not worry about if we come out on top or not? Serve someone who is ungrateful? Put someone else’s interests in front of ours? And the list can go on and on. I hope people have concrete things they can do to take up their cross and follow Jesus. I hope you to, too!

Sent in Love

- 4. Now that you’ve had the discussion of what each might mean, pick one and tell your group how you plan to take up the cross and follow Christ over the next seven days. Please try to be as specific as possible!**