Small Group Guide: The Cruciform Life — 1 Corinthians 7

Series: The Cruciform Life | Book of 1 Corinthians

Overview

This week's sermon explored what it means to live a life shaped by the cross in the context of marriage and singleness. Drawing from 1 Corinthians 7, the message challenged both married and single believers to take on the posture of a servant in whatever station of life God has placed them in. The cruciform life is not limited to our church involvement — it seeps into our most intimate relationships and daily decisions.

Key Takeaways

- The cruciform life calls every believer, married or single, to take on the attitude of a servant in all relationships.
- Sex inside of marriage is inside of God's will. Celibacy inside of marriage is outside of God's will. Sex outside of marriage is outside of God's will. Celibacy outside of marriage is inside of God's will.
- Marriage is a gift from God, and so is singleness. Neither defines our identity in Christ.
- A healthy marriage is marked by mutual servanthood, mutual affection, and mutual submission — not control or domination.
- Singleness is not pitiful — it is purposeful. It offers a singular focus and greater freedom to pursue God's work.
- Paul's underlying point throughout 1 Corinthians 7 is that life is short, and we should not be so consumed with earthly concerns that we neglect the eternal purposes God has for us.
- Jim Elliot's words capture the spirit of the passage well: "Wherever you are, be all there. Live to the hilt every situation you believe to be the will of God."

Icebreaker

Go around the room and answer this question: What is one thing you were taught growing up — in your home, your culture, or your church — about marriage or singleness that you have since had to rethink?

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Text

1. The sermon described Corinth as a multicultural crossroads where many different worldviews on marriage, sex, and family were colliding. In what ways does that description remind you of the culture we live in today?
2. Paul opens 1 Corinthians 7 by responding to a question the Corinthians had written to him about. Based on the context and Paul's answer, what do you think the Corinthians were actually asking? Why might that question have come up in their specific cultural moment?
3. The sermon pointed out that the Corinthians tended to see sex as either completely permissible or completely prohibited, with no middle ground. Why is that kind of all-or-nothing thinking dangerous, and how does Paul correct it?

For Married Group Members

4. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 7 that a husband's body belongs also to his wife, and a wife's body belongs also to her husband. What does mutual ownership and mutual submission look like practically in a marriage — beyond just the physical relationship?
5. The sermon stated that sex is not to be used as a reward for good behavior or withheld as a punishment for bad behavior, because that turns it into a means of control. Have you ever seen this dynamic play out, either in your own experience or in relationships around you? What does it do to a marriage over time?
6. Ephesians 5 describes a husband's love for his wife as resembling Christ's love for the church — self-giving, sacrificial, and purifying. What would it look like for that kind of love to be the foundation of a marriage rather than personal satisfaction or mutual convenience?

For Single Group Members

7. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 7 that he personally sees benefits to singleness, particularly around time and focus. What are some ways that single believers in your group or community are — or could be — using that freedom to serve God more fully?
8. Elizabeth Elliot said, "Having now spent more than 41 years single, I have learned that it is indeed a gift. Not one that I would choose. Not one many people would choose. But we do not choose our gifts." How does that statement challenge the way the church sometimes treats singleness as a problem to be solved rather than a season to be stewarded?
9. The sermon made the point that our identity in Christ is not defined by our relationship status. Do you genuinely believe that? What messages — from culture, from family, or even from the church — make that hard to believe?

For Everyone

10. The sermon challenged all believers — married, single, widowed, or divorced — to ask: "How will I maximize my time today to give glory to God?" What does that question look like in your specific situation this week?
11. Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 7 is essentially to remain as you are and serve faithfully in the station where you found Christ. Is there a part of your current life situation that you have been resisting or resenting rather than stewarding? What would it look like to bloom where you are planted?
12. The cruciform life means allowing the attitude of Christ — the posture of a servant — to shape every area of life, not just the parts that feel spiritual. What is one relationship in your life where you have been holding back that servant posture?

Practical Applications

- If you are married, have an honest and compassionate conversation with your spouse this week about one area of your relationship where you could serve them better. Approach it with humility rather than grievance.
- If you are single, identify one specific way this week that you can use your time and freedom to invest in God's work — whether through serving at church, encouraging a missionary, mentoring someone younger, or volunteering in your community.
- Regardless of your relationship status, reflect on the seven big worldview questions mentioned in the sermon (below). Write down your own answers and consider how those answers shape the way you live and the way you treat the people closest to you.
- Pray for someone in your life who is in a different relationship station than you — if you are married, pray for a single friend; if you are single, pray for a married couple you know. Ask God to help you encourage them in their specific calling rather than projecting your own experience onto them.

Closing Prayer Focus

Close your time together by praying specifically for the following:

- Married couples in your group — that their marriages would be marked by mutual servanthood and the attitude of Christ
- Single members in your group — that they would see their singleness as purposeful and use it with intention
- Anyone in a complicated or painful relationship situation — that they would find peace, wisdom, and the grace to serve faithfully where they are
- Your group as a whole — that the cruciform life would not be something you only discuss, but something that shapes how you treat one another every day

---

For Further Reflection

Read through 1 Corinthians 7 on your own this week. As you read, ask yourself: Where am I treating my current station in life as a burden rather than a gift? What would it look like to be, as Jim Elliot wrote, fully present and fully committed to the will of God right where I am?

---

7 Big Questions: James Sire- The World Next Door

1. **What is prime reality-the really real?** To this we might answer God, or the gods, or the material cosmos.

2. **What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?** Here our answers point to whether we see the world as created or autonomous, as chaotic or orderly, as matter or spirit, or whether we emphasize our subjective, personal relationship to the world or its objectivity apart from us.

3. **What is a human being?** To this we might answer a highly complex machine, a sleeping god, a person made in the image of God, a “naked ape.”

4. **What happens to persons at death?** Here we might reply personal extinction, or transformation to a higher state, or reincarnation, or departure to a shadowy existence on “the other side.”

5. **Why is it possible to know anything at all?** Sample answers include the idea that we are made in the image of an all-knowing God or that consciousness and rationality developed under the contingencies of survival in a long process of evolution.

6. **How do we know what is right and wrong?** Again, perhaps we are made in the image of a God whose character is good; or right and wrong are determined by human choice alone or what feels good; or the notions simply developed under an impetus toward cultural or physical survival.

7. **What is the meaning of human history?** To this we might answer, to realize the purposes of God or the gods, to make a paradise on earth, to prepare a people for a life in community with a loving and holy God, and so forth.