Small Group Guide

The Cruciform Life | 1 Corinthians 8 & 10:23-33

Overview

This week's sermon continued our series through 1 Corinthians, focusing on what it means to live a cruciform life -- a life shaped by the cross of Jesus Christ. Using the example of food sacrificed to idols in the ancient church at Corinth, the sermon explored how mature believers are called to set aside their personal rights for the benefit of others, particularly those who are younger or weaker in the faith.

Key Verse

Philippians 2:3-5 -- Paul instructs believers to do nothing out of selfish ambition or pride, but instead to value others above themselves, looking to the interests of others rather than their own, and to adopt the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

The Central Pattern

Although I have the right to... For your sake I choose not to... But I will do this for you instead.

Key Takeaways

1. Knowledge without love leads to pride. Paul reminds the Corinthians that knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. Spiritual maturity is not measured by how much we know, but by how well we love.

2. Our freedom is not the highest value. Believers have genuine freedoms, but those freedoms are not absolute. The cruciform life calls us to weigh our rights against our responsibilities to one another.

3. Our actions affect those around us. What a mature believer does freely can become a stumbling block for someone who is younger or weaker in the faith. Awareness of our influence is a mark of spiritual growth.

4. The cruciform life applies to everyday life. Whether it is diet, entertainment, substances, or habits, the pattern of the cross works its way into the ordinary decisions of family life, friendships, and community.

5. Spiritual maturity is revealed by our words and attitudes. The phrases we use and the questions we ask reveal whether we are primarily focused on being served or on serving others.

Discussion Questions

Opening

1. Think of a time when you gave up something you had every right to enjoy for the sake of someone else. What was that experience like? Was it difficult? Did it feel worth it?
2. Before this sermon, how would you have defined the word "cruciform"? Has your understanding of it changed or deepened?

Digging In

3. The sermon described the Corinthian church as a five-year-old church full of baby Christians who did not see themselves as immature -- they saw themselves as enlightened. In what ways do you think that same dynamic shows up in churches today? In your own life?
4. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 8 that an idol is nothing at all, and that food sacrificed to an idol does not bring a person closer to or further from God. If that is true, why does Paul still urge the more mature believers to limit their freedom? What does that tell us about the purpose of Christian community?
5. The sermon introduced the idea of "rights vs. responsible behavior" and described the cruciform life as happening at the crossroads of those two things. Can you think of a situation in your own life -- past or present -- where that crossroads became real for you?
6. The pastor shared the example of his brother's diabetes diagnosis and how the family adjusted their habits to support him. What stood out to you about that story? How does it illustrate the cruciform principle?
7. Jim Putnam's framework described spiritual infants, children, adults, and parents based on the kinds of phrases they tend to use. Looking at those lists honestly, which phrases felt most familiar to you? Which phrases challenged you?
8. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10 that whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. How does that standard change the way you think about ordinary, everyday decisions?

Going Deeper

9. The sermon noted that every household is different and that what is permissible is not always beneficial or constructive in every context. How do you navigate that in your own home or relationships without becoming either legalistic or careless?
10. The pastor's father told him: "If you want to be a leader, if you want to serve the church, you'll have to think about more than just yourself on these particular issues." How does that kind of counsel sit with you? Is there an area of your life where you sense God asking you to think beyond yourself?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to put into practice this week:

For individuals:

- Identify one area of your life where you exercise a personal freedom that may be affecting someone around you. Spend time in prayer asking God whether He is calling you to set that aside, even temporarily, for someone else's benefit.
- Review the list of phrases from the sermon associated with spiritual children, adults, and parents. Write down one phrase from the adult or parent list that you want to begin practicing this week.

For families:

- Have an honest conversation at home about whether there are habits, entertainment choices, or household patterns that may be making it harder for a family member to grow or to break a difficult habit. Approach it with curiosity and love rather than accusation.
- Ask each family member: "Is there something I do that makes it harder for you?" Be willing to listen without becoming defensive.

For the group:

- As a small group, discuss whether there are ways your group could better serve those who are newer to the faith or more vulnerable. Are there adjustments -- in how you meet, what you discuss, or how you spend time together -- that could make space for someone who is weaker in the faith to grow?

Closing Reflection

The cruciform life is not a life of joyless self-denial. It is a life patterned after Jesus, who as God had every right to do whatever He saw fit, but chose instead to become a servant for our sake. The goal is not to strip away freedom, but to use freedom wisely -- in a way that builds others up rather than causing them to stumble.

Close your time together by reading Philippians 2:3-8 aloud as a group, then spend a few minutes in prayer. Ask God to reveal specific areas where He is calling each of you to live out the cruciform pattern this week.

Memory Statement for the Week

"Although I have the right to, for your sake I choose not to, but I will do this for you instead."