

the cross

1: method

welcome

CELL: In three words or less, what does the cross mean to you?

worship

FACILITATOR: Use the words people shared from the welcome section as a basis for your worship together.

word

FACILITATOR: The death of Jesus is the most famous death in history. Multitudes of people were crucified in the ancient world. But we hardly know anything of other crucifixions. Only his death is recorded in detail and continues to make an impact.

CELL: Why do you think the cross of Christ is so significant an event?

FACILITATOR: No one in their right mind would have invented the cross as the means by which God was going to rescue people from the destructive power of sin, Satan and death. The Jews would have considered it nonsense. They looked for God to act in power to overthrow their enemies. People who were crucified on a cross were considered to be cursed by God. (See Deuteronomy 21:23 for how they arrived at this conclusion.) It was not possible that they could be doing God's will. For Greeks it made no sense. It didn't satisfy the criteria of their minds. They thought the world would be rescued by human cleverness. God's rescue mission would occur through either power or wisdom, strength or intelligence, might or cleverness, or so the ancient world thought. But God chose to work in a totally countercultural way. He worked through weakness and folly.

CELL: Read 1Corinthians 1:18 - 2:5 as a large group then split into small groups of four or five and consider briefly what this passage says about...

- How the cross shows the weakness and foolishness of God
- Why God's plan worked (v25)
- What impact God's chosen method had on people (v20-25)
- Why God chose this way (v29-31)
- What implications it has for who makes up the church (v26-28)
- Are there echoes here of the way God made the world (Genesis 1)?
- Does this tell us something important about God himself?

FACILITATOR: Come back as one large group and relate what you have learned to contemporary culture.

- What are the equivalent world views today that relate to the beliefs of the Jews and the Greeks?
- What solutions do politicians and academics offer to the problems people have in their personal lives and to the larger problems of the world?
- What does the cross teach us about those solutions?

witness

CELL: Based on the passage discussed above, what implications does it have for evangelism (2:1-5)?

Do we seek to evangelize from a position of strength, using impressive personalities and placing our trust in culturally relevant techniques? If God's solution was so counter the culture of the ancient world, in what ways should we who are saved by the cross be counter-cultural in our own day? Pray together for those friends we are reaching out to. Pray that our approach would be Spirit led and in the power of God, not the wisdom of man.

what now?

CELL: Spend time this week studying and praying through 1Cor. 1:18 – 2:5. Maybe use "The Daily 7-up" Structure (see Fusion Manual) for your study.

2: redemption complete

welcome

CELL: Which Bible character can you relate to and why?

worship

FACILITATOR: Spend time as a group worshipping to a CD. Choose songs that deal with redemption and the cross.

word

FACILITATOR: The Reformer Martin Luther thought Romans 3:21-26 to be the chief point, the very central place of the Epistle of the Romans, which is perhaps Paul's greatest letter. Many would agree with him. In these few verses the essence of Paul's reflection on the cross is found in concentrated form. He has much more to say about the death of Jesus than we find here. Even so, here is the heart of his inspired thinking.

The passage takes us into the world of the Old Testament - the world of the Law, the Prophets and of blood sacrifices. These all played a role in how people could be brought into a right relationship with God when sin had spoiled the relationship and put people, as it were, on the wrong side of God. But they were not the final solution to the problem. They were only signposts, pointing the way forward until God sent his Son to fulfill the Law and be the ultimate sacrifice of atonement. The background is a judicial one. But it is modeled not on our criminal law courts so much as our civil law courts, where disputes are settled and defendants are found to be either in the wrong or the right.

CELL: Take a few minutes and read Romans 3:21-26.

(FACILITATOR: Read it preferably in a couple of versions including the NIV or NRSV and a newer translation like the New Living Translation. Spend some time taking the argument in, perhaps in silence.)

CELL: These verses contain some of the big words of the Christian faith. Split into small groups and give some brief definitions to the following words before you go further. A dictionary might help. A dictionary of the Bible would help even more. Share your answers with the larger group.

-righteousness	-grace
-law	-redemption
-faith	-atonement
-glory (of God)	-justification

Now talk about the following questions:

-Who needs to be justified before God and why? (v23)

-Why can we not be justified by keeping the law? (v21, see also v9-20)

-What steps has God taken to provide us with justification? How does he provide us with the means of being put right with him when we cannot provide those means ourselves? (v24-25)

-What is 'a sacrifice of atonement'? (v25)

FACILITATOR: The background to it is found in the Day of Atonement spelled out in Leviticus 16. Glance though that chapter. Note that sin is described as 'uncleanness', 'rebellion' and 'wickedness' in verses 16 and 21. That explains our need for atonement. How was atonement made on that day? Note the role of the two goats (v7-10): one of which was killed (v15-19) and the other was sent into the wilderness (v20-22). In what ways does this prefigure (picture beforehand) the death of Jesus?

CELL: -Does this mean that God ignores his own law or acts in an unjust way? (v25-26)

-What does justification mean to you?

witness/what now?

FACILITATOR: Teach the cell group the 'one-verse evangelism' tool using Romans 6:23 (see the Fusion Training Manual). Pray together as a cell that everyone will have an opportunity this week to share this verse and the power of the cross with one non-believer within their sphere of influence.

3: reconciliation

welcome

FACILITATOR: Follow-up from last week's 'witness/what now' section. Did anyone have an opportunity to share with a non-believer using the one verse evangelism model? (If not, simply review this tool using Romans 6:23. Maybe split off in pairs and allow each person an opportunity to role play and share (using this tool) with their partner.)

worship

FACILITATOR: Read Luke 23:33-49 (the account of the crucifixion) and Luke 24:1-9 (the account of the resurrection). Spend time in worship to God for the work that was accomplished on those days.

word

FACILITATOR: The New Testament uses many different word pictures to explain to us the meaning of the cross. Justification has a law-court background and speaks of being put in the right. Redemption has a slavery background and speaks of a price being paid to set us free. Atonement has a temple background and speaks of a sacrifice being offered to overcome the defilement of sin and secure cleansing. One of the most popular word pictures is that of reconciliation. Reconciliation speaks of relationships being restored where they have broken down. It relates to family life, to husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters; to industrial life, to unions and employers; to international life, to nations which have been at war.

CELL: Think of other situations where reconciliation is needed.

Spend a little time clarifying what reconciliation is. How does it differ from a truce, a reunion after separation or when a settlement is imposed on a conflict?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 together and then discuss the following questions:

- Where does the initiative come from in our reconciliation with God (v18)?
- Why should it lie with God? Is it because he is the offended party?
- What was the cause of the broken relationship between us and God (v19 and v21)?
- How does the cross of Christ bring about reconciliation (v21)?
- What does it mean when verse 19 speaks of God 'reconciling the world to himself in Christ'?
- What does 'the world' mean here?
- List the results of our reconciliation to God? At least three are to be found in verse 17, 19 and 20. What are they?
- What does it mean to be Christ's ambassador? How far are you fulfilling the role?

Read Ephesians 2:11-22.

The great division of the ancient world was between Jew and Gentile. Jews were called 'the circumcised' because circumcision was the initiation rite through which baby boys entered the Jewish family. Gentiles were the 'uncircumcised'. Circumcision became the symbolic badge for a whole lot of other things. Only the circumcised, for example, could fully enter into the temple for worship. Gentile males were prohibited from going into the court of the Jews by a wall which warned them that they risked their lives beyond that point. See the allusion to that in verse 14.

- What difference did it make, in Jewish thinking, whether a person was circumcised or not? (v11, 12)
- How, according to these verses, does the death of Christ override the rite of circumcision?
- List the several benefits of Christ's work on the cross as Paul describes them here.
- What implications do these verses have for racial hatred or ethnic tensions? And do those implications apply only to the church or beyond it to wider society?
- Verses 19-22 speak of the church as a city, a family and a new temple. What are the essential features of these pictures? Do you see those features in the church and Christian groups to which you belong? If not, what can be done about it?

If time permits, read back to 2:1-10. How does the second half of Eph. 2 relate to what Paul wrote in the first half?

witness

CELL: Who, specifically, are those God is calling you to be his ambassador to? Remind one another and then take time to pray together. Consider standing in a circle and facing outward as you pray as a physical representation of your cell's desire to do evangelism out of this group.

what now?

Memorize 2 Cor. 5:20. How you are fulfilling the call to be an ambassador for Christ? Take action this week.

4: lord of all

welcome

CELL: Do you have a 'life verse' or a favorite Bible verse? Share it with the group.

worship

FACILITATOR: Have people to take their verse from the welcome section and make this worship time "their own". Offer ideas to the group...maybe some want to pray and worship the Lord in the quiet of the moment, others may want to write a Psalm or love note to God based on the verse, others may want to draw a picture depicting their love for the Lord. Allow people to express their love for the Lord freely.

word

FACILITATOR: Christians often make the mistake of thinking that the primary purpose of the cross is to provide individuals with a ticket to heaven. Though the cross is the means through which individuals are saved, it is the means by which God achieves much larger purposes than that as well. Colossians provides us with two further insights into the work of the cross.

Colosse was a small town where the church was made up of ordinary sheep farmers and market traders; some had Jewish backgrounds, some Greek. Their world was uncertain and they lived in fear of what 'powers and authorities' (see 1:16; 2:10) might do to them. They prayed much and engaged in religious rituals to ask for protection from evil powers. They hedged their bets spiritually and mixed a number of religious beliefs and practices together to gain greater security. This meant that they did not see Jesus as exceptional or supreme. He was just one of number of semi-divine powers or supernatural beings they could call to their aid.

Colossians is written to correct their error and present Jesus as the one who is supreme (1:18). Faith in him renders the need for faith in any lesser beings both superfluous and an affront to his glory. Within this context, the cross plays a vital role.

CELL: Have someone read Colossians 1:15-23.

-How does it describe the relationship of Jesus to God? Where does this put him in the 'pecking order' of powers in the universe? (v15, 16)

-What is Jesus' role in (a) bringing creation into being (v16); (b) in sustaining it now (v17); and (c) in relation to the new creation of the church (v18)?

-Look at what these verses say about the future of our created universe? Verse 20 says 'all things', i.e., the whole of creation, will be 'reconciled' to God, that is, put back in a rightful relationship with him, overcoming the 'fallenness' of our present world. The creation of a new heaven and a new earth is also mentioned in Romans 8:20-21; 1 Corinthians 15:20-28; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-27.

-How does this reconciliation come about (v21)? Why should blood poured out on the cross bring about a new creation. Leviticus 17:11 and John 12:24-26 give us some clues. The essence of life is in the blood. For new life to arise, old life has to die and so blood has to be shed.

-Consider whether your view of why Christ died is large enough? Or is it restricted to his death bringing about the salvation of individuals.

CELL: Have someone else read Colossians 2:13-15.

Two pictures are given here. The cross pays our debts (v14) and defeats our enemies (v15).

-Why do verses 13-14 tell us Christ died? What is the problem the cross deals with?

-What did he nail to his cross and what effect did it have for us?

-Picture a defeated general being led in procession into the city of Rome. The spoils of war and his disarmed and defeated soldiers would be displayed before him. He would be paraded through the streets stripped of his dignity. This is the background to verse 15.

-Consider the irony. Human and demonic authorities thought that by crucifying Jesus they were disgracing, disarming and defeating him. In reality he was defeating and degrading them. How did the cross achieve that? Has it something to do with the fact that they did their worst to him on the cross but through the resurrection, it showed them he could not be defeated?

-What are the practical implications? Do you ever feel intimidated by Satan's power or his agents? Shouldn't the cross set you completely free from such threats? Read Hebrews 2:14-15.

witness

FACILITATOR: *Take time to split up in small groups to pray. Do cell members struggle with guilt or shame, failing to fully understand forgiveness and thus become ineffective in their witness to others? Have the small groups read Colossians 2:13-15 again and then pray for each other.*

Follow with prayer for cell members' friends that do not yet know or recognize the powerful work that was accomplished on the cross.

what now?

CELL: Have you committed your life verse or your favorite Bible verse to memory? If not, do so this week!

Are there areas holding you back from sharing your faith openly with your friends? Pray for freedom from any fear or complacency.