

Small Group Guide: The Cruciform Life

Based on Mark 8:31-37

Opening Prayer

Begin your group time by asking God to help you understand what it means to follow Jesus and to give you courage to trust Him with your lives.

Sermon Recap

Jesus revealed to His disciples that being the Messiah meant suffering, rejection, and death—completely opposite to their expectations. When Peter rebuked Jesus for this, Jesus responded strongly, then called both His disciples and the crowd to follow Him by denying themselves, taking up their cross, and following Him. The cruciform (cross-shaped) life isn't about earning salvation but about trusting Jesus enough to let Him be King of our lives.

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Text

1. **Why do you think Peter reacted so strongly to Jesus' prediction about suffering and death?** What were the disciples expecting the Messiah to do?
2. **What did the "cross" symbolize to people in the first century?** How is that different from what it means to us today?
3. **Jesus said Peter sounded like Satan (Mark 8:33). Why was Peter's rebuke so serious?** What was fundamentally wrong with Peter's perspective?

Personal Reflection

4. **The sermon stated: "The cruciform life moves me out of the center of my life."** Why does it often feel counter-intuitive to not consider your own interests and desires first?

5. **Modern advertising tells us "life is all about you."** What are some specific messages from our culture that conflict with Jesus' call to deny ourselves? How do these messages affect you personally?
6. **The sermon mentioned that for some, following Jesus has cost them family, jobs, reputation, or influence.** Has following Jesus ever cost you something? What was that experience like?
7. **Jesus promises that "whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35).** What do you think Jesus means by this paradox? Have you experienced this truth in your own life?

Going Deeper

8. **The New Testament writers called themselves "doulos" (slaves) of Jesus Christ.** How does thinking of yourself as a "bondservant" of Jesus rather than just a "follower" change your perspective on obedience and commitment?
 9. **The sermon emphasized that Jesus' grip on us is stronger than our grip on Him.** How does this truth encourage you when you feel like your faith is weak or failing?
 10. **Jesus never mentions the cross without also mentioning the resurrection.** Why is it important to hold both the cost of following Jesus AND the promise of resurrection together?
-

Key Takeaways

1. **It's impossible to understand Christianity without understanding the way of the cross.** Following Jesus means living a cruciform (cross-shaped) life.
 2. **The cruciform life moves me out of the center of my life.** Denying yourself doesn't mean hating yourself—it means recognizing that life isn't ultimately all about you.
 3. **The cruciform life counts the cost and finds Jesus worth it.** There is real cost to following Jesus, but what we gain is far greater than what we lose.
-

Closing Reflection

Read together as a group:

Mark 8:34-35 *"If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life because of me and the gospel will save it."*

Closing Question: What is one thing God is asking you to surrender or one step of obedience He's calling you to take?

Prayer Time

Break into groups of 2-3 and pray for each other:

- Pray for courage to trust Jesus as King in specific areas of struggle
- Pray for strength to take steps of obedience even when it's costly
- Thank Jesus that His grip on us is stronger than our grip on Him
- Pray for those who are facing real persecution or significant cost for following Jesus

Before Next Week

- Read Mark 8:31-9:1 again slowly, asking God to speak to you through it
- Complete your chosen practical application
- Be ready to share one insight or struggle from your week

Additional Resources

- Book recommendation: *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer
- Consider memorizing Mark 8:34-35 as a group over the next month