

2026 Q3 L02 - The Message of the Cross - Discussion Leader Notes

Purpose:

- Guide conversation
 - Encourage discovery
 - Keep focus on Christ
 - Help participants speak more than the leader
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Day 1 Afternoon

Day Theme: The Paradox of the Cross **One memorable sentence:** What if the greatest victory in human history looked like an absolute, humiliating defeat?

Poll

: When you hear the word "cross," what comes to mind first?

- A. A piece of jewelry or art.
- B. A church building symbol.
- C. Extreme physical suffering and pain.
- D. Salvation and forgiveness.
- E. Foolishness.

Opening Engagement: Cicero, a famous Roman writer, once stated that polite citizens shouldn't even think about the cross, let alone speak about it. It was the ultimate symbol of shame. Yet, Paul made it the absolute center of his message.

Read the Text: (Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 1:18, NKJV) "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

What Do You Notice? (Observation Only)

- A sharp contrast between two groups: "them that perish" and "us which are saved."
- Two distinct views of the cross: "foolishness" and "the power of God."

Guided Discussion:

- Why do you think the cross was considered "foolishness" to the average person in the ancient world? (*Allow discussion*)
- What makes something an act of "power" in the eyes of society versus in the eyes of God? (*Invite multiple responses*)
- How does our perspective of the cross shift when we move from the path of "perishing" to the path of "being saved"?

- When have you experienced God's power in something the world might consider foolish or weak? (*Ask follow-up: How did that change your perspective on God's methods?*)

Discovery Insight: What the cross means depends entirely on the way one looks at it. To a world obsessed with status and power, it looks like absurd foolishness, but to those experiencing salvation, it is the life-transforming power of God.

Christ Connection: Jesus took the ultimate symbol of human shame and degradation and turned it into the ultimate demonstration of God's saving power.

Life Response: Take a moment this week every time you see a cross (on a building, a necklace, or in a picture) to thank God for turning defeat into victory.

Encouragement Bridge: Last week we met a terrified apostle in Sin City. This week, we discover his ultimate weapon.

Day 2

Day Theme: The Naked Gospel **One memorable sentence:** The power of the gospel is in the message itself, not in the eloquence of the messenger.

Poll

: What makes a spiritual message most effective for you?

- A. The speaker's charisma and confidence.
- B. Deep philosophical logic and reasoning.
- C. Emotional storytelling.
- D. The simple, unadorned truth of Scripture.

Opening Engagement: After trying deep philosophical debates in Athens with limited fruit, Paul changed his strategy when he arrived in the status-obsessed city of Corinth.

Read the Text: (*Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 2:1-2, NKJV*) "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

What Do You Notice? (Observation Only)

- Paul deliberately avoided "excellency of speech or of wisdom."
- He made a firm determination ("I determined").
- His exclusive focus was "Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

Guided Discussion:

- Why might "excellency of speech" or impressive human logic sometimes get in the way of the gospel? (*Allow discussion*)
- Why do you think Paul limited his focus to just one specific topic in such a diverse and complicated city? (*Invite multiple responses*)
- How can we tell if we are relying more on our own cleverness to convince people rather than the power of the cross?
- How does it relieve the pressure on us to know that we don't need a theology degree to share our faith? (*Ask follow-up: Who can you share the simple message of Christ with this week?*)

Discovery Insight: Paul intentionally abandoned elaborate rhetoric in favor of the simple, unveiled message of the cross. He knew that relying on human wisdom and persuasive performance could actually empty the gospel of its true power.

Christ Connection: Christ's sacrifice doesn't need to be dressed up in human philosophy to be effective; it is powerful simply because of who Jesus is and what He accomplished.

Life Response: Share the simple message of what Jesus has done for you with someone this week without feeling the pressure to sound "deep" or theological.

Encouragement Bridge: How do you win over a city obsessed with status? You preach a message of ultimate humility.

Day 3

Day Theme: Stumbling Blocks and Foolishness **One memorable sentence:** Jews demanded a miracle, Greeks demanded a philosophy, but Paul gave them a dying man on a cross.

Poll

: When God's plan doesn't match your expectations, how do you usually react?

- A. I get frustrated or angry.
- B. I try to figure it out logically.
- C. I ask God for a miraculous sign to prove it.
- D. I decide to trust Him anyway.

Opening Engagement: Sometimes God doesn't just fail to meet our expectations; He shatters them completely. Both the religious and secular worlds had a mold they expected God to fit into.

Read the Text: (*Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 1:22-23, NKJV*) "For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;"

What Do You Notice? (Observation Only)

- Two different cultural demands: "a sign" (Jews) and "wisdom" (Greeks).
- The single message preached: "Christ crucified."
- Two different reactions to the message: "a stumblingblock" and "foolishness."

Guided Discussion:

- Why was a crucified Messiah offensive (a stumbling block) to religious people expecting a conquering king? *(Allow discussion)*
- Why did the intellectuals of the day think the cross was complete foolishness? *(Invite multiple responses)*
- What are some "signs" or "wisdom" that our modern culture demands before they will believe in God?
- What expectations of God do you have that might become a stumbling block if He chooses to work differently? *(Ask follow-up: How can we surrender those expectations to Him?)*

Discovery Insight: The cross reversed every human hope of the ancient world. It offended religious elites who wanted a conquering ruler and baffled intellectuals who wanted elevated philosophy, because God refused to fit into their preconceived molds.

Christ Connection: Jesus refused to fit into the world's definition of power and wisdom, choosing instead to save us through an act of supreme sacrifice that shattered human pride.

Life Response: Identify one expectation you have of God that might be a "stumbling block" to your spiritual growth, and surrender it to Him in prayer today.

Encouragement Bridge: To the ancient world, Christianity looked like pure foolishness, but God's foolishness is always smarter than our greatest brilliance.

Day 4

Day Theme: The Ultimate Victory **One memorable sentence:** The cross wasn't a tragedy; it was a cosmic triumph.

Poll

: What do you think was the greatest accomplishment of the cross?

- A. Paying the penalty for our sins.
- B. Defeating and disarming evil powers.
- C. Showing the depth of God's love.
- D. Reconciling humanity back to God.

Opening Engagement: If someone asked you what actually happened on that Friday outside Jerusalem, how would you explain the mechanics of salvation? The cross was not an accident; it was a rescue mission.

Read the Text: (Ask someone to read Colossians 1:20 and 1 Peter 2:24, NKJV) "And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself..." (Col. 1:20) "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." (1 Pet. 2:24)

What Do You Notice? (Observation Only)

- Peace was made "through the blood of his cross."
- The goal is to "reconcile all things unto himself."
- Jesus "bare our sins in his own body on the tree."
- The result for us: "dead to sins," "live unto righteousness," and "healed."

Guided Discussion:

- What does the phrase "making peace" imply about the previous relationship between God and fallen humanity? (*Allow discussion*)
- What does it mean practically that Jesus bore our specific sins "in his own body"? (*Invite multiple responses*)
- How does knowing that you are "healed" by His stripes change how you view your past mistakes and current struggles?
- How should the reality that Christ has reconciled you to God change the way you relate to someone you are currently in conflict with? (*Ask follow-up: What step toward peacemaking can you take?*)

Discovery Insight: On the cross, Jesus didn't just suffer passively; He actively paid the penalty for our sin, reconciled us to the Father, and secured eternal peace by taking our curse upon Himself.

Christ Connection: Christ became our willing substitute, absorbing the fatal wages of sin so that we could be completely healed, justified, and brought back into the family of God.

Life Response: Write down one past failure or sin that brings you shame, physically cross it out with a marker, and remind yourself that Jesus has already borne it on the tree.

Encouragement Bridge: What really happened on that Friday outside Jerusalem? A victory so profound it echoes through eternity.

Day 5

Day Theme: The Reversal of the World's Values **One memorable sentence:** Feel like a nobody? You are exactly who God is looking for.

Poll

: Who do you think society values most today?

- A. The wealthy and affluent.
- B. The highly educated and intellectual.
- C. The attractive and popular.
- D. The powerful and influential.
- E. The humble and unnoticed.

Opening Engagement: Look around the room. If God were building an elite team to save the world based on society's strict standards of success, would any of us make the cut?

Read the Text: (Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 1:26-27, NKJV) "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;"

What Do You Notice? (Observation Only)

- Paul points out who is *not* widely called: the wise, the mighty, the noble.
- God actively *chooses* two unexpected groups: the foolish and the weak.
- The stated purpose of this choice: to "confound" (or shame) the wise and mighty.

Guided Discussion:

- Why do you think God intentionally bypasses the "elite" to choose the weak and despised of the world? (*Allow discussion*)
- How does it impact your self-worth to know God doesn't require you to be "mighty" or "noble" to be chosen by Him? (*Invite multiple responses*)
- What does this text say about the danger of a church trying to cater to the wealthy or popular to gain cultural influence?

- In what area of your life do you feel "weak" right now, and how might God want to use that exact weakness to show His strength? (*Ask follow-up: Are you willing to let Him use your weakness?*)

Discovery Insight: God deliberately flips the world's status system upside down. By choosing the weak, ordinary, and foolish things, He ensures that salvation and ministry are entirely a work of His grace, not human achievement.

Christ Connection: Jesus bypassed the palaces of Rome and the religious academies of Jerusalem to build His kingdom with ordinary, broken people who knew they desperately needed Him.

Life Response: Send an encouraging text or make a phone call today to someone who feels inadequate, reminding them they are exactly the kind of person God uses.

Encouragement Bridge: You don't need worldly status to be used by God; His power is perfected in your weakness.

Day 6

Day Theme: No Flesh Should Glory **One memorable sentence:** When we stand before the cross, all our boasting must die.

Poll

: What is the easiest thing for people to brag about?

- A. Their intelligence or degrees.
- B. Their financial success.
- C. Their moral goodness and behavior.
- D. Their family background or connections.

Opening Engagement: It's human nature to want credit for our successes. But what happens when you realize the greatest success of your life—your eternal salvation—had absolutely nothing to do with your own effort?

Read the Text: (*Ask someone to read 1 Corinthians 1:29-31, NKJV*) "That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

What Do You Notice? (Observation Only)

- A strong prohibition: "no flesh should glory in his presence."
- Four things Christ is made to be for us: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption.

- A clear command on boasting: "let him glory in the Lord."

Guided Discussion:

- What does the phrase "no flesh should glory" mean in the context of our salvation? *(Allow discussion)*
- If Christ *is* our righteousness and sanctification, how should that affect our attitude toward other people who are struggling with sin? *(Invite multiple responses)*
- Why is it so easy for believers to fall into the trap of spiritual pride?
- How can we actively "glory in the Lord" rather than in our own accomplishments in our daily conversations? *(Ask follow-up: What does that sound like in real life?)*

Discovery Insight: The cross levels the playing field for all humanity. Because our entire salvation—our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption—is a free gift found only in Christ, boasting in our own goodness is impossible.

Christ Connection: Jesus is our everything. He doesn't just hand us a package of righteousness and wisdom; He *is* our righteousness and wisdom.

Life Response: Catch yourself the next time you feel morally superior to someone else, pause, and silently thank Jesus for being your only righteousness.

Encouragement Bridge: Is the cross the center of your religion? Because if it is, all the glory goes exclusively to Him.

Day 7 Summary

5 Weekly Takeaways:

1. **The Paradox of the Cross:** What the world sees as shameful foolishness is actually the ultimate, life-saving power of God.
2. **The Naked Gospel:** We don't need fancy philosophy or eloquence to win people; the simple message of Christ crucified transforms lives on its own.
3. **Shattered Expectations:** The cross offended the religious and baffled the intellectuals, proving that God's ways are radically different from our human logic.
4. **Worldly Values Flipped:** God deliberately chooses the weak, foolish, and despised to build His kingdom so that He alone gets the glory.
5. **No Boasting:** Because Jesus is our entire righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, there is absolutely no room for human pride.

Final Reflection Question: In what specific area of your life do you need to let the "foolishness" and "weakness" of the cross replace your own wisdom and strength this week? *(Pause for responses)*

Closing Appeal: We have spent this week at the foot of the cross, witnessing a love so profound it defies human logic. Jesus took our ultimate shame and freely gave us His righteousness. As we face the challenges of the coming week, let's leave our pride, our status, and our human wisdom behind, and choose to glory only in the Lord.