

# Life Group Questions

Sep 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**The Wisdom of God** – Pastor Ray Harmes-Wiebe – **1 Corinthians 1:18-31**

## Note from Pastor Jonathan

Hey Life Groups!

Here are a few announcements.

**Bridge Group** will start on Tuesday, October 1. Please pray for our facilitators, that God would use them to spur productive conversations and sharing that builds community. Pray that attendees will have a place to fit in.

**Prayer Summit** will be on Wednesday, October 9<sup>th</sup>. We'll have worship, God's Word, and prayer. We seldom have a chance to all gather together as a church to pray. To encourage everyone to participate, we will not be having other ministry programs, events, fellowships, or Life Groups from October 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>.

**REFUEL - Men's Conference** will be back on Friday – Saturday, October 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> this year. This is a wonderful opportunity for the brothers of our church family to come together, connect, reflect, and strengthen their walk with Jesus in community! The theme for this year's conference is "**Relying on the Resurrected Christ**", and we have a special guest speaker, Pastor Cliff Ursel from Westside, teaching on both days. Please take a look at a personal video invite from Pr. Vinh and the event details below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5yIEoX1kH3A>

Jonathan

## OPENING QUESTIONS (Pick Any You Like)

### 1. What's an example of something counterintuitive?

For example, when someone shares about a rough situation guys often help by offering solutions. "You're in a bad state, so let me help you fix it!" But that's not always what's wanted. Often they want someone to hear them out and sympathize. That's something a lot of husbands (including me) have to learn in their marriage. (Neil and Sharol of FamilyLife Canada use this funny video to illustrate this point: <https://youtu.be/-4EDhdAHRg>.)

Or people think the way to get people to like you is to be interesting. Tell amazing stories. Namedrop. Blow their minds about how talented and great you are. Be the life of the party.

But the best way is often just to show interest in the other person. Ask questions about who they are and what they're excited about. Show interest in their interests. Treat them like they're an amazing person and let them know you care.

What are some other examples you can think of? As we discuss today's passage, we'll see that the Gospel of the cross is very counterintuitive and seems illogical.

### 2. Have you ever struggled to convince someone to like something you liked? What did you do and how did it turn out?

Maybe tried to get a doubter to like your favorite TV show. You told them about your favorite characters or big moments in the show. You pointed out how popular the show is and all the friends who are also into it.

Our church is incredibly multicultural. Have you ever tried to get someone to try a popular food from your country? Khash, black pudding, escamol, beondegi, guinea pig, kangaroo, stinky tofu, Rocky Mountain oysters, balut, jellied moose nose, salo! Some of your mouths just started watering while others are opening up Google for a surprise. "Come on, it's not as weird as it sounds." "Everyone in my country loves it." "Try just a small bite." "If you try my food I'll try one of yours."

Were you successful? Was it frustrating?

Sharing the Gospel is often like convincing people of something that they're not interested in. In today's passage, Paul shares how the Gospel is unappealing to many people.

### 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

<sup>18</sup> For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God,

<sup>19</sup> For it is written,

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

<sup>20</sup> Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God, <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

<sup>26</sup> For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

<sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

<sup>28</sup> God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. <sup>30</sup> And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, <sup>31</sup> so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

LET'S DIG IN (Pick Any You Like)

### 3. How is the message of Jesus dying on the cross foolishness?

I still remember my evangelism professor, Dr. Cecil, talking about how weird Christian lingo is. Imagine you're a non-Christian and you walk into a room where hundreds of people are singing about a **FOUNTAIN FILLED WITH BLOOD** and telling you that you must be **WASHED IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB**. Is this Halloween Church? As we process the message of the cross, I hope we can see how foolish (and wise) it is.

**Cross.** Nowadays it's normal to put crosses on churches, T-shirts, and jewelry. Back then it was a terrible way to execute someone. Cicero (106-43 BC), a Roman statesman and scholar, wrote,

*Pro C. Rabirio Perduellionis Reo. 5* -- But the executioner, the veiling of the head, and the very word "cross" should be far removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes and his ears. For it is not only the actual occurrence of these things or the endurance of them, but liability to them, the expectation, nay, the mere mention of them, that is unworthy of a Roman citizen and a free man.

The cross is so bad that Roman citizens should never be executed on a cross, be threatened by it, or even think about it. It's not something you talk about in polite company.

Canada used to hang the worst criminals, like murderers, traitors, and rapists. If someone got hanged, you knew they were the worst of the worst. Imagine a group of people proudly telling others their leader got hanged.

"Let me tell you about Jesus. He was executed with the worst criminals in the worst way. Trust me, that was a good thing!"

*How is this wise?* God declared that anyone hung on a tree is accursed (condemned) (Deuteronomy 21:22-3). Because we disobey God, we're accursed and deserve God's wrath. Jesus took our punishment and became accursed by being hung on a tree (cross) on our behalf.

The cross also demonstrates how far God was willing to go to save us out of love. Jesus went from experiencing the joys of an all-powerful deity down to a human being executed in the worst way (Philippians 2:5-8).

**Death.** The Romans celebrated heroes who kicked butt and took names. They accomplished great things *before* they died. They don't give a Nobel Prize for *attempted* chemistry, do they?

Jesus talked a big game about being God's Son and bringing in God's kingdom. But guess what, Jesus died before conquering His foes or setting up His throne! The Jewish people *still* hated Jesus. Romans *still* oppressed God's people (e.g., Acts 18:2). Jesus' followers were persecuted by Jews *and* Romans. Seems like this Jesus guy failed.

And if Jesus really was God's Son, wouldn't God have protected Him? Muslims believe Jesus was the Messiah (Quran 4:171) and one of Allah's greatest prophets, so Allah didn't let Jesus get crucified (Quran 4:157-8).

To many, Jesus' premature death was proof He was a failure. The Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (AKA the Moonies, a cult from Korea), thinks this way.

<https://familyfed.org/chapter-4-the-messiah-his-advent> -- What would have happened if Jesus had not been crucified? Jesus would have accomplished both the spiritual and physical aspects of salvation. He surely would have established the everlasting and indestructible Kingdom of Heaven on earth. ... Jesus could not fulfill the goal of complete salvation ... because his body was struck down by Satan.

Since the time of Jesus, Christians have believed that Jesus came to this world to die on the cross. ... Jesus had wanted to live and fulfill his destiny, yet due to the people's disbelief in him, he died with a heart full of disappointment.

If Jesus couldn't convince God's religious leaders, why would anyone else listen to Him? How can He save others if He can't save Himself (Matthew 27:38-44)?

"Let me tell you about Jesus. He's *the* king of the Jews ... who was killed by the Jews. Trust me, He's the King!"

*How is this wise?* The punishment for sin is death (Romans 6:23). God gave His people the gift of sacrifices where innocent animals would die in the place of people. Sacrifice was a key function of the temple. All this death reminded people that God doesn't take sin lightly. But this wasn't a permanent solution so animals had to constantly be killed (Hebrews 10:1-4). So, Jesus offered Himself as a perfect sacrifice to take on our punishment once and for all (Hebrews 10:11-12). We don't need to go to a temple to sacrifice animals because of Jesus.

**Resurrection.** Thankfully, Jesus' death wasn't the end of the story. Jesus came back from the dead. For Christians who grew up in the church, this is good news. But for people non-Christians, it sounds like a myth.

United States founding father Thomas Jefferson liked Jesus' moral teaching but thought the supernatural stuff (including the resurrection) was nonsense. He literally cut and pasted the Gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) into his own version, removing all miracles. His version ends with Jesus being buried (<https://americanhistory.si.edu/JeffersonBible/the-book/?view=scan&page=86#dl>) with no resurrection.

"Let me tell you about Jesus. He was hung on a cross, died, and was buried, *but* He came back from the dead!" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

*How is this wise?* Scottish preacher John Duncan said that Jesus was a fraud, was deluded, or divine. Jesus was totally lying about who He was, was someone with a mental illness, or God. There's no shortage of religious leaders who fall under the first two categories who have died and none of their prophecies came true. Jesus is different because He came back from the dead and hundreds of people saw Him (1 Corinthians 15:6-7). This proves everything He said was true (1 Corinthians 15:12-20). He is God! He can give us life after death and we can be together with Him forever!

**Carry Cross.** Prosperity pastors say God promises "favor, promotion, and opportunity bigger than you ever imagined" (Pastor Joel Osteen, <https://www.facebook.com/JoelOsteen/posts/gods-dream-for-your-life-is-so-much-bigger-than-your-own-if-you-will-keep-being-/10156779974255227/>). They want you to think that "When you expect the best, you release a magnetic force in your mind which by a law of attraction tends to bring the best to you" (Pastor Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking*). They tell us that "Anyone who tells you to deny yourself is Satan" (Pastor Paula White, <https://albertmohler.com/2019/05/03/would-you-trade-eternal-life-for-a-ferrari-the-false-gospel-of-prosperity-theology/>).

They call themselves pastors, but they're not interested in helping people follow Jesus. To them, God's ultimate desire is for us to be materially comfortable and prosperous. His ultimate gift isn't forgiveness of sins and a relationship with Him, but earthly rewards (Matthew 6:10-21; Luke 18:24-30). There is not one example of someone in the Bible who believed in Jesus and became wealthy. If anything, the wealthy were eager to give their wealth up out of love for God and others.

Back in high school, a girl used to message me on AOL Instant Messenger to ask for math help. (I was co-president of the math honors society, Mu Alpha Theta. Please hold your applause.) I thought she was cute, so I

was eager to help, thinking maybe I could get to know her through this. After a while, I realized she only talked to me when she had questions. She wouldn't respond until she needed help again. She only wanted math help, not me, a math honors society co-president. [INSERT SAD FACE HERE]

We often treat God that way. We're eager to talk to Him to get what we want but don't want Him.

But the Jesus we follow didn't experience favor, promotion, and opportunity. He died in His early 30s after selflessly serving everyone around Him, eventually sacrificing His life to save others (Matthew 20:28). If He didn't, we would be left dead in our sins and destined for eternal damnation (Ephesians 2:1-3).

If Jesus chose the path of self-sacrifice, we can only follow Him by sacrificing ourselves, too (Matthew 16:21-26). If we're not, we're walking down a completely different path. It's like saying you want to be like LeBron James but you never play basketball or want to be like Pastor Vinh but don't eat Curly Wurly. Early church leaders embodied this as they identified themselves as slaves to Jesus, giving up everything to follow and serve Him (e.g., Philippians 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1; Jude 1).

"Let me tell you about Jesus. He suffered and sacrificed. If you follow Him, you'll suffer and sacrifice, too!"

*How is this wise?* What we're willing to suffer for shows what's important to us. The Olympics is a perfect example of people sacrificing time, money, and effort for the sake of their sport. I like sports, but not *that* much to sacrifice like they did.

When we suffer for Jesus, we demonstrate that God is bigger than what we're giving up (1 Peter 4:1-6). Knowing Jesus is better than anything else (Philippians 3:6-11). It's amazing to hear testimonies of people who endure so much for the sake of Jesus. It's not because we love pain, but because Jesus' love is so powerful it shines through the darkest places.

When we sacrifice our desire for revenge, God's mercy looks big (Luke 6:35-36). When we give up our money, the ministries of the church and other organizations look worthy. By placing ourselves last, the world sees how God's affirmation is better than the world's (James 4:10). When we spend our time worshiping God and bringing others to worship Him, too, we tell the world that God is the biggest prize (John 17:3).

**Substitutionary Atonement.** Here's a big theological term. *Atonement* means making things right. For example, if I go to your house for a Canucks game and "accidentally" break your TV while celebrating, I'd owe you a new TV and an apology to make things right. What if I break the \$40 million screen at the Cowboys' AT&T Stadium (<https://electronics.howstuffworks.com/dallas-cowboys-scoreboard.htm>)? You may be surprised, but I don't have \$40 million. My wife and I would have to save every paycheck for several hundred years to get that much money.

When we disobey God, we break our relationship with God. We owe a debt to God to make things right (Matthew 6:11-12). We have to make up for our sins. How do you pay back a God who owns everything? How do you un-offend a God? Since we can't, we must pay the penalty and suffer God's wrath for our actions.

That's where the *substitutionary* comes in. Jesus came to earth and lived a perfect life, obeying every rule and law. He loved God and others exactly to God's standard. He broke nothing, so He owed nothing. Jesus took on our punishment as our *substitute*, paying for our *atonement*. Jesus made things right so our relationship with God is repaired. Paul tells us this is a free gift from God and not something we can earn (Ephesians 2:8-9).

This doctrine sounds wonderful, but people naturally don't like it. We want to pay for our sins to feel a sense of pride or make sure we've fulfilled the requirements. Hindus may follow *prāyaścitta* to pay for sins

(<https://www.wisdomlib.org/hinduism/book/the-agni-purana/d/doc1083398.html>) and Sikhs need to meditate their way to salvation (Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji, Ang 1427). At best, many believe "God helps those who help themselves". Mormons believe "that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do" (2 Nephi 25:23). We want to *do* something to earn our salvation. We don't want to trust Jesus to secure it for us.

"Let me tell you about Jesus. You need Him because You are dead in your sins and are completely helpless to save yourself."

*How is this wise?* God gets all the credit! Think about the major events in the Bible. It's clear who deserves the praise. Abraham and Sarah v. barrenness, Joshua v. Jericho, David v. Goliath, Esther v. Haman. You name it. Their contribution was trusting that God could do the heavy lifting. God doesn't share His glory (Isaiah 42:8).

Because Jesus did 100% of the work to pay our debt, He gets 100% of the glory. We are helpless without God (Romans 5:6). Salvation is based on God's ability and not our own, so that means anyone can be saved!

#### **4. How does knowing God chooses the weak impact how you see yourself?**

Paul emphasizes that God didn't only pick the brightest scholars, the politically influential, or the highest in society to be His people. Chances are there were some, but it seems most of them wouldn't be considered special to Greco-Roman society. Their inclusion into God's family wasn't because they earned a place.

**Admitting Our Faults.** Contrary to how much of the world works, to follow Jesus means admitting our inadequacies.

We admit we're foolish because we've tried to find joy and life by doing things our way. We don't have all the answers and often the answers we do have are wrong. Even the smartest philosophers and scientists can't solve life's greatest questions.

We admit we can't save ourselves from death, no matter how hard we try (Matthew 6:27). I've been hearing futurologist Michio Kaku talk about immortality being in our grasp for the past 30 years

(<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/eX6Y7xQC1Q4>) but life expectancy seems to have peaked

(<https://www.cbc.ca/news/health/life-expectancy-1.7042008>).

We admit we're powerless to change the world around us. We can't control natural disasters, armed conflicts, or crime. Look at how powerless we were against COVID! All we could do was take precautions and ride it out.

As Christians, we don't gather as people who have it all together. We're the opposite! We gather to worship Jesus because we're completely dependent on Him.

**Humility and Gratitude.** Because we admit our weaknesses, we're humble. The Corinthian church had rivalries because human leaders boosted their egos. Paul, Apollos, Cephas. "These guys are superstars and if I follow them, I'm a superstar, too." "I'm on the winning team, unlike those other people."

But we know the only superstar is Jesus, so we're humble. When a pastor we appreciate gives a great sermon or runs a ministry well, we thank Jesus for working through them. When we're winning our battle against sin, we thank Jesus for working in us through His Spirit. When things go poorly, we ask Jesus for help. When we want to understand God, we rely on God's Word and not our own wisdom.

#### **5. How does knowing the cross is foolishness to non-believers impact how we interact with non-believers?**

We all have non-believing classmates, co-workers, neighbors, friends, workout partners, Uber drivers, and more. How can the truth from today's passage impact how we relate to them?

**Humility.** It's easy to look down on people following wacky cults or weird religions. "What a bunch of idiots! You follow that?" But we must remember the only reason we're not like them is because of God's grace. We didn't earn Jesus' love or favor. We didn't save ourselves. It's all by God's grace.

**Relying on God.** Apologetics is about how you respond to questions and criticisms about Christianity. Peter tells us to be ready to respond when people have questions about our hope (1 Peter 3:15). But we must acknowledge that our responses cannot ultimately convince people to believe in Jesus. I can't stand videos with clickbait titles like "Christian Shuts Down Atheist" or someone supposedly sharing foolproof arguments. Those arguments are important, but can't save.

The Israelites had God's law, Moses, and God in their midst, but they still rejected God repeatedly. The Jewish people had the law/prophets and Jesus' miracles and resurrection, but they still rejected Jesus. They had the best evidence, but they couldn't believe in God on their own (Romans 3:10-12, 23). Everyone is naturally dead in their sins (Ephesians 2:1). It's not a head problem, but a heart one.

Stephen Hawking said, "Remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see and wonder about what makes the universe exist" (<https://time.com/5199149/stephen-hawking-death-god-atheist/>). He was one of the smartest people in history and understood the universe in ways I can't even begin to comprehend. But his 160 IQ couldn't overcome the natural sin in his heart. He tragically died an atheist without seeking the God who created the universe.

Yes, share the Gospel and explain your faith well. Learn how to respond to skeptics. But don't forget to pray! Ask God to change their hearts and show them the beauty of the Gospel. Without God's help, they will only see it as foolishness.