



Sermon Discussions - Living Distinctively

Rather than having a specific study each week, we will try to use a fixed template. The aim is that we spend more time on application and sharing and less on understanding, as that happened on Sunday.

Preparation/Tips

- Make sure you listen to the sermon, are clear on the message, spend time in prayer for yourself and your group, and can share something for every question.
- It is usually good to send the questions to your group and ask them to think and pray through the questions beforehand (so they will have to catch up on the sermon too). However, with some groups this can take away from discussion.
- Maybe think of a relevant icebreaker that connects with the theme of the sermon.
- Try to spend at least 60% of your time on application (questions 3-4, 6-7). For question 2, don't spend too much time on questions about details that have little consequence for the meaning and application of the text.

Sermon Discussion Questions

- *(Understanding)* What was the sermon about this week? What was the Big Idea and what were the main points?
- *(Understanding)* Do you have any questions about the passage or things you didn't understand? Spend a short time trying to find an answer together.
- *(Application)* What part of the sermon was most impactful to you personally, and why?
- *(Application)* Where in the sermon/passage were you convicted of sin, or feel the need to repent?
- *(Application)* What from the sermon/passage do you want to rejoice in? How does it motivate you to respond?
- *What does this passage tell you about the world and God's love for the lost? How would it speak to those outside the church?*
- *(Application)* What is God calling you to do in the light of this message?



Power

This short series is about how Christians are supposed to be different from the world in three core areas: money, sex and power. Through the gospel we can live in a way that seems strange and counterproductive to the world, yet is a beautiful witness, as Peter urges us to do in 1 Peter 2:9-12.

The first topic is **power** - the ability to significantly influence others. This is something we all have in various measures. Either official authority because of our role at work, in society or in our family, or informally through our age, personality, maturity, longevity, physical presence etc. We all have power and influence in some measure. And we should realize power is **a stewardship, entrusted to you by God, in order to serve others, not yourself.**

In Mark 10:35-45 we see these two kinds of power. James & John want glory and power - to sit in positions of authority at Jesus' right and left hand (v37). We see how power seduces us, blinds us ("you don't know what you are asking", Jesus says) and multiplies. Ultimately it is just for themselves, all about them. Jesus calls out that this is how the world sees and uses power, but his disciples should be different (v42-44), which e.g. we see in the NT when church 'leadership' is far more often referred to as servanthood.

Why should we use our power to serve others? First, this is part of *God's design for humanity*. God uses his power to do good to his creation, and we are made in his image, and so in every power structure that is what it means to be human. But more, it is at the *heart of God's rescue plan*. What do we see on the cross? Jesus, the one with all authority and power, not using this to his own advantage, but laying it aside to serve those who couldn't save themselves (Mark 10:45, in light of Daniel 7:13-14), and to give them everything out of sheer grace.

The main reason we want power is to get something for ourselves. The power of the gospel is that we as Christians already have everything in Jesus, through his loving grace and work on the cross. So if we don't need power to get something for ourselves, we are free instead to use it to serve and bless others. The gospel is not just the example of our loving service, but the power behind it.



Money

The second sermon in this series is about money. This is a huge idol in Hong Kong, as money can get us everything - security, comfort, approval etc. Moreover we need money to live in the modern world, and that's OK - money is just neutral, and can be a gift of God to be enjoyed and stewarded.

Yet as we look at the Bible's teaching on money, Christian attitudes are very distinctive. They don't idolize money (1 Tim 6:17), but even more, they seem not to care about it much. They are quite content with the basics (1 Tim 6:6-8) and OK with losing it (Heb 10:34). They actively and generously give it away (1 Tim 6:18-19, 2 Cor 8:1-4). How can they do that?

Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:19-34 is helpful. **First, money is only temporary.** Treasures on earth don't last. Things break, get stolen, get wiped out in the stock market, suffer from inflation, and then get left behind when you die. Jesus says it's far better to invest in treasures in heaven, which last forever. So better to actively use as much money as we can for the gospel rather than on things here. It is the wisest investment decision ;-).

(We don't talk much about treasure in heaven, or the reward Jesus promises but it's there in Scripture. We store up treasure by living for him, loving your enemies, doing good, being persecuted, giving and lots of other ways (Matt 10:42, 25:14-30, Luke 6:23, 35, 12:21, 18:22). Jesus doesn't tell us exactly what it is, except that it is not selfish. It is for ourselves (Matt 6:20) but other-centred and God-centred. E.g. Paul says the Thessalonians are his glory and joy before God (1 Thess 2:19-20) and the servant's reward is to enter into the joy of his master (Matt 25:21, 23). Good to keep in mind.)

Of course this feels scary, living for God with our finances. Won't we lose out? Won't we suffer financially as a result? No need to be anxious, Jesus says in 6:25-34. **Your heavenly Father will take care of you.** He knows your needs, and if you look around you see how good he is at taking care. Even more, he gave up his Son for you (Rom 8:32). If he is so committed to you, won't he make sure your needs are met? If we truly believe this, we are free to not be like the world but instead seek the Kingdom first with our finances (Matt 6:31-33).



Sex (1 Corinthians 6:12-7:5)

The last sermon in this series is about sex. There is a lot to say about this topic. It is often a painful and difficult topic for all kinds of reasons, yet on the other hand, given the world we live in, it is what everyone wants to know more about.

The following points were made on Sunday. *Note that it might be easier and more helpful to split the group into men and women for this discussion.*

Sex is about love, not freedom. The Corinthians only cared about what they could do and were allowed to do (6:12). But they didn't ask what is good for others. Knowing Jesus' love who didn't use his freedom for himself but gave himself up for others, Christians want love to be the guiding principle of their lives, including in relationships with others.

Sex is sacred, not insignificant. The world treats it as insignificant. As the Corinthians said, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food." It is just a bodily craving that doesn't matter in the long run. Instead, in the Bible sex is sacred and powerful. It brings about an emotional and spiritual union between two people (6:13-17), and so sinning in this area is unique in the harm it does to a person (6:18). And so Christians restrict sex only to marriage not because it is bad but because it is sacred, precious and powerful.

Sex is about covenant renewal, not consumerism. It is not about me getting my pleasure but other-centred. People may not have heard this idea of covenant renewal before, but this is what it is. When a couple gets married, they say "All that I am I give to you". This is the start of the covenant of marriage. And sex renews this. You physically and emotionally say again "All that I am I give to you." (NB *this is why sex is for after the wedding. You don't renew a covenant before it is made.*) But it means sex is a profoundly relational and other-centred act, where you give yourself to the other person. But in modern culture is it all about self-gratification, using others for my own pleasure. So e.g. for those tempted to sleep together before marriage, ask yourself "Do I want this for the other person, or for my own pleasure?". Similar for hook-up culture, pornography etc.

Sex is good but it is not God. It can't bring ultimate identity, status and happiness. The world knows the problem but thinks the solution is a different partner, different techniques and so on. Instead, Christians know we should find our joy in God and in loving others, in this case our spouse. And ultimately as couples grow in love for God and each other over decades, sex takes its limited place and is the most satisfying.