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Servanthood & Stewardship

I Corinthians 4 | Week Three

Overview

The goal of the Fellowship is to create connections leading to authentic community, and provide biblical perspective on becoming a Christian scholar. Therefore, be sure to take time to hear from each other (15 minutes), review the lesson (30 minutes) and to pray for personal concerns and campus outreach efforts (15 minutes). Encourage participants to read the chapter in advance, using it for personal devotionals, reflecting on the Memory Verse and journaling insights from your Quiet Time. Try to connect with others outside of the Fellowship this week. In this way your spiritual and relational goals for the group can be met. Having leaders rotate discussion will allow each to share their perspective.

Where We Are Now

In the last session we looked at the difference between human wisdom versus the power of God. We concluded that we cannot rely exclusively on our own wisdom, but need to depend on the wisdom that comes from knowing Christ.

This Week

This week we will look at the importance of being humble servants and stewards who care far more about what God thinks of us than what the world around us thinks. To this end, we should seek to imitate wise, Godly mentors. We should avoid arrogance, and live out our faith powerfully by His Spirit. It is not just something to simply study or talk about.

The Big Idea

It is more important that we humbly serve God, caring about what He thinks of us far more than what the world thinks, and faithfully serve as stewards of His truths. We must endure persecution, imitate wise and Godly mentors, and beware of arrogance.

Memory Verse I Cor. 4:1, 2

Looking at the Text

Ask someone to read I Corinthians 4:1-5 - *This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. 3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I am not*

Get Started

Open up the session by asking someone to pray. This will help break the ice and get everyone in the practice of listening to each other.

Don't Forget

Before you start calling on people to read Scripture or pray, make sure the individual you are calling on is comfortable with the task. You never want to put someone on the spot!

All provided Scripture quotations are in the English Standard Version.

aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. **5** Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

1. Paul begins by stating that we are both “servants” and “stewards.” Who do we serve? How are we stewards?

We serve Christ. A steward is someone who is responsible for caring or watching over something. Christians are to serve as faithful stewards of the mysteries of God. As Christian graduate students we are no different from other believers who are called as “stewards” to be faithful in serving Christ. However, our tasks will be very different as Christian scholars. What does it mean to be faithful as academics? Excellence in research (seen through the lens of a Creator God), fair as a TA, responsible relationally with lab-mates and department peers (initiating meaningful dialog), etc.

2. What does Paul say about judgment in this passage?

He says that he is not concerned about being judged by other people, even human courts. Instead, what really matters in relation to judgment is what God thinks of us.

Ask someone to read verses 6-13 - *I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. **7** For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*

8 *Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!* **9** *For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. **10** We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. **11** To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, **12** and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; **13** when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.*

3. What does the phrase “not to go beyond what is written” mean? How do you think not going “beyond what is written” can help us in our Christian lives?

It means that the Bible is to serve as our standard for our Christian beliefs. By not going “beyond what is written” we can avoid falling into favoritism for a particular preacher, teacher, or Christian leader. By sticking to Scripture, we can guard against Christian cliques.

4. Verses 12 and 13 speak about being “reviled,” “persecuted,” and “slandered.” Why do you think the world sometimes treats Christians like this? What should our response be?

In taking a stand for Christ, Christians make certain claims about reality, such as the belief that salvation comes through Jesus. Such claims can offend others. Our

Think About It

Illustrate It

Can you think of someone who has endured persecution because of a strong stance they have taken, either academically, in relation to their faith, or both? Share about that experience with the group or invite others to do so.

Tie It Together

No one likes being judged, but sometimes we ourselves are quick to pass judgment on others. Thinking on a larger scale, we should seek to please God rather than live to try and please other people. By doing so we become free of the pressures of trying to adjust our lives, and sometimes even our beliefs, to suit others and can live in ways that please God.

Illustrate It

Pride and Humility: Arrogance and pride walk hand in hand. Both puff us up and encourage us to come across as more important than we really are. As C.S. Lewis said, “Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man.” Humility, on the other hand, helps us see ourselves modestly, not as more than we really are. This attitude allows God to move in our lives as we seek to cultivate virtue in our character, acknowledging God’s greatness and our moment-by-moment dependence on him.

response to persecution should be to endure it. Christ, for instance, called us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:44).

Ask someone to read verses 14-17 - *I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. 15 For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 16 I urge you, then, be imitators of me. 17 That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church.*

5. Paul encourages the Corinthians to imitate those who serve as Christian fathers. How can this help us?

By imitating good Christian role models we can better integrate their positive traits into our own lives.

Ask someone to read verses 18-21 - *Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. 20 For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power. 21 What do you wish? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love in a spirit of gentleness?*

6. Define the word “arrogant.” Given the context of these verses, what does Paul think of arrogance?

To be arrogant is to think more of ourselves than we should, to become prideful and vain about ourselves. Paul sees arrogance as a serious problem in the Christian life.

7. Given your academic pursuits, how might you fall into a form of arrogance? What can you do to avoid becoming arrogant?

If someone is very skilled in their chosen field of study, this can lead to thinking more highly of ourselves than we should. To avoid arrogance we can express gratitude to God for blessing us with the talents we have and actively seek to pursue humility in our lives.

Wrapping Up

8. How can you become a better servant and steward, both academically and in serving your church?

Avoiding arrogance and the pride that comes with it is a good step toward becoming a better servant and steward. It’s also important to remember that our goal is not to please others if they judge us but to please God above all. Academically, it’s important to be grateful to God for the abilities He has given us, as well as to responsibly care for and share the central truths of the faith. In church we can faithfully attend and participate in the fellowship that comes from joining with other believers in worship, prayer, and Bible study.

Tips for a Better Discussion

Try not to leave anyone out of the discussion, but at the same time be careful not to put undue pressure on people in attendance. Maybe they wish to remain silent because other matters are on their mind or because they didn’t have time to review the material. Make them feel comfortable and welcome, gently probing to find out if they are in need of some encouragement and prayer.

See the Ganssle quote from the discussion guide on humility.

Illustrating the Audience of One

A concert violinist received a standing ovation after the performance. Yet there seemed to be no joyful expression, until seeing “the teacher” in the wings applauding wildly. This affirmation was the approval sought above all others.

As your discussion comes to a close pray for each other to become faithful, humble, stewards