



Introduction

Welcome

from David Lose, author of *Making Sense of the Cross*

I am both pleased and grateful that you've offered your time and energy to serve as a leader for this study. The role you will play in helping others to better understand the nature and importance of Jesus' cross and resurrection is so important. I know that it takes both effort and commitment to lead a class like this effectively, and I appreciate that you've offered to do that.

To help you in the role you've accepted, this Introduction to the Leader Guide will do three things:

- share several guiding convictions of the course,
- go over the pattern of the Leader Guide and review each component of the sessions, and
- offer some advice ahead of time on how to lead this study most effectively.

A further word before jumping in: Sometimes when we are invited into leadership roles, we wonder if we are adequately prepared. I want to assure you from the outset that the primary requirements for leading this course are a curious and open mind, a desire to welcome others into a conversation about the cross, and a willingness to learn from the other participants in the class. You do not need to be an expert in Christian theology or the Bible to lead this course, and you should never feel that you need to have answers to all the questions others may raise. You are as much a learner as the other participants. In fact, you may very well find you learn even more because of your additional preparation; I regularly find I never learn a subject so well as when I prepare to teach it.

I hope and expect that leading these sessions will be a rewarding experience for you. I know already that others will benefit from your effort. Please accept my thanks in advance for this.

Guiding Convictions

Two convictions I have about the nature of conversations and the importance of questions shape both the content and the structure of *Making Sense of the Cross* and this study course. A third conviction about the nature of biblical faith will be helpful to consider as well.

1. Conversations

Countless experiences have taught me that there are few, if any, ways better at helping one learn something than by talking about it. From study sessions in college to long and memorable all-night conversations with friends, there's just something about hashing out an issue with others that makes a subject easier to understand, talk about, and use. Maybe it's that you have to put your knowledge to work in a conversation, fashioning an argument or thinking through how you might clearly explain what you mean. Or maybe it's the lively, often unpredictable twists and turns that are part and parcel of conversing with a real, live person that make conversations such important vehicles for learning. Whatever it is, I just know that in, with, and through conversations with others, I've probably learned more than from all the books I've ever read or lectures I've heard.

This conviction shapes *Making Sense of the Cross* in two important ways. First, the book is written as a conversation. This may feel a little awkward at first, as we're used to reading prose in one voice and point of view, but many have commented that they enjoy "listening in" to this kind of conversation and that, indeed, they find themselves participating right alongside the two voices in the narrative. Second, and just as important, this leader guide proposes a class design that has conversation at its heart. Again and again, people will be invited to engage in conversation with each other—thinking, talking, listening, responding—all with the conviction that we have a tremendous amount to teach each other and that the best way to share, teach, and learn is through conversation.

2. Questions

Somewhere along the way, many of us picked up the idea that because questions supposedly betray ignorance, they are something we should avoid. That is, we fear that others will unconsciously equate the number of questions we ask with our intellectual inadequacy. Sometimes we do indeed ask questions because we don't know something, and in those cases I can't think of a better way of learning. (Isn't it, after all, the truly foolish person who never asks a question for fear of looking foolish?) And so questions become an important vehicle for learning.

At other times, questions are a mark of just how much we already understand. Think about it: how could we begin to ask a particular question about Einstein's theory of relativity if we hadn't already mastered many of the basics? In fact, only someone who knows a lot more about physics than I do can even ask a coherent question about relativity. Questions, then, far from betraying a lack of intelligence, are actually the mark of a lively, sharp, and curious mind.

Similarly, there is a persistent notion among some Christians that doubt is the opposite of faith. Even a relatively cursory reading of Scripture, however, provides ample evidence that doubt is an integral part of the life of faith. Almost everyone in the Bible doubts God's promises at one time or another, and that includes not only the disciples but even Jesus, and so we should feel free to trust that God works through our doubts, not in spite of them.

Recognizing that questions and doubt are part of a robust biblical faith means that we will put a high value on the questions we have about faith, about life, and even about God. Therefore this book is, again, regularly moved forward by the questions and, at times, doubts of the conversation partners. Similarly, it will be essential to help

people in this study to come to believe that there are no “dumb questions” by creating a safe and welcoming environment where people feel comfortable sharing both their faith and their doubts and can voice both their insights and their questions.

In fact, the issue of “Insights and Questions” probably deserves another moment of reflection. Most of us are familiar with the IQ, or Intelligence Quotient, test. By and large, we think of an IQ test as a measure of intelligence according to what *we already know*. In much of life, however, and certainly for the purposes of this course, we will instead think of IQ as a measure of intelligence according to what *we are presently learning and still curious about*. For this reason, at the beginning and end of each session, we will take a few moments to dwell on the Insights and Questions (IQ) we have about the material at hand. The more comfortable we are in sharing what we are learning and questioning, the more enjoyable and profitable will be our time together.

3. Biblical Faith

I believe that the Bible is best understood as a collection of all kinds of different confessions of faith. These confessions take many different shapes and sizes. Some are stories while others are songs; some are legal codes and others genealogies; some are instructions for rituals, while others are romantic poetry. And some, as we will soon find out, are lengthy passion narratives. What binds all these varied confessions together is that all of them were offered by persons so gripped by an experience of God that they had to tell others. Together, these confessions of faith tell the story of God and God’s people. As anyone who opens a Bible soon discovers, however, it is not the same kind of story as one you find in a novel—with a neat beginning, middle, and end. Rather, it is more like the story that emerges from a family scrapbook, filled with bits and pieces of a family’s history over the generations.

Theology, at its best, helps us to make sense of the many rich and varied stories and confessions of faith in the Bible by pulling important themes from these confessions to help us see a larger story among all the many various and sundry stories in the Bible. In a sense, if we can imagine the biblical witness and our life of faith as a journey, theological doctrines are the major road markers, or signs, pointing us in the right way. That means that we think about and believe theology not because we have to—as if getting the right terms or historical background matters—but instead because theology is actually helpful to us. When theology is primarily about “believing the right things,” in fact, it quickly becomes dry and dusty, but when theology helps us make sense of Scripture and our lives, it’s remarkably helpful.

This is particularly true when we talk about the cross. There are a lot of strong views about the nature, purpose, and effect of the cross, and some Christians have actually made certain propositions about the cross the litmus test for measuring “true” faith. Given the complexity of the biblical witness about the cross, I think this is both unnecessary and unwise. Therefore, I think it will be very helpful to invite people to risk their views, their hunches, and their convictions about what is accomplished in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, even if they don’t always agree with each other. The point isn’t to understand the cross once and forever, and certainly not to be able to prove our orthodoxy over others. Rather, the goal for this study and the conversation it engenders is to have a fresh and ongoing understanding and experience of the life-transforming love of God that is poured out for us and all the world in and through Jesus’ cross and resurrection.

For this reason, don’t be afraid of hard questions; instead, honor both the questions and the insights people bring and trust that God can work through all of them to draw us more deeply into relationship with God and each

other. Sometimes honoring questions can seem frustrating—and some in the group may want to know what the “right” answer is—but I’ve found that by living with the questions rather than rushing to answer them, we end up with a livelier and deeper relationship with the God we come to know most clearly in the man hanging on a tree.

Overview of the Leader Guide and Session Components

In this section, we will walk through the structure of the Leader Guide and discuss each component that makes up a session.

PREPARE

The Prepare section is designed to help you get ready for each session. Here you will find the following elements:

- **Focus Statement**—Summarizes the key learning point of the session. This can serve as a compass point to keep you oriented toward the main idea of the chapter and session.
- **Chapter Overview**—Recaps the chapter from *Making Sense of the Cross* that the session will explore. This is for your review. You may, however, use this as a starting point to outline the key concepts for participants, particularly if you decide not to use the accompanying DVD introduction to the session.
- **Before You Begin**—Offers some questions for you to think about as you prepare to meet with participants.
- **Session Instructions**—Provides a list of key things to keep in mind as you prepare to lead the session.
- **Facilitator’s Prayer**—Presents a way to center yourself and prepare for the role you will play. It is the same each week, and you are encouraged to take confidence from its familiarity as well as adapt it to your needs.

Throughout the session, you will also find Teaching Tips and Supplies in the sidebar. Take time to look at these items as you prepare to lead. They provide helpful hints and additional ways to approach the session time.

GATHER

The Gather time includes three essential elements:

- **Welcome and Check-In**—Focuses on building relationships and trust so the community feels comfortable asking and addressing challenging questions. We do not learn well unless other, more basic, needs are met. One of the most basic needs participants will have is to feel welcome, accepted and safe. By spending a few moments each week to check-in, you will greatly strengthen the level of trust participants have for each other.

- **Opening Prayer**—Offers each participant the chance to be still and centered as they become open to God’s Word. Each session has a different prayer written with the subject material of that session in mind. Feel free to read it aloud or adapt it. You might also use this time to invite participants to share prayer requests or offer prayers.
- **Insights and Questions (IQ) Time**—Gives participants a chance to articulate, and therefore “own,” what they are learning (which is why this is one of the most important parts of the session). This time also helps participants focus their questions. Participants may be surprised by how powerful it is to name the new insights they have achieved and to listen to and learn from the insights of others. Sometimes participants will be able to answer each other’s questions—adding to their confidence in discussing matters of faith. Sometimes their questions will serve to focus the conversation ahead. Either way, collecting these insights and questions upfront will be a helpful habit to develop. At the end of each session, participants will revisit their IQs in light of the discussion and study they’ve just experienced.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

In this section participants will engage the central concepts and ideas of the chapter they’ve read in three ways.

- **Video Introduction**—Provides a summary of the chapter and an overview of the exercises and Bible study to come. If you choose not to show this, you will probably want to summarize the chapter concepts, drawing from the Chapter Overview (in the Prepare section).
- **Conversation Starters**—Focuses on two quotations directly from *Making Sense of the Cross* that capture the main ideas of each chapter. These quotations are followed by several questions designed to elicit initial conversation about the topic at hand.
- **Activity**—Gives participants a chance to put the concepts into practice, usually while working together in small groups. Here, some of the conceptual learning takes a deeper, more experiential “hold” of the participants. Many sessions also offer a Bonus Activity that can be used in addition to or instead of the main activity, depending upon your group’s needs and the amount of time you have for the class session.

OPEN SCRIPTURE

Having “practiced” the concepts of the chapter during the Activity, this section engages participants in exploring Bible texts to support the key concepts of the session.

- **Bible Text**—Engages participants in Scripture using the new ideas and tools they developed during Join the Conversation. Through discussion and activities, participants deepen their understanding not only of a biblical passage, but also of the main idea or skill covered in the chapter. Most sessions have a Bonus Activity with suggestions for exploring additional Bible passages.

EXTENDING THE CONVERSATION

- **Looking Back**—Revisits the notes from “IQ” (Insights & Questions) Time collected at the beginning of the session. This is usually a good opportunity to affirm what has been learned and sometimes to sharpen questions that the participants will want to keep in mind going forward.
- **Looking Ahead**—Previews the subject to be covered in the next chapter and session. You can share the brief instructions provided to “prime the pump” before participants read the next chapter and prepare for the next session.

REPRODUCIBLE SESSION HANDOUTS

These are provided to you for each session in case you want the learners to have the questions that accompany the activities of the study (Join the Conversation and Open Scripture). They also include the assignment for the upcoming session.

MAKE THE COURSE YOUR OWN

While the Conversation Starters, Activities, Bible Passages, and Bonus Activities are designed to reinforce and build on each other, please feel free to tailor or adapt these pieces to fit the needs and goals of your group. For example, you may anticipate spending extra time on a particular Activity and decide to spend less time on the Bible Passage that week, or vice versa. The Leader Guide sessions are just that—guides with information and suggestions to equip you to lead and facilitate each week’s study. You are and remain the leader of this study, and you can and should exercise your discretion in how to use the material provided. So after reading the Leader Guide, feel free to make this course your own.

Advice and Counsel

Be assured that you have everything you need to lead this course of study effectively. By reading through the Leader Guide ahead of time and doing some minimal preparation, you can be confident of facilitating a rewarding and enjoyable learning session for your participants. Below are several suggestions for enhancing that experience.

- **Making Sense of the Cross** is the main resource for each of the participants. The material in your Leader Guide is provided only to you. While you may want occasionally to read aloud or otherwise share some of the material in the Leader Guide (the chapter summaries, for instance), you will more often profit by encouraging participants to read from and engage the material directly from their books.
- **Questions are central to this course.** It will be helpful at the very beginning and throughout the course to remind people that there are no dumb questions, that we learn from the questions we have and that others ask, and that questions are, indeed, the mark of a curious and eager mind. You all have a great deal to teach and learn from each other; reminding participants of your confidence in this will only help develop trust and support within the group.

- ***Don't be afraid of silence.*** Sometimes one of the most difficult things about leading a study of any kind is enduring the silence that often comes immediately after you ask a question. As the leader, you have had time to think through the questions ahead of time. Participants, however, may not have thought of these questions before and are using this time to formulate their answers. What may seem like a very long time to you probably does not seem that long to the participants. So don't feel the need to fill the silences, but allow those to be "holy times" of contemplation in a world where such time is scarce.
- ***Pay attention to building relationships.*** As important as the material covered in each session may be, the relationships you are developing with each other around your shared interest in Scripture and the cross is more important. Always make room for catching up and checking in with each other, and always allow time and space for people to share their thoughts and questions, insights, and concerns. The time you spend with each other in conversation and prayer will always be time well spent.
- ***Conversations about faith, and certainly about the cross and resurrection, sometimes engender strong emotions in people.*** Even those who have not actively participated in a Bible study or attended worship in some time or read a Bible in years may be surprised at how strong their opinions about the cross are. Don't be caught off guard if people in your group disagree about various aspects of the cross or the Christian faith. (For instance, some may believe that there is only one way to understand the cross.) When such emotions or sentiments are expressed, try not to be defensive. Rather, consider the following steps in replying to a difficult or impassioned question:
 1. Honor the questioner by listening carefully to the question. You may want to try to reflect back what you are hearing to make sure you understand the participant correctly (for example, "It sounds like you are saying that it is very important to you that the cross be understood in this particular way").
 2. Acknowledge the validity of the question.
 3. Remind all participants that intelligent and faithful people can and will disagree with each other from time to time on these kinds of issues. Such disagreements do not signal a lack of faith.
 4. With the permission of the questioner, turn the question over to the larger group for discussion so that all participants have an opportunity to share their insights and similar questions.
 5. Work to maintain a level of respect and consideration for each other, rooted in a shared faith in the God we know in Jesus. Remember that this is more important than "resolving" differences.

A FINAL WORD

I am very excited for what you, as the leader and facilitator of the group, will learn by playing this role, and I am grateful for the service you are rendering your co-learners. Thank you for your time, effort, and good faith. Even more, thank God for you.

David Lose, author
Making Sense of the Cross

Session Schedules and Variations

The *Making Sense of the Cross* course is flexible to fit a variety of settings and timeframes. Use the following charts to guide your session planning. *Making Sense of the Cross* contains many rich theological concepts and opportunities for exploration and discussion. As you review the session materials, you may want to consider extending this course so the group can engage in deeper conversations with each other and with the Bible.

We include the times for a 60-minute session in our session discussions that follow.

	<i>45 MINUTES</i>	<i>60 MINUTES</i>	<i>90 MINUTES</i>	<i>120 MINUTES</i>
<i>GATHER</i>	5	10	15	15
<i>JOIN THE CONVERSATION</i>	20	20	35	50
<i>OPEN SCRIPTURE</i>	15	20	30	45
<i>EXTENDING THE CONVERSATION</i>	5	10	10	10

Depending on your desired emphasis, you may want to adjust the times given to each part of the session.

Using a Retreat Format

Consider a retreat option if you want to focus concentrated time on *Making Sense of the Cross*. You might even consider using this as a leadership retreat for your council and other congregational leaders. If you do plan to do the course in a retreat setting, you will greatly benefit by having the participants read the book *Making Sense of the Cross* before the retreat begins. Order copies and hand them out to retreat participants at least two weeks in advance if possible.

If you use this course in a retreat setting, you may want to meet one or more times after the retreat to continue your conversations and put the Take It with You options into practice.

Day 1: Friday

5:30 p.m.	<i>Supper</i>
6:30–8:00 p.m.	<i>Session 1</i>
8:00–8:10 p.m.	<i>Break</i>
8:10–9:40 p.m.	<i>Session 2</i>

Day 2: Saturday

7:30 a.m.	<i>Breakfast</i>
8:45–10:15 a.m.	<i>Session 3</i>
10:15–10:25 a.m.	<i>Break</i>
10:25–11:55 a.m.	<i>Session 4</i>
Noon–1:00 p.m.	<i>Lunch</i>
1:00–2:30 p.m.	<i>Session 5</i>
2:30–2:40 p.m.	<i>Break</i>
2:40–4:10 p.m.	<i>Session 6</i>
4:10–4:25 p.m.	<i>Closing Prayer and Departure</i>

Covenant

We agree to join with others in this study and discussion of the cross and Christian faith together.

It is our understanding that . . .

- No prior knowledge of the Bible or theology is expected or required.
- Members will not be forced to speak if we are not comfortable doing so.
- Group members are expected to respect each other's views.

We will do our best to . . .

- Read the study material in advance of each session.
- Make attendance at sessions a high priority.
- Share our ideas in the sessions, speaking as we are able.
- Tolerate the opinions and ideas of others.
- Keep personal things spoken in our time together confidential.
- Respond as we are able to requests of the leader and the various coordinators.
- Pray for the group gathered for study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Roster of Group Members

Names	Email / Phone Number / Address

Invitation Letter

Dear _____ ,

A group of us will be gathering soon to begin an exciting study called *Making Sense of the Cross*. There is no expectation that you have certain prior knowledge of the Bible or theology. Just bring your questions and openness to talk about matters of the cross and resurrection of Jesus. I would be very pleased if you could join us.

We will gather on _____ at _____ .
[day and date] *[location]*

We are meeting at _____ , and will plan to meet for about _____ minutes.
[time]

Copies of the book used in the study are available in the church office. If you plan to join us, you will find it very helpful to have read the Introduction and first chapter of the book. But even if you haven't read the book ahead of time, come anyway.

It should be a very relaxed first gathering. I'll call you in the next few days to see if you have any questions.

Talk to you soon!

In Christ,