

Small Group Materials 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Pray for your time together in God's Word!

Read the passage out loud as a group. Option: Give the group 5 minutes to look at the passage by themselves.

This Week's Passage

Scripture Reference

2 Cor. 4:7-18 (NIV—2011)

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. 15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Discussion

Ask the Group: What about this passage stood out to you?

Leaders' Note: This question gives your group the opportunity to explore their own ideas before leading them to specific discussion. Caution: Do not let this turn into a debate about personal understandings—keep it more on the "observation" level.

Ask the Group: What is the treasure Paul refers to in vs 7? Look back at the context and read the previous verses.

Leader's Note: In vs. 6, we have the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, so the treasure is the knowledge of God's glory.

- Why would Paul say "we have this treasure in jars of clay"?
Possible Answers: Paul uses this analogy to illustrate we are the poor, humble, and fragile jars of clay, and that what we have is valuable (God's power) but not we ourselves. It's not the vessel, but the materials inside.

Read to the Group: After the analogy about our treasure in jars of clay, Paul goes on to give several contrasts of the Christian life. He describes the suffering we experience now,

but that the glory of God is our ultimate gain.

Ask the Group: What are these contrasts Paul uses to describe the Christian life? Read through the entire passage and list the juxtapositions of “ ____ but ____ ” in two columns on the bottom of the scripture handout.

Possible Answers:

vs. 7	jars of clay	all-surpassing power from God
vs. 8	hard pressed	not crushed
	perplexed	not in despair
vs. 9	persecuted	not abandoned
	struck down	not destroyed
vs. 10	carry death (suffering) of Jesus	life (glory) of Jesus revealed
vs. 11	given over to death (suffering)	life (glory) revealed in mortal body
vs. 12	death (suffering) is at work in us	life (glory) is at work in us
vs. 16	outwardly wasting away	inwardly renewed day by day
vs. 17	light momentary affliction	prepared for an eternal glory
vs. 18	things seen temporary	things unseen eternal

Leader's Note: If your group does not find all of these juxtapositions at first, refer to this list throughout the rest of your study, adding to it as you go.

Ask the Group: Why would Paul mention both positive and negative things?

Possible Answer: To relate to those who are suffering, to encourage them to continue persevering, etc.

Ask the Group: What are the reasons Paul gives for the suffering of Christians (the negative parts of the list)?

Possible Answers: Starting in vs. 10: We experience suffering so that the life of Christ may be manifested. It's also for our sake and so grace may be reaching more and more people. This affliction prepares us for the eternal weight of glory.

- What attitude should we take while experiencing suffering?

Possible Answer: In vs. 16 we're encouraged to not lose heart. We still have hope, joy, and praise, focusing on the grace of God and the eternal promises.

Ask the Group: What reason does Paul give for our ultimate hope in suffering and death?

Possible Answers: Refer to vv. 14, 16-18. Jesus rose from the dead, and we will also be raised from the dead. We also have hope in endurance, always focusing on eternal glory.

Ask the Group: How could this hope change the Corinthians' viewpoint on suffering?

Possible Answers: See suffering as a means for growth, a way for God's glory to be revealed, etc.

Application

Ask the Group (small or large): How does the fact that Jesus rose from the dead give you hope in suffering?

Ask the Group (small or large): Where are you experiencing suffering right now?

- What from our study today can you focus on to encourage you this week?

Suggestion: Send this application question and challenge out during the week to encourage your group.

Last Week's Application: (Discuss if time)

Ask the Group (small or large): As you go through your week, are your words and actions calling attention to yourself or to God?

Ask the Group (small or large): As you interact with others, are you portraying the truth of the gospel at the risk of offending those around you?