

2 Corinthians

God's Glory and God's Grace

3. Suffering and Hope

2 Corinthians 4.16-5.10

Aim: To recognise that suffering is something that happens to all of us. We don't have to deny it or struggle in silence. But rather than be discouraged, we can have hope that we are looking forward to a bodily resurrection and living with God in a new Heaven and a new Earth.

Note to Leaders: There is a worship activity included at the end of this study as a response

To Start With:

Think about your stage of life. What is it that troubles you? Discuss amongst the group. How does it differ amongst the generations represented in your cell? (You can be as personal or general as you like with this question- whatever people are comfortable with.)

Reading the Passage:

Today's passage is part of Paul's on-going explanation of how the gospel is better than the Law and how Christians are a witness to the world of its glory and transformational power - even in difficulty and weakness.

He has used a number of metaphors; Christians being like a letter testifying to the truth of the Gospel, or being like jars of clay containing the glory of God

In this section Paul uses another metaphor to describe what we are like.

Read 2 Corinthians 4.16-5.10

1. From what you know what reasons would Paul have for losing heart? (1.8-9 & 4.8-10 might help).

2. How would you sum up Paul's argument in two or three sentences? (People could do this in pairs and then share).

*Read the same passage in **The Message** translation (See Handout 1)*

3. What images or ideas stand out to you now?
4. How helpful do you find his 'tent' metaphor? How far do you think it helps us grasp a proper perspective on suffering?
5. a) How would you describe Paul's attitude towards:
 - His present suffering?
 - His future death and judgement by Jesus?
 - Why do you think he feels like this?
- b) What are your feelings about these things in your own life? How far do you share Paul's confidence?

Response, Prayer, and Worship:

Paul is confident that even though the things that trouble us are only temporary, God still knows and cares about them.

Hand out pebbles (or a suitable substitute) to everyone. Ask people to think about something that troubles them at the moment. Maybe they are suffering or know someone else who is. Bring that suffering to God in prayer, asking him to give them the right perspective on it. As you pray, place the pebble in the centre of the room, and as you all hand over your burden to God you'll build up a mini cairn (pile of stones) in the middle of the room.

Now to finish have someone read aloud *Revelation 21.1-7* while others listen with their eyes closed. Spend some time imagining that day which will be so glorious that it will eclipse the very worst of human suffering. Ask God to help you cling onto that hope and praise him for the hope that he has given us in Jesus.

Then listen to or worship using Matt Redman's song '10 000 Reasons' [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AiC4GU4NttA> is a good live version that lasts about six minutes.]

