

LOOKING TO ETERNITY

A RESOURCE AIMED AT CHRISTIANS

We love God and God loves us. He cares for us and we know that He hurts when we hurt. It breaks His heart to see us in pain. But how are we supposed to deal with the pain? Is it ok to let the pain get us down? As Christians how can we deal with pain in a way that brings glory to God?

This resource is designed to tackle these questions with a series of group discussions and some verses taken from the Bible. It will work best when everyone in the group engages with the questions and is honest with their answers. This can be a very sensitive subject so please be tactful with your comments.

Take a few minutes to find out what hurts?

- * **INVITE THE GROUP TO SHARE SOME OF THE TIMES IN THEIR LIVES THEY'VE BEEN HURT, THIS CAN BE EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL OR SPIRITUAL PAIN. (REMEMBER TO BE EXTRA SENSITIVE IF THE ISSUE IS HAPPENING IN THE PRESENT).**
- * **INVITE THE GROUP TO SHARE SOME TIMES WHEN THEY FEEL THAT THEY HAVE BEEN LET DOWN, BY THE WORLD OR BY GOD.**

This study will focus on 2 Corinthians 4:7-18. It may be a good idea for someone to read the passage aloud before diving into the questions.

Has anyone ever felt like a jar of clay? Like a fragile piece of pottery? Like at any moment someone could come and knock you and you'll smash? Maybe you feel like that right now. But the verse says that there is a treasure in us, a treasure in the jars of clay.

- * **WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT TREASURE IS?**

When a jar of clay is pushed and crushed from every side what happens to it? It smashes. It shatters into hundreds of little pieces but the verse says it's not crushed!

- * **WHenever YOU'VE EXPERIENCED SUFFERING, WHAT ARE SOME OF THE QUESTIONS THAT YOU'VE ASKED? THINGS LIKE 'WHY ME?'**
- * **HAVE YOU BLAMED ANYONE OR ANYTHING THAT DIDN'T DESERVE IT?**
- * **HOW HAVE YOU FELT AFTER ASKING THOSE QUESTIONS? DID YOU EVER GET AN ANSWER? DID IT HELP?**

When we are in pain it often doesn't make any sense. We find ourselves asking why me? What did I do to deserve this? We can get very confused but the passage says we are perplexed but not in despair. It also says we are persecuted but not abandoned. Struck down but not destroyed.

- * **HAVE YOU EVER FELT CRUSHED, IN DESPAIR, ABANDONED OR DESTROYED?**
- * **COULD YOU GIVE SOME EXAMPLES OF THESE TIMES? HOW DID YOU DEAL WITH THAT?**

I think it's completely normal to feel like that. But we don't need to! The treasure inside us is the Holy Spirit. It's God living inside us and that is a massive treasure. If we get crushed then there is nowhere for God to stay. If we are in despair then we can't laugh and feel the joy of God. We cannot be abandoned because God is inside of us and we cannot be destroyed because God will protect us. It may feel like we are being destroyed or we are being abandoned but that's because we're looking for help from somewhere else. Not from God or we're being influenced by things that are not from God.

- * **WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS WHEN THE BIBLE SAYS 'WE ALWAYS CARRY AROUND IN OUR BODY THE DEATH OF JESUS' AND 'WE WHO ARE ALIVE ARE ALWAYS BEING GIVEN OVER TO DEATH FOR JESUS' SAKE'?**

Death is at work in us. We are getting ever closer to old age, we are living in a fallen world where pain and suffering can be seen everywhere. Pain and suffering is one of the great levellers, it puts everyone on the same level, everyone feels pain, rich and poor, young and old, black and white, gay and straight. The thing that makes you different is that 'life is at work in you'.

- * **WHAT DO YOU THINK IT MEANS TO HAVE LIFE AT WORK IN YOU?**
- * **HOW DO YOU FEEL, KNOWING THAT LIFE IS AT WORK IN YOU?**

Jesus once said 'I am the way, the truth and the life'. Jesus is the life that is working in you, the saviour of the world is at work in you! Therefore 'do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day'.

- * **IS IT ALWAYS EASY TO NOT LOSE HEART?**
- * **DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE WASTING AWAY?**
- * **OR DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE BEING RENEWED?**
- * **HOW DO YOU FEEL KNOWING THAT YOU ARE OUTWARDLY WASTING AWAY?**

Of course it's not easy to not lose heart. Jesus himself let the pain get to him. In the garden of Gethsemane, the pain of knowing what was about to happen caused him to weep bitterly and sweat blood, he knew that he would soon waste away, that his life would leave his body and it was going to literally hurt like hell before he died. But that was not a punishment, it was not a form of discipline it was simply the result of a broken world. But it did not last long and we see in verse 17 'our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.'

- * **WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE WORD MOMENTARY?**

It doesn't always feel 'momentary' or 'temporary' but it is. We know that there is a place where there is no suffering and that's where we are headed.

The pain and suffering that we go through is not our fault, it's not something that can be blamed on us or on God but only on the way of the world. It can be overwhelming, it can be distracting and it can be terrifying but our God went before us into this world of pain, our God watches over us and loves us, our God lives within us. So even though we suffer and we are drawing ever closer to the day we die, life is at work in us and the more we focus on that life, the everlasting life, the more we are focused on God and the more we are focused on God, the more glory we give to Him.

AND SO IT IS THAT '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.'