

Small Group Guide THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

The Church at Brook Hills

Dr. David Platt

November 3, 2013

2 Corinthians 1:1-2:17; 4:7-5:10; 11:16-12:10

Use this resource as a tool to help Christ-followers move forward in their spiritual growth. To do this well requires that the Small Group Leader is building a relationship with the individuals in the small group and has identified where the people are in their relationship with God. Are they Christ-followers? Are they growing in Christ? If so, in what areas do they need to grow further? As disciple-makers, Small Group Leaders shepherd people to know the truth of Scripture, to understand why it matters, and to apply it to their lives. Small Group Leaders come alongside those whom they disciple to discover how loving God, loving each other, and loving those not yet in the Kingdom should shape how they live. The structure of this resource coincides with moving people from knowledge (Main Truth) to understanding (Why It Matters) to application (Now What Do We Do?). Utilize this Small Group Guide as a flexible teaching tool to inform your time together and not as a rigid task list.

GETTING STARTED

Welcome – Incorporate time for greeting one another, enjoying any refreshments, and making announcements. If guests are visiting, make introductions and help them feel welcomed. Ask for their contact information, so you can follow up with them.

Looking Back – Provide an opportunity for small group members to share what God is teaching them, how they are applying what they are learning, and how He has given them opportunities to share the gospel with others. This can be done as a whole group or in smaller groups. Do the people know each other well enough to share more than surface level information? How can time together be used to foster deeper relationships among those in the small group? Also, what are the struggles and needs of the people in the small group? How can the people in the small group sacrificially serve each other?

Looking Up – Hold prayer as fundamental to small group time rather than supplemental to it. Give adoration and thanksgiving to God in prayer. Submit yourself to Him, confessing sin. Petition God for personal needs and other requests. Pray for the disciple-making efforts of those in the group and for the salvation of the lost in each other's families, spheres of influence, and in the world. The Weekly Prayer Focus below can also be incorporated in the group's prayer time.

Weekly Prayer Focus (from Our Worship Guide)

- *Pray for Our Lives: Praise God for the truth that any sorrow or suffering we experience is only temporary for all those who have faith in Jesus Christ. Pray for God to comfort us during our times of sorrow. Ask God to guide you in how you can be a comfort to others in need. Pray that our ministry will flow from God's work in our lives. Thank God for the hope His comfort brings to us. Pray we will live confident in our future because of God's unshakeable faithfulness.*
- *Pray for Our City: This week we are praying for the successful launch of WorkFaith Birmingham, a new non-profit ministry that Brook Hills is helping start. WorkFaith Birmingham will focus on helping urban adults in transition discover and enjoy God's plan for their lives through work and faith. We are also praying for Mountain Brook Community Church and Tim Kallam, Pastor.*
- *Pray for Our World: This week we are praying for Brook Hills Mid-Termer, Sarah Toles, serving in Oaxaca, Mexico. Sarah is a nurse and has been training national*

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believers in basic health care skills so they can serve their communities and share the gospel. To read more about Sarah and her time in Oaxaca, visit her blog at tokensofredeeminglove.blogspot.com. We are also praying for our Short-Term team serving with Neverthirst in Cambodia.

MAIN TRUTH

Message Outline

THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

2 Corinthians 1:1-2:17; 4:7-5:10; 11:16-12:10

We experience suffering in God.

- He is sovereign over all suffering.
 - Satan intends every type of suffering to sabotage us.
 - God ordains every type of suffering to sanctify us.
- He is familiar with all suffering.
- He is the source of all compassion.
- He is sufficient for all comfort.

We extend comfort from God.

- We are comforted for others' sake.
 - That we might show the love of Christ to each other in the church.
 - That we might spread the love of Christ to others in the world.
- We are a fellowship of brothers and sisters...
 - Who hurt.
 - With hope.

We exult in the glory of God.

- He is our victory.
- He is our deliverer.
- He is our reward.
 - Suffering comes full circle...
 - God uses suffering for our sake.
 - God uses suffering for others' sake.
 - God uses suffering for His sake.
 - Suffering becomes well worth it...
 - All suffering for the Christian is light and temporary.
 - Coming glory for the Christian is vast and eternal.

Message Summary

Physical struggles, emotional pain, relational hurts, financial issues, and personal temptation – God's Word speaks directly to those who are suffering. As we examine selected passages in 2 Corinthians, this letter explains that suffering affects even those who are obedient to God; therefore, Christ-followers should not be surprised when suffering comes. God utilizes suffering to sanctify believers and to enable us to show the love

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of Christ to each other in the church and to spread the love of Christ to others in the world. As we trust in God's sovereignty over all suffering, we rejoice in the glory of God knowing that He is our victory, our deliver, and our hope in affliction.

WHY IT MATTERS

Digging Deeper

"I wish my story was different. I wish it didn't have *this* in it." This statement was made by a college student in our faith family as she described a season of suffering she walked through during freshman year. But as she reflected, she described how that experience grew her faith in God, taught her more about His character and provision, and allowed her to better relate and minister to the girls in her dorm. God had transformed a season of loss and pain into a platform of ministry, enabling her to point others to God's sufficiency.

As you discuss the topic of suffering in your small group, there are likely people in the group who have or who are currently suffering. Like the college student in the true story above, they might wish that their story was different and did not include that particular chapter. What questions do people in the group have about God and suffering? Do not be surprised if someone in the group expresses anger, bitterness, or distrust of God because of what He has permitted in their lives or in the world. During the group time, point the group to what Scripture says about God's character and God's purpose in suffering.

Discuss different causes or reasons for suffering. For example, some forms of suffering directly result from a person's sin. If this is the case, what should be the response? Point out that repenting of sin does not make the consequences of that sin magically disappear. Suffering can also be a result of living in a sinful world. Death, natural disasters, illnesses, miscarriages – they occur because creation is affected by the Fall of man. Suffering can also result because we are affected by the sins of others, and many Christians suffer because of obedience in proclaiming the truth of Christ. Despite the cause of our suffering, Satan intends every type of suffering to sabotage us, and God intends every type of suffering to sanctify us. Describe ways in which suffering often sabotages the faith of believers. How can we resist temptation in these areas? Discuss how God uses suffering to refine us and to strengthen our faith in Him. Point out that we would not experience and truly know God's sufficiency if everything our lives were easy and smooth.

God wants to use His people as conduits of His comfort to others. We are comforted for others' sake so we might show the love of Christ to each other in the church. Ask the group members to relay how they have seen and experienced this truth in their lives. How should this truth affect our perspective as we face difficult seasons? What does it look like to be a "conduit of comfort"? How can we avoid self-centeredness in our suffering?

Ask the group how God uses suffering to spread the love of Christ to others in the world. God demonstrated most clearly His love for the world through the suffering of His Son. For those who are suffering, are you presenting a clear picture of Christ to the world in how you respond to your affliction? What does it look like to walk faithfully in suffering? How should suffering affect our care and concern for the lost and our intentionality in engaging the lost?

Is anyone in your group currently facing pain, illness, heartbreak, loss, etc.? if so, how can the group come alongside each other and encourage and support each other? For those who have endured seasons of suffering, what things did others do or say that comforted and encouraged them in their pain? How did they experience God's comfort in their affliction? Spend time praying for each other and for the specific situations that various group members are facing.

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NOW WHAT DO WE DO?

Group Discussion & Application

Use the following questions to help review the application of God's Word to our Head (What does God want me to know?), to our Heart (What does God want me to desire/value?), and to our Hands (What does God want me to do?).

- Why should we not be surprised when suffering comes?
- Read Acts 14:19-22. Following Christ does not mean that you will be healthy or prosper materially. Why is this true? What does Scripture teach?
- Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. God is sovereign over all who suffer. Discuss the implications of this truth. How should we respond to suffering in light of this truth?
- We do not always know *why* we suffer. So how do we walk by faith in God in the face of our unanswered questions?
- What does it mean to “experience suffering in God”?
- In what ways does Satan use suffering to sabotage our faith?
- How does God use suffering to sanctify us?
- Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-5. These verses mention the suffering that Christ experienced. The One who is sovereign over us has endured agony, pain, and loss. How should this reality affect how we view and respond to God in times of suffering?
- In what ways does God provide comfort in the midst of suffering?
- How do we avoid self-centeredness in our suffering?
- What does it practically look like to walk with faith and obedience during seasons of suffering?
- How do we hurt with hope? What hope do we have? How do we find hope in God during seasons of intense pain and brokenness? Read Romans 5:3; 2 Corinthians 1:10. How do we rejoice in God when we despair of life itself? How do we exult in God in such times?
- Should we pray for healing or for deliverance in times of suffering? How should we respond if God chooses not to answer our prayers in the way that we would choose? What does Scripture tell us about God's character and God's purpose in suffering?
- How is God glorified through the suffering of His people?
- Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. How should we live in light of these truths? How should these truths affect how you pray about suffering? How should these truths alter our desires?