

BIG IDEA

When things look their worst, Jesus is at his best.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT ME TO KNOW?

People have a tendency to say trite statements to those who are suffering. Have you been guilty of this? Have you been the recipient? Why do we tend to do say these things?

This question is probably one that everyone can answer! If you choose this question, monitor the conversation so that it doesn't head down a negative road (gossiping, name-calling, complaining).

Listen to Isaiah 61:1-4 as it is read aloud: what words or phrase jump out at you?

Listen to the passage again and focus on the word(s) or phrase: what images or people come to mind?

Listening to Scripture read aloud can impact us differently than reading it silently. Lead the group in this listening activity by telling them that you will read the passage. Ask them to listen for a word or phrase that jumps out. Before reading the passage aloud again, ask the group to share what they noticed. Read the passage again, instructing the group to pay attention to images or people that God may put on their heart. Have another brief discussion before you move on to the next question.

How does God call us to interact with those who are going through difficult times?

In this passage, Isaiah is proclaiming his calling to be an agent of restoration in the lives of the broken. Even though God is the ultimate Redeemer, he moves people with his Spirit to join him in that work.

Read Luke 4:16-21. How does this passage deepen your understanding of Isaiah 61:1-4?

Jesus read the scroll of Isaiah and declared that it had been fulfilled— this means that we can look to him as the example. If we ever want to know how to show God's love to people who are suffering, we need to look at Jesus.

What can we learn about Jesus from both of these passages?

Jesus is the clearest representation of the healing and restorative work of God in our lives!

WHAT IS MY INITIAL REACTION?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-12. What emotions and challenges can you identify in this passage? How can you relate?

Paul describes his situation in many ways: hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, struck-down. Some people in your group may be feeling this way now. It is hard not to despair in these times. Many of us fear that God has abandoned us. These feelings can be obstacles that keep us from trusting God in the midst of hard times.





LIFE GROUPS

LEADER GUIDE

What do you think it means to carry around the death of Jesus in our bodies? Have you ever felt this way?

This passage causes us to wrestle with some difficult concepts. Believers are called to follow Christ, and Christ endured much suffering. This is a great passage to wrestle through with groups of mature believers, but it may be challenging for groups that are younger in their faith. Below are some other scriptures that may help you to flesh this idea out further:

Romans 8:15-18

Philippians 3:10-16

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

Re-read 2 Corinthians 4:10. How does this passage support the big idea?

Carrying around death in our bodies doesn't sound like much fun. But Paul recognizes that these kinds of trials provide us with a unique opportunity to experience Christ and know him more deeply. Jesus is able to draw us close to him even when we are hard-pressed, persecuted and struck down.

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:13-18. According to this passage, what attitude are Christ-followers called to live out during times of suffering? How do our attitudes impact those around us?

Paul highlights a few key concepts in this passage: speaking from faith, graciousness which leads to gratitude, and endurance (not losing heart).

When you find yourself in difficult seasons, do your words reflect what you say you believe? Are they filled with grace?

Sometimes we are disappointed because of our expectations of what God is or is not doing.

Reflect on a recent hard season. Where were you able to show gratitude? How is God challenging you to grow in gratitude?

Gratitude is difficult to express during difficult times. It is a matter of maturity and confidence in the person of Jesus Christ. He is a good God. He is a gracious God. Always, even when you cannot see him clearly.

Re-read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. Paul encourages believers to "not lose heart." How is this possible? Based on this passage, what steps can we take to endure dark times?

God has his eyes on eternity for us, but we only see the short term. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 encourages us to expand our perspective by fixing our eyes on eternal things. We learned earlier in this discussion that we need to look to Jesus as our hope for restoration and as our example for how to love others who are hurting.

