



grow. pray. study.

May 10, 2020 “Adversity and Opportunity”

Scripture: Romans 5:3-4, 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, Romans 8:28, Philippians 1:12-14

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

A stunning change to a reordered life

MONDAY 5.11.20 Acts 7:54-8:3; 9:1-9, 20-22

Saul first appeared in the book of Acts as almost a bit player, a young man holding other people’s coats. He quickly became a leading persecutor of early Christians. A stunning encounter with the risen Christ utterly changed his life. He soon began using his Roman name, Paul (cf. [Acts 13:9](#)). His passion and drive, formerly used in hate and harassment, now focused on proclaiming persuasively that Jesus was, in fact, the long-awaited Messiah.

- In Saul’s upbringing, nearly everyone he valued, from the high priest down, rejected Jesus and saw Christians as a threat to God’s truth. It’s no wonder he worked passionately to destroy a faith he saw as dangerously wrong. In what ways did Saul have to adjust his dreams and expectations to reorder his life after meeting Jesus? Did your background and training make it easy or hard for you to believe in Jesus? What changes, if any, has your faith called you to make?
- Paul did not treat his meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus as “just a vision,” an illusory, inward incident. He believed he’d met the risen Christ just as “really” as any other apostle (cf. [1 Corinthians 15:5-9](#)). It was so significant that Paul told (and Luke reported) two additional versions of it ([Acts 22:3–16; 26:9–18](#)). What evidence or experiences have most strongly led you to share Paul’s faith Jesus is truly alive, and to order your life around that faith?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you called Saul and changed his life. He went on to change millions of lives by his preaching and writing. Give me listening ears and an openness to meet you as you reach out to my heart. Amen.

Unfair imprisonment? A chance to reorder disordered lives

TUESDAY 5.12.20 Acts 16:22-34

Paul and his young associate Silas had been in the Roman colony city of Philippi for several days (cf. [Acts 16:6-15](#)) when they were unfairly beaten and imprisoned. Around midnight, in stocks in prison, they were praying and singing hymns. Luke reported that a violent earthquake shook the prison. Paul and Silas calmed their jailer’s fears (if a Roman jailer let prisoners escape, he usually suffered the prisoners’ penalty). They led the man and his family to new life in Christ.

- Reflect on this—“Around midnight [in stocks in prison], Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns.” To what extent can you deal with even a long wait on a web site or a minor error on your electric bill by praying and singing hymns (inwardly if not outwardly)? In what ways does Paul and Silas’ example provide a challenging benchmark to help you assess your level of spiritual maturity, of how you are letting Jesus reorder your life?

- After the earthquake, Paul’s jailer was ready to kill himself rather than face the penalty for letting any prisoners escape. Scholar N. T. Wright said his question (verse 30) likely meant, “Gentlemen, will you please tell me how I can get out of this mess?” And of course he got more than he bargained for.” * Paul and Silas’ reply—“Believe in the Lord Jesus”—reached deeper than his immediate concern and spoke to all the disorder and messiness of human existence. It’s a basic question each of us faces: how can I trust Jesus to bring order to all the messes in my life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, that desperate, nameless jailer (and his whole family) found in you the answer to his whole spectrum of needs. I trust you to be the ultimate answer to all my needs, too. Amen.

* Wright, N.T., *Acts for Everyone, Part Two: Chapters 13-28*. (The New Testament for Everyone), Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

Focusing on unseen, eternal realities

WEDNESDAY 5.13.20 2 Corinthians 4:7-9, 16-18

The apostle Paul wrote the letter we call 2 Corinthians after a painful time. Many of his converts in Corinth had turned against him, biased by a set of teachers Paul dubbed (ironically) the “super apostles.” Seeing his own converts reject him was heartbreaking—but Paul did not let it destroy him. In verse 10, he said he dealt with his struggles by remembering Jesus’ death (which looked like the worst heartbreak of all). But it wasn’t—it became a life-changing victory when he rose from the dead.

- Paul called this life’s troubles “temporary minor problems.” He wasn’t in denial. He wasn’t trying to convince anyone that it’s great to be confused, harassed or knocked down. But he was clear that the greatest payoffs of serving Christ come in eternity, not now (“an eternal stockpile of glory”). And he was fine with that, convinced eternity was worth it. Are you?
- Paul expressed his hopeful spirit in verse 16: “we aren’t depressed...even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day.” Two months (so far) of pandemic cautions and shutdowns feel like forever. Yet like Paul’s earthly troubles they are a drop in the bucket to the long sweep of God’s life-reordering work. How can you let trouble and endurance build character and hope in you (cf. [Romans 5:1-4](#))? How can Paul’s eternal outlook give you more resilience today?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as your child I live in your eternal kingdom, shaped by your freeing, incredible grace. But I also live with headlines about still rising death tolls and infection rates. I thank you that this world isn’t all there is. I ask you to give me strength to live in your hope. Amen.

“When I’m weak, then I’m strong”

THURSDAY 5.14.20 2 Corinthians 11:23-29, 12:7-10

Later in 2 Corinthians, the apostle Paul honestly told his Christian friends of the many difficulties he faced as a traveling preacher. He related that he had prayed earnestly for God to remove a “thorn” in his body, an unspecified physical ailment. Whatever it was (perhaps poor eyesight), it clearly was a hindrance to his missionary travels. God did not take the ailment away. Yet Paul’s trust in God was such that he took that experience as a message saying “my grace is enough for you.”

- Paul did not blame God for his ailment—he called it “a messenger from Satan,” not from God. He said he “pleaded with the Lord three times for it to leave me alone.” How good a case can you imagine Paul, who often traveled on foot, making for God to give him full health? Did having his physical struggle continue mean God didn’t care about him? Or was he right in seeing it as a further message about God’s grace at work in his life?

- Our culture, like the Roman and Greek cultures of Paul’s day, values being “strong.” We often define “strong” as “standing on your own two feet,” being tough enough to handle any problem. Yet scholar N. T. Wright called “My grace is enough for you” “one of the most comforting, healing, reassuring and steadying ‘words of the Lord’ ever recorded.” * In what ways have you found that “when I’m weak, then I’m strong,” that relying on God’s grace makes you stronger than you could ever be on your own?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I’m not as invulnerable as I sometimes think I am. I’m grateful that your grace is with me even in times of struggle, and your power can work through the weakness I wish I didn’t have. Amen.

* Wright, N.T. *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* (The New Testament for Everyone) (p. 133). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

“We wait...with patience”

FRIDAY 5.15.20 Romans 8:18-25

As we saw yesterday, suffering was a regular part of Paul’s life as an apostle (cf. [2 Corinthians 11:23-29](#)).

We might think that would leave him bitter, defeated and hopeless. But it didn’t, and today we read why.

The apostle understood that “the essential quality of hope is that it is oriented to something in the future that one expects but does not yet possess (Rom 8:24–25).” * He knew real hope grew, not from human resolve or strength, but from the sustaining presence of God’s Holy Spirit.

- Paul also knew he was not the only one who suffered. (The whole creation suffers, he said.) Have you ever felt that life (or God) had singled you out to suffer? It in no way plays down your pain to remember that you are not alone, that this broken world’s reality is that “creation suffers.” We do not yet possess the reality of God’s promise to end all suffering. How do you find that trust in a better future gives you strength even in a painful present?

➤ When Paul wrote that “We were saved in hope,” he wasn’t in any way being glib. “Paul is not expressing a...superficial optimism that everything tends to everybody’s good in the end. No, if the ‘good’ which is God’s objective is our completed salvation, then its beneficiaries are his people who are described as those who love him.” ** How do you base your hope, not in vague, general optimism, but in the faithfulness of the Savior who loves you and who you’ve learned to love?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I don’t like this pandemic time. I don’t like it when I or someone I love is sick, or unemployed, or sad and disappointed. I’m truly thankful that even in these times, especially in these times, you are with me every moment. Amen.

* Article “Hope” in Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit and Tremper Longman III, general editors, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998, p. 399.

** John Stott, *The Message of Romans*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994, p. 248.

“God works all things together for good”

SATURDAY 5.16.20 Romans 8:28, 31-32, 35-39

The apostle Paul did not teach that God caused evil things like sickness, violence or broken relationships—but he knew they happen. “Trouble, or distress, or harassment, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword”—he’d faced all these and more. Yet his list of those “broken world” realities was not a complaint. As we’ve seen this week, none of those things could quench his hope and sink him into despair. After listing the obstacles that some might think could separate us from God’s love, he wrote, “In all these things we win a sweeping victory through the one who loved us” (verse 37). No matter what life throws at us, we can march, heads up and hope high, with Paul and a long line of believers in God’s eternal victory parade.

- Romans 8:28 did not say, as people sometimes think, that “all things” are good—they’re not. It said God, who is always good, can take even bad and painful things and bend them to serve a good purpose, if we are willing to put them in God’s hands. Can you recall times when God has brought good

out of hard things you have faced? Paul asked a compelling question: “Who will separate us from Christ’s love?” His Greek phrasing assumed that the answer was “Nobody and nothing could do that!” We are all living right now through a time that is painful, frustrating and scary. What in this situation is most likely to leave you feeling separated from God’s love? What spiritual “anchors” can keep you connected to God’s love, hope and peace, even in a time like this?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you that even when I feel overwhelmed, I have your promise that you can win a sweeping victory through me in “all these things.” Amen.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

Kris Richardson and family following the death of Evelyn Davis (mother), who died 4/19/2020

Jim Byram and family following the death of Charles Byram (father), 4/24/2020

Dorothy Morse and family following the death of George Roche (brother), who died 4/25/2020

Don Davidson and family following the death of Marguerite Babb (sister), 4/28/2020

Kitty Sampson and family following the death of Vicki (sister), 5/1/2020

Gloria Dye and family following the death of Rita C Rydzak (mother), 5/2/2020

Pam Pickell and family following the death of Jerry (brother), 5/3/2020

Ann Morrison and family following the death of Gertrude “Trudy” Cutaiar (mother), 5/4/2020