



Sermon-Based Small Group Leader Notes

For the week of October 9, 2011

Leader Guide

Opening Reminders

- This is week 4 in the 10-week cycle. We hope that by now you have found a LIFE Group in which you feel comfortable.
- If you have a Prayer Coordinator, is everyone receiving weekly prayer requests and praises?
- If the group has a Service Coordinator, have you started talking about possible projects you could do as a group? Brainstorm some interests. There is an Additional Resource with ideas put together by the Community Ministries Team, online and in the foyer.

Topic

“The Three ‘Rs’ of the Good Life”; Psalm 23; Rev. Brian Dixon

Goals for this Gathering

To recognize our fallibility in contrast with God’s power. That we are fragile and breakable, while he is everlasting, and by giving him control we too can become strong as his glorious light shines within us.

Prayer

Ask the Lord to make Himself and his will known to us as he walks with us this week.

Getting Started

Reminder to Leader

Encourage participants to take a few minutes each week to read the participant guide, jotting down a few responses to the questions. This is week 4 in the 10-week cycle. Opening questions will get to the meat of the study more quickly from this point on.

This week we are studying how we, as believers, relate to God. In this week’s sermon, we studied Psalm 23 and how God uses the three R’s to “form us” and provide us with the good life: God Restrains, leads through R.I.S.K.S., and he Rewards.

Answers to **Questions 1–3** are “personal” answers to try to open a discussion that will help people to consider their weakness and brokenness before God and hopefully to recognize that his power is made perfect through us—that because we are weak, his strength is clear.

Psalm 23—Just in case you need to review:

A psalm of David. ¹The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures, he

leads me beside quiet waters, ³he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name’s sake. ⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (NIV)

Into the Bible

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. ¹²So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

¹³It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, ¹⁴because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. ¹⁵All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So 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. (NIV)

Transformation #1

Intro to 2 Corinthians passages:

In this passage Paul’s focus shifts from the glory of the gospel message to the weakness of the gospel’s messenger. He shows that our sufferings only serve to demonstrate God’s glory; giving him further confidence and faith in the gospel. Even though this glorious gospel message has been entrusted to a weak messenger, Paul still had faith he would not “faint,” or “lose heart” (v. 16).

Question 4: Paul is calling the knowledge of the glory of God, essentially our salvation, a “treasure” carried in jars of clay. What do you think of when you imagine a clay jar? If the “treasure” is our salvation, what is represented by the “Jars of Clay”?

Paul is saying that God chose us to carry this precious message in the unadorned and fragile clay pots of our lives in order to prevent anyone from confusing God's incomparable power with us. God uses our frail, ordinary, weak, and corruptible mortal bodies to demonstrate his Power over/through our weakness.

Question 5: What other examples can we point to where God chose to use someone for his purposes that we might not have selected as the best, strongest, smartest, most capable candidate? Examples can come from the Bible, history, or modern times.

Answers may include almost any person in the Bible! The disciples were almost all fishermen... David was a little boy when he was chosen....Joseph was the youngest son... Moses, Noah, etc....

This can lead right into the story of Gideon....

The group leader should share the following illustration: Gideon's Army (Judges 7)

Another illustration of God's purposeful intent to show his power is found in Judges 7 in the story of Gideon. When God called Gideon to save Israel from Midian, Gideon said, “But Lord... how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family” (Judges 6:15 NIV).

God wanted to show his power and ensure that the Israelites could not take credit for defeating the Midianites. So he selected the lowest person in the weakest clan—essentially the lowliest person in all of Israel. And despite the fact that the Midianite army outnumbered Gideon's army of 32,000, God told Gideon that he wanted to *reduce* the number of soldiers.

To that end he instructed Gideon to release any fighters who were scared to fight the Midianites. Twenty-two thousand went home, leaving only 10,000. God still thought this was too many, so he had the remaining 10,000 go down to drink water from a stream. The men who drank from their hand, rather than kneeling to drink directly from the water, were chosen to stay, and Gideon released the other 9,700 and told them to go home.

This left only 300 men to defeat an army of thousands. And they did it by scaring their enemy in the dark with... **pay attention here....CLAY JARS** filled with lit torches and broken to reveal their hidden light, along with the blast from 300 trumpets at God's command.

Transformation #2

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor. 4:8-9 NIV).

Question 6: This is a verse you have run across a time or two if you've been in Bible studies over the years—but read it anew. What does this verse tell you about what we can expect from our lives and our relationship with God?

Common sense would say that because the treasure is in earthen vessels, easily smashed and broken, that defeat seems imminent. Yet through God's power we are Encouraged not Discouraged. We may experience trouble from every side and feel hard pressed, but He will not allow us to be crushed; we may be “perplexed” and confused, not understanding why or what is happening, and not sure which way to go, BUT we are not in despair, which means “to lose all hope.”

We know he cares for us. That no matter what happens he is with us. We don't know what to do, but He does. We may have been spiritually terrorized, but God hasn't left our side; we've been thrown down, but we haven't broken. He will always be there, for us and with us. He doesn't keep us from experiencing these “bad” parts of life, but he keeps us from despair. We always have him at our side. He is our hope.

Transformation #3

Question 7: How is Christ like the grain of wheat?

Paul and John remind us that a grain of wheat is just a grain of wheat until it is “dead” and buried in the ground. Because if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over.

In the same way, Christ died and was buried so that he could sprout into our lives, and when we share this message of the living Lord in our lives, this joy of Life in Christ is reproduced many times over.

Question 8: How does this image—of a pot being broken in order for the light inside to shine—represent all three transformations we experience through Christ?

Sample answers:

1) *Power over Weakness: we know that he is in control and it isn't up to us—we can't do it without Him.*

2) *Encouragement vs. Discouragement—we know that He can mend the pot, he can make us new, no matter how hard-pressed or confused we are, He is the light inside that will show us the way.*

3) *Life over Death—when the pot is broken, life, in the form of the savior, will take over and shine.*

Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer