

## Sermon-Based Small Group Preparation

For the week of October 9, 2011  
"The Three 'Rs' of the Good Life"  
Psalm 23

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Please look over these questions *before* your Small Group meeting.

### Getting Started

This week we are studying how God acts in our lives as he encourages us to develop a relationship with him.

- 1) As you consider how God relates to us through the "R's" discussed, please select one and give an example of how God manifested himself in this area, either in your own life or in the life of someone close to you.
  - God restrains
  - God leads through risks
  - God rewards
- 2) This week's sermon text, Psalm 23, celebrates God's companionship as we go through both good and difficult times. Thinking of difficult times you've experienced, can you recount a time you felt him walking through the "dark valley" with you?
- 3) What life experiences have helped you grow the most as a follower of Jesus Christ?

### Into the Bible

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

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

<sup>13</sup>It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, <sup>14</sup>because 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. <sup>15</sup>All 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.

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

Like the Psalmist whose faith held that God would care for him in troubles and in victory, the Apostle Paul also expressed his faith in a God who entrusted the Good News to a frail human messenger. We too can experience this transformation from broken to breakthrough when we place our faith in Him. Let's break the passage down into its transformative "parts."

### Transformation #1 – Power over Weakness

Look again at verse seven: "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7 NIV).

- 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"?
- 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.

Another great illustration of Power over Weakness, and a literal use of clay jars filled with light, is found in Judges 7 in the story of Gideon, which your leader will share.

### Transformation #2 – Encouragement over Discouragement

Look again at verses eight and nine: "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).

## Sermon Notes

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### Transformation #2 (continued)

- 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?

We are encouraged, and we don't lose hope, because of what we read in 2 Corinthians 12:9 – "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

### Transformation #3 – Life over Death

Finally, let's look again at verses ten through twelve: "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For 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. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you" (2 Cor. 4:10-12 NIV).

The Apostle John recorded Jesus' words, spoken during the week before his crucifixion, in his Gospel account: "Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds" (John 12:24 NIV).

- 7) How is Christ like the grain of wheat?

We can't hold on to life just as it is – that destroys our lives. But if we let go, reckless in God's love, we will have it forever, real and eternal. His death transformed us so that we can truly live.

### Digging Deeper

Remember in the story of Gideon, the torches were hidden in clay pots until the time of battle, and then they were broken so their light could shine.

- 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?

### Group Prayer