

AUGUST 16, 2020

IS THIS A CHALLENGE OR A CHANCE?

2 Corinthians 12:7-10



The Big Picture: Some people crumble under the pressure of a challenge. They become so bitter and resentful toward the Lord that they walk away from His calling for their lives. They might even resort to addictive behaviors to try to escape the pain. Others face similar challenges but have a completely different reaction. Instead of letting it weaken them, difficulties make them stronger. The difference is they have learned to depend more fully on the power of the Holy Spirit. They see things as a chance to grow instead of a challenge.

Through challenge, tribulation and difficulty, Paul learned ten things we can pass on:

- 1. He could know peace even in adversity.** Paul said, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me," (Philippians 4:11-13).
- 2. God would give him supernatural strength in his weakness.** He explained that his weakness allowed the Holy Spirit's power to work through his life: "I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong," (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).
- 3. The Lord was the source for all his needs.** Philippians 4:19 says, "My God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus." When we fully rely on the Father, He will provide for us.
- 4. He could trust in the Lord's faithfulness.** "God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it," (1 Corinthians 10:13). Paul had learned to depend on the Lord to carry him through any trial.
- 5. The Father valued his service more than his desires.** Although Scripture promises that the Lord delights in giving us the desires of our hearts (Psalms 37:4), He will prioritize our character development over our comfort. Instead of satisfying Paul's inclination toward comfort and ease, God sent adversity to prepare him for greater service (2 Corinthians 12:7).
- 6. Even in his adversity, God would strengthen his message.** Because Paul was imprisoned, the entire Roman guard heard the gospel (Philippians 1:13-15). The more adversity we face, the more effective our message will be to others. We have our greatest impact when people watch us go through pain and suffering with our faith intact.
- 7. It is important to see everything as coming from God.** God uses everything, even the wrongs of others, for His purposes in my life (2 Corinthians 12:7.)
- 8. God's ways are not our ways.** Suffering is often the stimulus to greater closeness with God. We draw near to Him for relief from pain and suffering and, in the process, discover more about how He works. (2 Corinthians 12:9-10.) Trouble prepared him to comfort others more effectively. God uses our suffering to prepare us to minister to others (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). We are best equipped to comfort people if we have been through something similar.
- 9. God had a specific purpose for adversity.** Paul's thorn had a specific function; it was designed to keep him humble and dependent on God, despite the astounding spiritual revelations he had been given (2 Corinthians 12:7). Like him, our trials are designed by God to help us become the people He desires.
- 10. We can rejoice in the midst of adversity.** In Philippians 4:4, the apostle wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" Knowing the Lord is always in control of our circumstances gives us a reason to celebrate.

LifeGroup Worksheet

AUGUST 16, 2020

1. Reflect- *How has God been working in your life? How has He provided, comforted, answered, reconciled or guided you? Be open to sharing both your successes and struggles.*

2. Review - LifeNotes on opposite side.

3. Read - **2 Corinthians 12:7-10** *carefully several times, both with your group and alone.*

4. Engage and Explore - *Try to answer at least one question.*

- a. Turn to the other side. Assign each person to look up the lessons mentioned in numbers 1-10. Read what is written for each number, as well as the scripture.
 - i. Which number impacts you the most?
 - ii. How is God speaking to you in this?
 - iii. If there was something you wanted to remember, what would it be?
- b. Is there a common theme in the points 1-10?
 - i. What was God saying to the early church?
 - ii. What is God saying to us now?
- c. What was Paul's response to his "thorn" (12:8,10)? What purpose can suffering serve (12:9)?
- d. Is life more a **challenge** for you or a **chance** to be more connected to God?

5. Connect - *how this passage applies to you and your relationship to Jesus and others. How is the Holy Spirit speaking to you through this passage? Try to answer at least one question.*

- a. What are some weaknesses or afflictions that you find difficult to live with?
- b. How does the Christian perspective on power and weakness differ from that of the world?
- c. What has the last five months taught you about how painful situations help you grow? Why is this so hard to grasp?
- d. In what way does knowing that God has a purpose for our challenges help you?
- e. Describe an area of challenge that you need to give back to Jesus with a different attitude.
- f. What weakness can you turn over to the Lord through prayer this week?

6. Silent Meditation - *You may want to move away from the group to a quiet spot. Silently read the scripture several more times. Write down the words/passage you want to focus on this week and how you plan to apply God's truth to your life. What is God saying and what will you do?*

7. Share- *Key insights with your group from question #6.*

8. Close in Prayer- *Try using different prayer models found in the LifeGroup Leader Handbook*