

Walking On In Despair - 2 Corinthians 4

The central theme of 2 Corinthians is the relationship between suffering and the power of the Spirit in Paul's apostolic life, ministry, and message. In addition to calling into question Paul's motives in organizing a collection for believers in Judea (8:20-21; cf. 2:17; 12:14-18) and questioning his personal courage (10:10-11; 11:21), Paul's opponents had argued that Paul suffered too much to be a Spirit-filled apostle of the risen Christ. Paul argues that his weakness as an apostle is the very means by which believers are comforted (1:3-11) and God in Christ is made known in the world (2:14-17; 4:7-12; 6:3-10; 11:23b-33). Paul's sufferings embody the cross of Christ, while his endurance amid adversity, with thanksgiving and contentment, manifests the resurrection power of the Spirit (12:7-10). Paul's suffering as an apostle is thus the very means God uses to reveal his glory (1:3-4, 11, 20; 4:15; 9:11-15; 10:17-18). -ESV Study Bible

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Warming Up

1. Would you consider yourself an optimist or pessimist? Do you think it's better to be one over the other?

Into the Passage

2 *Corinthians 4:1-18*

2. Summarise verses 1-6 in your own words.
3. What do you think would happen if the practice of "disgraceful, underhanded ways" was used (verse 2)?
4. What does verse 6 mean?
5. In verse 7, what are the jars of clay referring to?
6. Read verses 16 - 18, then summarise it to the person next to you. Why is it possible to not despair even in the midst of difficulty?

Moving Forward

7. What does it mean to walk on in difficult times? How can we do this?
8. What is the reason for these times? Do you think the purpose validates the hardships?
9. Like persecution, despair/discouragement looks different in everyone's lives. What forms do you think it can take?

Life Together

11. Fill in the blank: Lately I have felt _____. Share and pray.

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These notes are primarily for the Into the Passage portion, and are to be used just as guidelines or commentary notes. Most of them are my own thoughts, so take that with a grain of salt. Let the Word of God lead you to truth, not these notes.

Into the Passage

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

2. Summarise verses 1-6 in your own words.

Being brought into God's kingdom has changed our lives, and there will be those who desire to tear down those working for God, but we remember that it's not about glorifying ourselves, but its about glorifying Jesus Christ, the one who saved us.

3. What do you think would happen if the practice of "disgraceful, underhanded ways" was used (verse 2)?

The church would just become so engrossed with arguing and fighting amongst themselves. It would become a place of dissent, gossip, and judgement. A very different church to one filled with trust, forgiveness and grace.

4. What does verse 6 mean?

The ESV Study Bible says: Paul uses the provision of light in Gen. 1:3 to picture conversion as the dawning of the new creation amid this fallen world. the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. To know the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4) is to encounter the life-transforming glory of God.

5. In verse 7, what are the jars of clay referring to?

A common metaphor in the ancient world for human weakness

6. Read verses 16 - 18, then summarise it to the person next to you. Why is it possible to not despair even in the midst of difficulty?