



SESSION 3

- **Main Passage:** 2 Corinthians 11:16-30; 12:7-10
- **Purpose:** To help men understand that they must expect suffering when choosing to follow Jesus.
- **Session Snapshot:** Paul may be the best example of what a Christ-follower looks like. His life after meeting Jesus was full of suffering. This suffering wasn't meaningless; it served a valuable purpose and forced Paul to lean on God's grace. It even became a matter Paul felt confident to boast about.

GETTING STARTED

Kick-off your time together with a quick connection time or reviewing what you did in the last session.

FIRST, remind your group that this is week 3 of their video series on Paul and that it's part of a larger study looking at the real men of the Bible.

THEN, if you want to start with asking men for prayer requests, checking in on how their weeks have gone, or any other housekeeping tasks, do so.

FINALLY, if there are no questions or other input, transition into the *Digging In* section of your leader's guide.

DIGGING IN

Jump into the session by watching this week's video.

FIRST, play the video. You can access the video by logging into your Iron Hill Press account.

THEN, when the video is over, lead men in a short discussion based on what Rick covered. Feel free to come up with your own questions, or consider asking some similar to those below:

- **How have you seen God's power at work in your weak areas?**
- **When's the last time you've bragged about a weakness? Why would you?**
- **Where does pride most often pop up in your life? Is all pride bad? Why or why not?**
- **What suffering have you experienced because of your faith in Jesus?**
- **Paul suffered so he wouldn't become conceited (v7). Why do you think you go through times of suffering?**
- **Is it possible to experience the power of Christ without suffering? Explain your answer.**

- **If you never face suffering because of your faith, does that mean you are not following Christ closely enough? Why or why not?**

FINALLY, transition into the *Opening the Word* portion of your time together by saying something like the following:

- **In his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul did something that most men never do: he bragged about his weakness. He pointed to his suffering as the defining credentials of his apostleship. At least in Paul's mind, it appears that persecution speaks louder towards discipleship than the praises of people.**

OPENING THE WORD

Spend time going deeper into a specific concept Rick introduced in the video.

FIRST, explain that you're going to take a more in-depth look at 2 Corinthians 11:21-30 and 12:7-10. As Rick stated in the video, Paul did some boasting but not in the way we typically see it. To become the loyal disciple Paul was, we must learn to see things the way he did.

We must make sure your people have a good understanding of the context of the passage you'll be studying. Provide the context for the passage using the following bullet points:

- **Author:** The Apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to the Church in Corinth.
- **Time frame:** Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia around 55 or 56 AD, a year or so after writing 1 Corinthians and a year before writing his letter to the Romans from Corinth.
- **Purpose:** According to the ESV Study Bible, the main theme of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians was "the relationship between suffering and the power of the Spirit in Paul's apostolic life, ministry, and message."

THEN, read or have a volunteer read 2 Corinthians 11:21-30. When the volunteer has finished, lead the group in a brief discussion. Ask something like:

- **Paul lists the (many) consequences he had faced because of his faith as his qualifications to be an apostle. Why do you think suffering and faith in Jesus are linked?**
 - Answer: Because the world hated Jesus, it will hate His followers (John 15:18-19). In comparison to the rest of the world, Jesus has called us to an upside-down way of living that will make us drastically different than everyone else. And the world has never treated "different" very well.
- **Read 2 Timothy 3:12 to the group. Where have you recently experienced persecution because of your faith? How did you respond?**
 - Answers will vary. Allow guys to share personal stories of persecution and the positive/negative ways they reacted to it.
- **If you were in Paul's place, would there have been a breaking point for you? What would stop you from giving up and saying, "Enough is enough. I'm done suffering for the Gospel"?**
 - Answer: Once we become a Christian, we never have to face anything without God's help. He never leaves or forsakes us (Deuteronomy 31:6). Because His strength is in us, we will never have to take on more than we can endure (1 Corinthians 10:13). His strength gives us the strength needed to take on all things (Philippians 4:13).

Before transitioning to the next question, say something like:

- When we choose to follow Jesus, we don't have to go out searching for suffering; it will find us. While persecution is an expectation for the Christian, sometimes suffering is part of the process needed to make us better/stronger.

NEXT, direct your group's attention to 2 Corinthians 12:7-8. Then, ask:

- **How can suffering ever be considered a gift for our good?**
 - Answer: Paul had the kind of relationship with God few have ever experienced on this side of eternity. To keep him from becoming arrogant or conceited, Paul was given suffering. Spiritual struggles have the unique ability to strengthen our faith while keeping us humble at the same time.
- **Why do you think God would not remove Paul's "thorn?"**
 - Answer: Persecution and difficulty can remind us of our constant need for God and His grace. It prevents us from thinking we can do things on our own.
- **How have you experienced God's grace through seasons of suffering?**
 - Answers will vary.

THEN, read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. Paul was a man of strength. Reread 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 to see the kind of endurance and pain tolerance he had if you have any doubts about his manliness. But Paul sort of flips the script on the idea of strength and power. Ask:

- **What do you think it looks like to have God's power manifested in your weakness?**
 - Answer: The transforming work God performs on our minds and hearts is remarkable. He takes our sinfully weak areas and remodels them to His great purposes. Who we used to be is not who we are, and that is because God's strength has appeared in our weaknesses.
- **What would it take for you to become content with your weaknesses?**
 - Answers will vary.

FINALLY, have a volunteer reread 2 Corinthians 12:10. Then, say something like:

- **As men, we all want to be seen and thought of as strong, powerful. But regardless of our ability to take on pain or our max bench press numbers, our strength has a limit. But not God's. His power and strength know no boundaries. And it is perfected in our weaknesses.**

Ask if there are any questions. If there are none, transition into *Accepting the Challenge*.

ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE

Focus your group's attention on one key takeaway from your time together.

FIRST, explain that you want to challenge the group to focus on the takeaways from this session. Consider starting this portion of your session by asking your group what they think are the main application points from your session. Allow discussion to go until there are no more suggestions.

Then, if necessary, supplement your discussion with the following application points. Say something like:

- **When it comes to our family relationships, how can God's power be used to overcome our weaknesses?**
- **At work, where do you fall short that God's strength could be used to make a difference for His Kingdom?**
- **How can God use you at church in areas you have previously avoided because you saw them as your weak areas?**

Give the group time to consider each question. If it feels appropriate, allow discussion about the next steps they are considering taking to put this lesson into action.

FINALLY, encourage men to process these questions in the week to come. Challenge them to listen to what God is trying to tell them and to respond accordingly. If there are no more questions or input, close your time together in prayer.