

SPIRITUAL: ADVERSITY L.G.

LifeGroup Leader Notes

INTRODUCTION

Leaders, as you prepare for LifeGroup this week be in prayer once again about spiritual strongholds. The sermon's key idea was "*God doesn't only guide by what he provides, but also by what he withholds.*" Often the areas of abundance in our lives choke out our passion for Jesus because instead of a relentless pursuit of God we seek a lesser god. When we fail to embrace our areas of scarcity and weakness we miss out on opportunities to have God's power made manifest in our life in incredible ways. The Enemy doesn't want that!

Throughout the discussion this week you will be using Scripture to unmask the lie that prosperity equals blessing. You will be using the Apostle Paul's story to highlight that in our weaknesses God can be glorified and our spiritual walk strengthened. And finally--and most importantly!--there will be opportunities for your group to verbalize the ways in which they believe these lies and the areas of scarcity where God is trying to get their attention. By externalizing these areas of struggle and opportunity the light of Christ can shine into dark areas of our spiritual lives. Tonight is a chance for spiritual breakthrough!

DISCUSSION

1. In the sermon Paul quoted Craig Groeschel, "*God doesn't only guide by what he provides, but also by what he withholds.*" Paul then added, "God given limitations lead to spiritual multiplication."
 - a. Read through and discuss the quote above.
 - b. ***Next Level*** Share how this quote hits home for you or someone you know.
2. Read Peter, John and lame beggar's story in [Acts 3:1-10](#).
 - a. How do Peter's financial constraints became his spiritual strength?
Peter acknowledged to the beggar that he had no silver or gold. Functioning from a gut-response it would appear that Peter could not help the beggar at all (by providing food or medical care). However, because of Peter's financial

constraints, Peter focused on what he *could* offer the beggar: a fully restored relationship with Christ!

- a. Can your group think of or find some other biblical examples of how spiritual scarcity leads to spiritual multiplication? We suggest dividing up into groups of 2-3 to see if you can find other examples. This is a friendly competition! Use the Appendix below to organize your examples.
Leaders, here are some ideas! (1) Go no further than Genesis 2. God first created Adam without Eve. The limitation designed to wake Adam up to his need for Eve. (2) Joseph's dysfunctional family of origins. (3) Moses' speech impediment. (4) Esther's politically incorrect uncle and lack of influence. (5) The disciples vocations. They were not learned men but fishermen. (6) Handicaps are often turned miracles by Jesus. There's virtually not a page in the bible where we don't see God leading through adversity and limitations.
 - b. To be a Christian is often not only counter-cultural, but counterintuitive.
 - i. How does Peter exemplify counterintuitive Christianity in Acts 3?
 - ii. For each of the examples you have brainstormed exemplify following God in a counterintuitive way?
2. The Apostle Paul is one of the Christian faith's greatest spiritual heroes. Yet there was a time when God purposely withheld from Paul what he desired.
- a. Read 2 Cor. 12:6-8. What is it that Paul desired?
Healing from his "thorn in the flesh." We do not know what Paul's thorn in the flesh was — some ideas are: an illness, poor vision, a disability, persecution, or poverty — the point is that Paul lacked and was undergoing scarce times.
 - b. Read 2 Cor. 12:9-10. Why did God withhold from Paul? What was God's response to Paul?
Highlight God's emphasis on the fact that when Paul lacked God was glorified more greatly. In scarcity (for Paul it was the scarcity of healing) God is shown to be great in the way he sustains Paul through his adversity.
3. Remember we're discussing the idea that "God does not only guide by what he provides but by what he withholds." Read through **Philippians 3:1-14**.
- a. In this passage the Apostle Paul explains how he was provided with lots, and he had no lack... except for a relationship with Christ. In Philippians 3:1-6 what were Paul's list of credentials? How would this have set him apart in that culture and time?
 - b. Imagine that you woke up tomorrow and you had everything you desired. Think through what that would look like. (***Next Level*** Share it with the group!) Would this help you live a spiritual life following Christ? Is it possible that

abundance in your life might choke your hunger for Christ just as it did in the Apostle Paul's life?

Remember what Paul said in his sermon, "It's the trials, challenges, gaps and lacks of life that remind us that we're human, physical & spiritual beings, and urge us to look up, even if it's to cry out - why me God?! To be spiritual means to accept adversity."

- i. Paul came to know Jesus Christ dramatically and radically on the Road to Damascus (c. Acts 9). Reread through [Philippians 3:7-11](#).
 - What is Paul's attitude towards the abundance he previously experienced (before Jesus) and his current situation (now having a relationship with Christ, yet being in chains etc.)?
 - Our experience might not be the same as Paul's (going from everything minus Jesus to Jesus minus everything) but how does Paul's response toward abundance and scarcity challenge our current goals and pursuits? Share some personal and specific examples.

Encourage your group to get personal and begin applying this passage to their present situation. This might be awkward or lead to some moments of silence, but that's OK. Just be patient and be sure to thank and affirm the people that are brave enough to share. Once individuals have shared you might want to wrap up this part of the discussion by pointing to Phil. 3.12-14 where Paul highlights that Jesus is the goal that is ever before him, not security, comfort, upward mobility, RRSPs, etc.

4. Hana Gazdik shared how God used adversity and limitations to grow her spiritually.
 - a. As a group try to recall some of the specific examples Hana described.
 - b. Everyone take out your phones or pen and paper, it's an introvert's favourite part of the night!
 - i. Write down some of your own past or present challenges or limitations.
 - ii. Let's recall how God has been faithful. Thank him for areas of provision and blessing. Are you able to thank him for the areas of lack and adversity as well?
 - iii. Are there some areas where you once said "if only" (i.e. if only I was born to better parents; if only I lived in a different time; if only I was smarter; if only had more money) that turned into a "thank you God!"
 - iv. What might radically change in your life if we started embracing these lacks and gaps as potential areas where God's strength might be shown through to ourselves and others?

- v. ***Next Level*** Share some of your thoughts, learnings, or even some of the points you journalled.
- c. During our Spiritual series we've talked a lot about spiritual disciplines as God given pathways for divine encounter. How might the spiritual disciplines of simplicity and fasting help us to embrace God given limitations?
- d. ***Next Level*** During the week ahead, pick one of these options:
- i. Personally **meditate** on Philippians 3:6-14 and share your learning with the group next week.
 - ii. **Fast** from one meal this week. Ensure you drink plenty of water and spend extra time in prayer. Share your experience with the group next week.
 - iii. To practice **simplicity** find one resource you can give away this week, for example...
 - Do you have something you no longer use you could give to someone who would?
 - Is there an area you could simplify your spending and donate? (i.e.: instead of buying coffee everyday for yourself, buy a stranger's coffee and share the love of God with them).
 - Could you prayerfully rethink your monthly budget?

PRAYER

Leaders, it is getting to the time in the year where people may be more comfortable to pray out loud in your group... but with some prompting and encouragement. Consider having a different person pray for one of the prayer points below (aside from leaders) - that's four people stepping up!

- Praise God for his character, provision and faithfulness.
- Pray for the areas of adversity and lack that were shared by individuals in the group. Ensure everyone who shared is prayed over.
- Ask God for the ability to see areas of scarcity with spiritual eyes rather than earthly eyes.
- Pray that in the coming weeks your group would see God work through areas of weakness for his glory!

APPENDIX A -- Biblical Examples

Biblical Character(s)	Passage	Area of Scarcity	Counterintuitive Spiritual Blessing
Example: Peter and John	Acts 3:1-10	Lack of financial funds	Instead of providing money for the beggar he is healed by Peter and has the ability to enter and worship in the temple. We're talking a fully restored relationship with Christ! And other bystanders got to hear the gospel message!