

Day 7 Reflections and Observations

Week in Review

Briefly review your daily reflections and observations. What stands out most to you about what God is saying to you?



SESSION 5



He Chose to Give Us Victory

Overwhelming victory is ours
through Christ, who loved us.

Romans 8:37 NLT

Jesus came in the flesh and he suffered all of the things that people suffer in the flesh.

He does this so that we can go with him to the cross, and we can participate in the brokenness of this life so we can see and enter into the resurrection of Jesus and be a part of that. . . . It is through death that we enter into the victory that is beyond death.

*Dallas Willard, "A Conversation
on Pain and Suffering"*

GROUP DISCUSSION: CHECKING IN (8 MINUTES)

A key part of getting to know God better is sharing your journey with others. Before watching the video, briefly check in with one another about your experiences since the last session. As time permits, use one or more of the following questions:

- Briefly share your experience of the session 4 practice, “The Pull of the Good.” The focus of this practice was to shift your focus from trying hard *not* to sin to being “governed by the pull of the good” instead. What did you find most challenging about shifting your focus in this way? What did you learn about yourself in the process?
- What was the most meaningful or helpful watchword you identified in your daily Scripture reading? How did God use it to challenge, encourage, or comfort you?
- What similarities or differences do you notice among the watchwords each of you identified this week?

VIDEO: *HE CHOSE TO GIVE US VICTORY* (18 MINUTES)

Play the video segment for session 5. As you watch, use the outline provided to follow along or to take additional notes on anything that stands out to you.

Notes

The decisions we all face in our lives are like the notes on the page. Our instrument can be used to bemoan tragedy or sing praise and triumph. How we play our song is our choice. But a decision must be made.

Just before Jesus died, he asked for something to drink. But he refused myrrh and gall. He refused to be stupefied by the drugs, opting instead to feel the full force of his suffering. Why? Because he knew we’d face pain—if not the pain of the body, the pain of the soul. He knew we’d face thirst. If not a thirst for water, at least a thirst for truth.

Because John lingered on Saturday, he was around on Sunday to see the miracle. What did he see? “Strips of linen” (John 20:5). Through the rags of death, John saw the power

of life. John would tell you God can turn any tragedy into a triumph, if only you wait and watch.

In order for the cross of Christ to be the cross of our lives, we need to bring something to the hill. We can bring our *bad moments* and our *mad moments*: bad habits, selfish moods, white lies, binges, and bigotries.

The first step after a stumble must be in the direction of the cross. "If we confess our sins to God, he can always be trusted to forgive us and take our sins away" (1 John 1:9 CEV).

God wants our worries as well. We can bring the fears we have about our *final moments*. He wants us to trust him. "Don't let your hearts be troubled," he urges us. "I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am" (John 14:1, 3).

If God can change the disciples' lives through a tragedy such as the cross and the tomb, could it be he will use a tragedy to change yours? As hard as it may be to believe, you could be only a Saturday away from a resurrection.

GROUP DISCUSSION (32 MINUTES)

Take a few minutes to talk about what you just watched.

1. What part of the teaching had the most impact on you?

Receiving the Gift of Victory

2. The victory accomplished through Christ's death and resurrection is sometimes referred to as the "paschal mystery." The word *paschal* (*pas-kuhl*) comes from the Greek word for *Passover*, the Jewish remembrance of when the angel of death "passed over" the Hebrew families prior to their exodus from slavery in Egypt (see Exodus 12:13, 23).

The lamb sacrificed and eaten at Jewish Passover celebrations was the paschal lamb, a term New Testament writers also use for Christ (see John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7). The paschal mystery encompasses God's hidden plan of salvation

revealed in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection.¹⁹ In his first letter to the church at Corinth, the apostle Paul summarizes the events of the paschal mystery when he writes:

Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said (1 Corinthians 15:3-4 NLT).

The paschal mystery is also understood as the recurring pattern of God's transforming work in our lives: that some form of death always precedes new life—and that death never has the last word. Speaking of the life that would follow his own death, Jesus said to his disciples: "I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives" (John 12:24 NLT).

- For a seed, there is life on both sides of death (planting), but each life is of a very different kind. What three words or phrases would you use to describe the life of the seed before death? What three words or phrases would you use to describe the life that follows death?

- What parallels do you recognize between life on either side of death for the seed and the before-and-after life human beings experience whenever we encounter some

form of death (a tragedy, a personal struggle, a choice to deny ourselves, etc.)? In what ways might the same two sets of words and phrases you used for seeds also apply to the human experience on either side of a death?

- Overall, what does God's paschal pattern—in the natural world and in the life of Christ—suggest about what "victory" is when we experience some form of death in our lives?
3. Author and pastor Eugene Peterson comments on God's paschal work in our lives when he writes, "All suffering, all pain, all emptiness, all disappointment is seed: sow it in God and he will, finally, bring a crop of joy from it."²⁰
 - If we think of the hardships and losses of this life as seeds, we have at least three options for what we can do with them: (1) we can cling to our seeds and refuse to sow them; (2) we can sow our seeds in God; or (3) we can sow our seeds in something other than God. In practical terms, how would you describe what it means to follow through on each option?

- Of the three options, which comes closest to describing your tendency when you are in a season of hardship? Are you more likely to cling to life as it is, surrender yourself to God in faith, or try to bury yourself in distractions or self-defeating behaviors?
4. Speaking of Jesus' empty grave clothes, Max said, "God took a token of tragedy and turned it into a symbol of triumph." We all face tragedy and hardships, but the promise of Scripture is that God is always at work to bring victory and new life, even from the rags of death. The apostle Paul writes:

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. . . . Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? . . . No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us (Romans 8:28, 35, 37 NLT).

The phrase translated "overwhelming victory" is a compound of two Greek words, *hyper* and *nikaō*. *Nikaō* means "to be victorious," and *hyper* is an intensifier of whatever it precedes: "Overwhelming victory [*hypernikaō*] is ours through Christ, who loved us" (Romans 8:37 NLT).

You may be familiar with the Greek word *nikē*, the noun form of *nikaō*, which means "victory." The apostle John uses both words when he writes: "Everyone who is a child of God conquers [*nikaō*] the world. And this is the victory [*nikē*] that conquers [*nikaō*] the world—our faith" (1 John 5:4 NCV).

- Based on how the apostles Paul and John describe the victory that is ours, how would you describe its opposite, *defeat*? In other words, how might we refuse or thwart our victory, perhaps especially when we are suffering?
- Trusting that God is always at work for our good does not mean pretending we don't feel the pain of loss or that everything in life is beautiful when it's not. Jesus never flinched from acknowledging the reality of suffering; instead, he gave us reason to hope in an even deeper reality. We get a glimpse of both reality and deeper reality in the words Jesus spoke to his disciples after preparing them for his own impending death:

I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome [*nikaō*] the world (John 16:33 NLT).

If living in victory is possible even in the midst of “many trials and sorrows,” how would you describe what that victory is?

In what ways, if any, have you experienced the deeper reality Jesus describes?

5. At the end of the video, Max suggested a simple exercise. Think for a moment about Paul’s words: “In everything God works for the good of those who love him” (Romans 8:28 NCV). Remove the word *everything* and replace it with whatever symbolizes a tragedy or hardship in your life. For example, “In hospital stays God works for the good,” “In divorce papers God works for the good,” “In prison terms God works for the good.” How would *you* complete the sentence?
- In _____ God works for the good.

Walking Together through Lent

6. Take a few moments to discuss what you’ve learned and experienced together throughout the *He Chose the Nails* study.
- In each session, you considered several Easter images and the gifts they represent. Which of these gifts did you find most meaningful or helpful as you walked through Lent? Share the reason for your response.

Session 1: Jesus’ crown of thorns as a symbol of Christ’s power over sin

Session 2: the nails in Jesus’ cross as a symbol of reconciliation with God

Session 3: Jesus’ robe and the torn temple curtain as symbols of our access to God’s presence

Session 4: Jesus’ cross as a symbol of sanctification

Session 5: Jesus’ discarded grave clothes as a symbol of Christ’s victory over death

- In session 1, you considered how Lent is a season that prepares us to return to God with all our heart. In what ways, if any, did this perspective change how you thought about or experienced Lent this year?

- Overall, how would you describe your experience of the weekly Lenten practices? To what degree, if any, did they help you to prepare spiritually for Easter? What was it

like to read the same Scriptures together and then share your watchwords each week?

- How have you recognized God's work among you as a group throughout the study?

INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY: WHAT I WANT TO REMEMBER (2 MINUTES)

Complete this activity on your own.

1. Briefly review the outline and any notes you took.
2. In the space below, write down the most significant thing you gained in this session—from the teaching, activities, or discussions.

What I want to remember from this session . . .

LENTEN PRACTICE

Before concluding, briefly review the session 5 practice, "Bring It to the Hill." If your group is ongoing, allow time at your next gathering to talk about your experience of the practice. If this is your last group meeting, consider sharing your experience with a friend or another member of the group one-on-one in the coming days.

CLOSING PRAYER

Close your time together with prayer.