

### Warm-up Activity or Question

Choose one and pursue it as a group.

#### 1. Activity.

- If someone asked you, “What is your life verse?” what would you say?
- Discuss as a group the blessing found in having a life verse.
- Would anyone in the group like to seek out a life verse? If so, let’s resolve to land on one and bring it back to the next gathering of this group.

#### 2. Question.

- There’s nothing in the Bible against New Year’s resolutions *per se*. Humans have been making them for 3,000 years (starting with the Babylonians). What’s been your experience with New Year’s resolutions? Will you make one this year? How will John 15:5 relate to your resolution (“... *apart from Me you can do nothing.*”)?

### Can You Relate?

This week’s Scripture provides a deep and compelling review of three great blessings that come with God’s comfort amid all suffering and affliction.

1. **For believers, suffering is never meaningless** (v.4). For the non-believer, suffering seems meaningless, unfair, random, and almost always regrettable. NOT SO with the followers of Christ! God gives great purpose to ALL our suffering. Someone read aloud verses 1-4. Pay close attention in v.4 to the use of the word “all” and to the “so that” clause.

*I.e.*, we are all *Wounded Healers*. God comforts us in ALL our afflictions so that we can comfort others in ANY affliction with the comfort we have received. We are all called to pay our comfort forward as part of the healing process for others who are suffering.

Someone set a timer. Let’s take two full minutes of silence for each of us **to identify an example of being comforted by God in the midst of or as a result of suffering**. Then let’s take turns discussing the following questions.

- Is your example one that you have or would be willing to “pay forward” to another?
- Do you have a Bible verse that speaks to what your example says about God?
- If not, can the group help identify one?

2. **For believers, suffering can deepen our intimacy with God** (v.9). Someone read aloud verses 5-9. Pay close attention to the final sentence. For unbelievers, suffering is a reason to give up hope; but for believers, it is a reason to persevere, to press deeper, knowing that God will not only use our experience to comfort others, but that it will deepen our devotion and dependence on Him.

*I.e.*, in losing our grip, we let Him take the wheel in the driver’s seat of our lives. In our weakness, His strength is revealed (2 Cor. 12:9). Paul is describing the kind of moment when you are **at the very end of your rope**, the place where you believe **you are helpless on your own**. A child was hospitalized. You were fired from a job. You were in a traffic accident. You experienced divorce. While these can be some of the most painful memories of our lives, they are each precious, faith-building opportunities for deepening our intimacy with God.

#2, continued

Someone set a timer. Let's take two full minutes of silence for each of us **to identify an example of our most desperate moment of helplessness wherein God came through in a faith-fortifying way.** Then let's take turns sharing.

- Tell us about your experience. How has it impacted your faith?
- Would the faith of your children or grandchildren (or nieces, nephews, friends) be encouraged by that story?

3. **In our suffering and in our answered prayers, the faith of others is strengthened** (v.11). Someone read aloud verses 10-11. In v.11, Paul calls them to prayer and points out the third great blessing that comes through suffering: When we are transparent about our suffering and need for prayer, the faith of others grows as they see prayers for us answered.

Someone set a timer. Let's take two full minutes of silence for each of us **to identify an example of prayer amid suffering in anyone's life that resulted in an answered prayer that has encouraged your faith.** Then let's take turns.

- Tell us about that. How has it impacted your faith?
- How you could use that true story to encourage others and strengthen their faith.

### **Live It Out**

**Let's take a moment and go around the group to identify what we want to take away from this discussion. Any quiet-time reflection required?**

- In #1, we each identified **one** example of "comforted suffering" that we could readily "pay forward" by sharing with and encouraging others. Quiet-time journaling would be a great setting for building out your list to include all your compelling examples of "comforted suffering" that you could "pay forward" to others. Rounding out your list is a powerful catalyst for Christian sharing and ministry to others. Consider pledging with someone in the group to do quiet time this week in pursuit of additional examples of "comforted suffering" from your life and texting one another for support as we go through it.
- Similarly, in #2 we each identified one example of God coming through for us in the midst of desperate helplessness. Rounding out your list to include your most compelling examples is great catalyst for ministry. Consider pledging with someone in the group to do quiet time this week in pursuit of additional examples from your life of God responding to desperate helplessness and texting one another for support as we go through it.
- Try resolving to start each day pouring your heart out to God in transparent prayer.
  - **How?** This week, **before you get out of bed** (making God your first priority), pick up your phone or tablet and play *Hold On* by Katy Nichole. Absorb the lyrics ("purpose in the pain"). Play them back in your head thru the day. Report next time on how that went. That song is on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/4s3k8aUaFgk>

***Encourage members of the group to commit time to praying for one another, encouraging and meeting one another's needs, fellowshiping together, and interceding for the other members. Contact absent group members and encourage them to continue to meet and to return together at the next scheduled gathering.***