

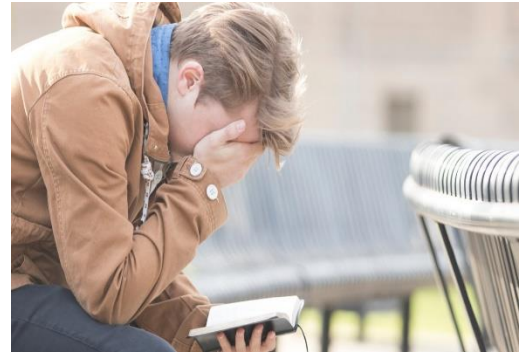
Can you imagine if every day had a "do over" option?

Even with the opportunity to try again, we would still be unable to eliminate every trial, pain, and hardship in our life.

But, here's the thing... the difficult seasons of life have a purpose and they help us go deeper in our relationship with God.

We have hope in God, even in the tough times.

- Nick Diliberto, *Ministry to Youth*



LESSON ON TOUGH TIMES

Written by Tiffany Hollums

Bible: 2 Corinthians 4:7-9

Bottom line: We have hope in God, even in the tough times.

TEACH

Have you ever had "one of those days"? You know... the kind where you think "Wow, I should just go back to bed and try this day again."

Each of us go through tough times. Think about your own life and people you know: What are some of the difficult times you or others have faced.

How do you feel when you see the news? _____

What types of hard situations do you see other people facing?

Now, if you could sum up all this pain in an emotion - what words would you choose?

I wish that I could say that all of these things that happen and the hurt you've written here just didn't exist, but that would be a lie.

Life can be very hard. But, the good news is that God is always with you. And for those who follow Christ, we have hope in God, even in the tough times.

Paul, who wrote a huge chunk of the New Testament, had his fair share of tough times-

Read 2 Corinthians 11:23b-27.

I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea. I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not. I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.

Make a list of some of the trials that Paul faced._____

How would you feel if you were Paul?

How did he deal with all of this?

Let Paul tell you in his own words how he dealt with all of these things, because they are pretty inspiring:

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-9.

We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.

What words did you hear that describe how tough times can make you feel?_____

Paul doesn't diminish or discount the pain. He felt it... yet it's the 'but not' part of his words that I want you to focus on...

Listen again to his words:

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

Life is hard. Our world and the people in it can be cruel. I think Paul reminds us with his image of a jar of clay that life can be really hard, and it can sometimes leave us feeling... depressed, alone, confused...

But with Christ we are not ever destroyed, in despair, abandoned or destroyed... why?

Because we hold in "*fragile clay jars*" a treasure. A treasure that will not be destroyed. The treasure of Christ living in us gives us life. See, with Jesus you are NEVER alone. Paul could face anything because he knew that Jesus was with him and within him.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT

1. How could knowing that Jesus is with you help during tough times?
2. Which of these words or phrases from the scripture stuck out to you, or described how you've felt during different times in your life: struck down, pressed, destroyed, or persecuted?
3. Are there other words you would add to this list?
4. Re-read 2 Corinthians 4:7-9 and choose the 'but not' phrase that connects the most with you.
5. Have you ever thought of yourself as a "treasure"?
6. How do those who do not have a relationship with God handle the hard times in life?
7. Come up with a "plan" that will help you when you face difficulty. Example: Pray, talk to someone who will help you turn to God, have Bible verses that you can read, etc.