

small group **discussion**

For the sermon on February 16-17, 2013
"Suffering Graciously"

lean in

Tell of a time when your resources (time, energy, or money) were very depleted. What happens to you emotionally when you become aware that you are depleted in an area of life?

look down

This week we continue in the series, *The Resilient Life*. Suffering can come from many sources. Regardless of its origin, suffering can leave us tired and depleted as well as cause us to become inwardly focused. Today's passage tells of a group of people Paul grew to deeply appreciate. Even though they were walking through some tremendous suffering, they were still generous and outwardly focused on how they approached their lives. How do deeply hurting people suffer with grace and generosity? This is the big question of the week!

Read 2 Corinthians 8.1-9 together. Paul seems to be making a comparison between two groups of people: the Macedonian Christians and the Corinthians. How does Paul describe the Macedonian believers? What did they have and what did they lack? What was their attitude toward ministry? (Note: he is most likely referring to the church in Philippi and other churches in that area when he refers to Macedonia.)

How did Paul describe the Corinthians in this passage? What did they have and what did they seem to lack? What was Paul encouraging them to do in light of what the Macedonian churches had done?

look in

What comes to mind when you hear the phrase: *suffering graciously*? Does it feel like an oxymoron? Is it possible?

Suffering and hardship can bring out some natural tendencies for people who are inwardly focused. Some people will withdraw, some will complain, others will become protective and selfish. How or where have you experienced this?

Share some stories of people you know who have suffered with grace and dignity.

Discuss the theme of grace in 2 Corinthians 8:

"...we want you to know about **the grace** that God has given the Macedonian Churches" (v 1).
"For you know **the grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (v 9).

Paul seems to indicate that the ability (grace) to be generous during a time of hardship was a gift from God to the Macedonian church. Is it possible to suffer graciously and generously apart from God enabling us to do so? What situations in your life does this principle relate to right now? Where do you need God's grace for you to be gracious?

What happens in the heart of someone who is able to focus outwardly even when they are being crushed in life?

Spend some time in prayer asking God to give each person the grace to be gracious.



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