

LEADERTREKS **SERMON SERIES**

## MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ rely on God's grace and strength during times of pain and struggle.

## SCRIPTURE

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-10

## SERMON OVERVIEW

Today we are starting the first lesson in our When Life is Hard series and discussing how difficulties can help us experience God's grace and grow in our relationship with him. As believers, it's essential that we turn to God to rely on his grace and strength when times of pain and struggle come our way.

### OPENING

#### WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

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#### GAME AND ICE BREAKER QUESTION

- We recommend **Good or Evil** or choose another screen game from **Deep Discipleship Games**.
- Tell us the story behind your coolest scar.

### MESSAGE

*Use the following teaching points and suggested illustrations as a starting point to build your message.*

## READ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7

### POINT 1: **Everyone goes through difficult times**

One of the Enemy's sneakiest tricks is making us think we are the only ones who struggle to live like Jesus. We think we are the only ones with doubts, the only ones struggling to understand the Bible, the only ones who don't always want to do the right thing, and so on. But the apostle Paul, probably the greatest example we have of a Christ-follower, faced adversity and hardships.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Tell a **personal story** about a time you faced a huge obstacle.

Because our world has been stained by sin, we all go through struggles. Whatever it is that is difficult for you in your journey of faith, you are not the only one struggling with that obstacle. Peter tells us that disciples all over the world face opposition from the enemy (1 Peter 5:9). You are not alone.

## READ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:8

### POINT 2: God is our primary source of help

When Paul was in trouble, he turned to God. Our friends, family, and small group leaders are great options to seek advice and help. Many times, God uses these people to speak to us. But our first option should always be the Lord.

No one knows our circumstances and struggles the way God does, so no one can provide the level of comfort we need exactly the way we need it. The Lord is the "God of all comfort" and is present to comfort us through "all our affliction" (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

## READ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:9

### POINT 3: Grace and power through trials

Three different times Paul asked God to remove his hardships. Instead of getting rid of Paul's problems, God gave him grace and power to get through the struggle. This was to Paul's benefit. Avoiding trials doesn't make you stronger, only going through them brings strength.

*ILLUSTRATION:* Tell a **personal story** about a time you got stronger after going through a difficult process. (Example: Lifting weights, training for a race, studying for an exam)

Going through all the hardships Paul faced made his faith incredibly strong. And because he had God's grace and power, he could push through any adversity.

## READ 2 CORINTHIANS 12:10

### POINT 4: Content in Christ

The word content means "to be satisfied," and it's been said that contentment is the secret to happiness. When Paul understood that God was with him during the hard times, providing His amazing grace and power, Paul was content with whatever came his way. Paul was actually able to be "glad" during his struggles because it brought him closer to Christ.

## CLOSING REFLECTION

*Use this prompt to wrap up your message and leave your students with a challenge to apply.*

- What struggles are you facing that you need God's grace and power to get through?
- How do you think these trials will make you stronger?

## GROUP DISCUSSION

*Pick a few questions from below to discuss. Close with prayer.*

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What has been one of the hardest struggles you've faced?
- When have you had to rely on God?
- Why do you think the Bible never tells us what Paul's thorn was?
- What types of struggles did Paul experience because of his relationship with God?
- How has God's strength helped you through a recent struggle?
- How can rejoicing in your struggle change your perspective and experience of that struggle?
- How do you think struggles can help us grow in our relationship with God?

### APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- How does reflecting God's image involve caring for his creation and other people?
- How does knowing God created you and your world just because he wanted to make something good change how you think about yourself and the world?

### PRAYER

Close by praying or invite someone to pray for your group.

*Use this space to keep track of any prayer requests.*

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