

BiG IDEA SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Small groups that focus on the Big Idea for the week can use this guide to apply the message to life and take action. Feel free to use whatever parts of this guide best fit your group personality and time frame. Do NOT feel like you have to use every question. All verses, unless otherwise noted, are from the New International Version (NIV).

6.27/28.09 // TOUGH TIMES – Look Ahead

BiG IDEA: In tough times I need to stay focused on eternity and the hope that is ahead of me.

This session is based on material from Geneva Brown, Adult Ministry Director – Community Christian Church, Shorewood campus (IL) – newthing.org

// Ice Breaker _____

Option 1: Is there something you're "hoping" for right now? What is it? How confident are you that you'll get it?

Option 2: If you could choose one thing to take with you for eternity, what would it be and why?

// Questions for Discussion _____

In the Bible (NIV) the word "HOPE" is mentioned 159 times. Webster's definition of "HOPE" is to cherish a desire with anticipation, to expect with confidence. Synonyms for "HOPE" are "anticipate" and "await." Our hope is in Christ -- hoping for an eternity with Christ.

Read about the story of a man who endured intense tough times – it sounds like something out of a movie or an episode from the TV show 24. But this isn't a day in the life of Jack Bauer, it's the story of Paul.

2 Corinthians 11:23-27

23Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. 24Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. 25Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, 26I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. 27I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

1. Describe what it must feel like to be Paul. Would you have hope in these situations? Why or why not?

In this letter Paul expresses his deep desire and concern for their spiritual progress. He had such a passion to convey this through his writing and the way he lived that he often sacrificed many of the things we take for granted: peace, comfort, safety, etc. Paul experienced tough times more than some of us ever will. This makes his message even more real and credible.

2 Corinthians 4:15-18

15All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. 16Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17For our light

and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

2. Look at verse 15 again. Have you ever viewed your tough times in that way--that everything you are going through has the possibility of bringing glory to God? Why or why not?

James 1:2-3, 12

"Consider it pure joy my brothers whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance."

"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love Him."

3. Paul was able to balance the "light and momentary" troubles he was living with the value and HOPE of spending eternity with Christ. How do you think he was able to do that in the midst of so many trials and struggles? Have you been able to do that in your own life?

4. What are some of the things in this world you look toward to bring you hope?

5. Share a time when you had a hope that was fulfilled.

1 Corinthians 2:9-10

"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him – but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit".

The Life Application Bible comments on this passage perfectly. It says, **"We cannot imagine all that God has in store for us, both in this life and for eternity. He will create a new heaven and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17, Revelation 21:1) and we will live with him forever. Until then, his Holy Spirit comforts and guides us. Knowing the wonderful and eternal future that awaits us gives us hope and courage to press on in this life, to endure hardship and to avoid giving into temptation. This world is not all there is. The best is yet to come."**

6. In the verse above it says: "But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit." If we allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, He will bring peace and comfort to us during the tough times and we get a small preview glimpse of what Heaven is like. What is the "IT" that the Spirit reveals?

7. Is it hard for you to accept that your life here on earth isn't what our lives are really about—that it's not really about "ME", that I'm living for a greater purpose? And if our lives are focused on living for eternity, how does that change your daily interactions?

8. Describe a time where the Holy Spirit worked in you during a tough time.

9. Mercy Me sings, "I can only imagine." Describe what you think it will be like when you finally spend an eternity with God.

Now that's the HOPE I want to stay focused on during this life and during tough times.

// Application _____

Commit to memory 2 Corinthians 4:18

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

// Prayer_____

Pray for any in the group going through tough times
Pray for an eternal perspective