

Life Group Leaders Guide: Pono Church 2 - 2 Corinthians 4

Opening Prayer (5 minutes)

Begin your time together with prayer, asking God to reveal areas where you may be relying on your own strength rather than His power.

Worship Song Suggestions (10 minutes)

“Great Are You Lord” – All Sons & Daughters
“Yet Not I But Through Christ In Me” – CityAlight
“Broken Vessels (Amazing Grace)” – Hillsong Worship
“This Is Amazing Grace” – Phil Wickham

Ice Breaker (10 minutes)

Question: Share a time when you tried to stand on something unstable (literally or figuratively). What happened?

Key Scripture Passages

2 Corinthians 4:6–10 “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed”

Key Takeaways (5 minutes)

1. The Treasure in Jars of Clay

- God has placed His light (Jesus Christ) within us—fragile, deteriorating vessels
- This reveals that our power comes from Him, not from ourselves
- We are hard-pressed but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair

2. The Danger of "Doing Church" in Our Flesh

- We can become so good at church activities that we perform them without Jesus
- Like the Corinthians, we can focus on performance, status, and appearances
- Social media and constant connectivity increase pressure to meet worldly expectations

3. Rest and Remember (R&R)

- We need to regularly set aside time to remember what God has done
 - Create "altars" or reminders of God's faithfulness in our lives
 - The light of Jesus shines through our darkest moments
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Discussion Questions (20 minutes)

Understanding the Message

1. What does it mean that we have "treasure in jars of clay"? Why did God choose to work through fragile vessels?
2. Jason shared about the Corinthian culture of honor/shame, class division, and performance. How do you see similar pressures in our modern world?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 together. Which of these contrasts (hard-pressed/not crushed, perplexed/not in despair, etc.) resonates most with your current situation?

Personal Reflection

4. Jason admitted he struggled with the question: "Why serve in church when these things failed me?" Have you ever felt this way? How did you work through it?
5. When have you been "doing church" rather than truly being with Jesus? What's the difference?
6. Jason described feeling crushed and in despair, despite the scripture saying we shouldn't feel that way. Have you experienced this disconnect? What might it indicate about where you're drawing your power from?

Going Deeper

7. The Corinthians brought their outside culture into the church: division, performance focus, and status-seeking. What aspects of secular culture do we unconsciously bring into our church community?
 8. Jason shared about the powerful moment in the hospital bathroom when he sensed God's presence. When has God met you in your darkest moment? How did that experience change you?
 9. How can we tell the difference between standing on our own abilities versus standing on God's power? What are the warning signs?
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Practical Applications (15 minutes)

This Week's Challenge:

Choose at least ONE of these to practice this week:

1. Create a Remembrance Practice

- Set up a physical or digital "altar" of God's faithfulness
- Write down 3-5 times God has shown up in your life
- Spend 10 minutes each day reviewing these reminders

2. Flesh vs. Spirit Inventory

- List your church activities and spiritual practices
- Honestly assess: Am I doing these in my own strength or God's power?
- Ask God to reveal where you need to shift your foundation

3. Social Media Fast

- Take a break from social media for 3–7 days
- Notice how the pressure to perform or compare decreases
- Use that time to focus on God's presence in your life

4. Share Your Story

- Identify one dark moment where God's light broke through
- Share this testimony with someone this week
- Remember: your story brings hope to others

5. Daily Check-In

- Each morning, ask: "What am I standing on today?"
 - Throughout the day, notice when you're drawing from flesh vs. spirit
 - Each evening, thank God for being your foundation
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Group Activity (20 minutes)

Building an Altar Together

As a group, create a collective remembrance:

1. Each person shares one way God has shown His faithfulness
 2. Write these on stones, cards, or a shared document
 3. Keep this as a group reminder to revisit when anyone is struggling
 4. Commit to adding to it regularly as God continues to show up
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Scripture for Further Study

- 2 Corinthians 4:6-10 - The main passage (read in multiple translations)
 - 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 - God's power made perfect in weakness
 - Psalm 18:1-2 - The Lord is my rock and fortress
 - Matthew 7:24-27 - Building on the rock vs. sand
 - Joshua 4:1-9 - Setting up stones of remembrance
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Closing Reflection (10 minutes)

Question to Carry with You: "Am I standing on my abilities to do church, or am I standing on the light of Jesus that shines through my weakness?"

Prayer Focus:

- Confess areas where you've been relying on your own strength
 - Ask God to help you recognize when you're drawing from flesh vs. spirit
 - Pray for the courage to be vulnerable about your fragility
 - Thank God that His power is made perfect in our weakness
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For Next Week

Come prepared to share:

1. What happened when you tried one of the practical applications
 2. A time this week when you noticed yourself standing on the wrong foundation
 3. How God's light showed up in an unexpected way
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Leader Notes

Sensitive Topics:

- Jason shared deeply about losing his son. Be prepared for grief stories
- Some may struggle with feeling they've "failed" at church
- Create space for honest confession without judgment

Encourage Authenticity:

- Model vulnerability by sharing your own struggles with doing church in the flesh
- Remind the group that admitting weakness is where God's power shows up
- Avoid "fixing" people's struggles—point them to Jesus as the foundation

Watch For:

- Group members who may be burned out from serving
- Those who might be performing rather than connecting with God
- Opportunities to celebrate where God's light has broken through darkness

Additional Discussion Questions to Choose From

How do we distinguish between doing church activities in our own strength versus truly relying on the power of Christ within us?

What are some ways that modern social media and constant connectivity create pressures similar to what the Corinthians faced in their honor-shame culture?

When have you experienced feeling hard-pressed but not crushed, or perplexed but not in despair, and what sustained you through that season?

How can we set up spiritual reminders or altars in our daily lives to help us remember what God has done and where our true power comes from?

In what areas of your life might you be standing on fragile foundations like the white plastic chair illustration, rather than on the solid foundation of Christ?

How does the image of treasure in jars of clay challenge our tendency to rely on our own abilities and present a polished image to others?

What practices can help us regularly examine whether we are drawing power from the flesh or from the Spirit in our ministry and service?

How can experiencing deep loss or disappointment either drive us away from God or reveal where we have been placing our hope and trust?

In what ways might our church culture unintentionally encourage performance, status-seeking, or division similar to the Corinthian church?

How can worship and remembrance become sources of genuine hope and transformation rather than just religious activities we perform?

5-Day Devotional: Standing on the Solid Rock

Day 1: The Treasure Within

Reading: 2 Corinthians 4:6-10

Devotional:

God has placed an extraordinary treasure within ordinary vessels—us. We are fragile jars of clay, deteriorating and imperfect, yet we carry the very light of Christ. This divine design is intentional: when power flows through our weakness, it becomes unmistakably clear that the strength isn't ours: it's His.

Today, reflect on where you've been trying to generate power from your own abilities rather than resting in God's strength. Are you exhausted from performing Christianity rather than experiencing Christ? The treasure isn't what you do for God; it's what God has done in you. His light shines brightest through our cracks and imperfections, revealing His glory, not ours.

Day 2: Hard-Pressed but Not Crushed

Reading: Psalm 34:17-22

Devotional:

The Christian life promises presence, not absence of struggle. We will be hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down—but never crushed, despairing, abandoned, or destroyed. The difference between these paired realities is the sustaining power of Christ within us. When you feel overwhelmed today, remember that feeling pressure doesn't mean you're failing spiritually.

The question isn't whether difficulties will come, but what foundation you're standing on when they do. Are you standing on your own strength, your performance, or your understanding? Or are you anchored to the unshakeable presence of Jesus? His grace is sufficient in your weakness. Create a reminder today of a time God sustained you through impossibility.

Day 3: Light Shining Through Darkness

Reading: John 1:1–5; John 8:12

Devotional:

Darkness cannot comprehend or overcome light. Even the smallest flame dispels shadows. God specializes in bringing light into our darkest moments—not to remove the darkness instantly, but to provide hope within it. In seasons of grief, confusion, or despair, God's presence becomes that inexplicable peace that surpasses understanding. You may not see the full picture, but you can see the next step illuminated by His light.

Today, identify one area of darkness in your life. Instead of asking God to remove it immediately, ask Him to reveal His light within it. How might His glory be displayed through this struggle? What hope can you cling to, even when circumstances haven't changed?

Day 4: Rest and Remember

Reading: Deuteronomy 8:2-18

Devotional:

The Israelites built altars as monuments to God's faithfulness—physical reminders of spiritual victories. In our distracted, social-media-saturated world, we desperately need intentional remembrance. We need regular R&R: Rest and Remember.

Set aside time today to recall specific moments when God showed up for you. When did His provision surprise you? When did His peace sustain you through impossibility? When did His light break through your darkness? Write these down. Create your own altar of remembrance. This isn't nostalgia; it's spiritual warfare against forgetfulness and doubt. When present struggles threaten to overwhelm you, these monuments remind you: the God who was faithful then remains faithful now. He hasn't changed.

Day 5: The Dawning of a New Day

Reading: Lamentations 3:19–26

Devotional:

"Because of the LORD's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." Even in the book of Lamentations—written amid profound suffering—hope breaks through. Every sunrise represents God's renewed mercies, His fresh commitment to you.

Yesterday's failures don't define today's possibilities. Yesterday's pain doesn't cancel today's hope. The same God who brings physical dawn brings spiritual awakening. What feels like an ending may be the darkness before a breakthrough. Today, as you face whatever struggles lie ahead, receive this truth: God is making all things new, including you. His light is dawning in your life. Stand on this solid foundation—not your performance, not your understanding, but His unchanging presence and unfailing love.