

(This is written to give you good things to enjoy, because look again at what Paul told Timothy (1 Tim 6:17-18)! I think he was thinking of us at the time: **17 Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be conceited and not to put their hope in the uncertainty of wealth, but in God, WHO RICHLY PROVIDES ALL THINGS TO ENJOY. 18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, and to be generous and ready to share...**) The following ice breaker is just a starter for your group. The message comes after the second bar. Please enjoy!)

CROWD BREAKER: What makes you anxious? How do you find relief? —The scribe

Note: Be good to one another. Be sensitive and kind. Let God heal our hearts...and guide our discussions. **PLEASE PRE-READ THESE NOTES AND CHOOSE THE DIRECTION THAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR GROUP. The purpose is to unite, not divide; to fearlessly proclaim the freedom the gospel brings. Any part of these notes might be appropriate as a crowd breaker for your own group. The goal is to create memories from Sunday that will serve for a long time. BE COGNIZANT OF YOUR GROUP'S TIME AND BE SENSITIVE! Some groups would like to dwell on a single idea. Let the Spirit be your guide. Never feel obligated to complete this study. This study is also a great devotion, taken slowly through the week.**

Note: I have highlighted suggested discussion questions raised by Pastor Mark's message from this Sunday. Let's allow the Holy Spirit to guide all our discussions, using the highlights as trail blazes. **The purpose is to minister to one another.**

Pastor Mark says, "Our situation may not change, but if our perspective changes, it can restore peace." **How does that work?**

Did you go to the regional night of worship? What did you see?

Think of any difficult situation that you find yourself in. Have you asked the Lord for wisdom? What did you hear? Look up Psalm 139.

- 1O LORD, You have searched me
and known me.
- 2You know when I sit and when I rise;
You understand my thoughts from afar.

3You search out my path and my lying down;
You are aware of all my ways.

4Even before a word is on my tongue,
You know all about it, O LORD.

5**You hem me in behind and before;**
You have laid Your hand upon me.

6**Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,**
too lofty for me to attain.

7**Where can I go to escape Your Spirit?**

Where can I flee from Your presence?

8If I ascend to the heavens, You are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, You are there.

9If I rise on the wings of the dawn,
if I settle by the farthest sea,

10even there Your hand will guide me;
Your right hand will hold me fast.

11If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me,
and the light become night around me"—

12even the darkness is not dark to You,
but the night shines like the day,
for darkness is as light to You.

13For You formed my inmost being;
You knit me together in my mother's womb.

14I praise You,
for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Marvelous are Your works,
and I know this very well.

15My frame was not hidden from You
when I was made in secret,
when I was woven together
in the depths of the earth.

16Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all my days were written in Your book
and ordained for me
before one of them came to be.

17How precious to me are Your thoughts, O God,
how vast is their sum!

18If I were to count them,
they would outnumber the grains of sand;
and when I awake,
I am still with You.

- 19**O God, that You would slay the wicked—
away from me, you bloodthirsty men—
20who speak of You deceitfully;
Your enemies take Your name in vain.
21Do I not hate those who hate You, O LORD,
and detest those who rise against You?
22I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them as my enemies.
- 23**Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my concerns.
24See if there is any offensive way in me;
lead me in the way everlasting.

What does this say about difficult situations? Why is this psalm so instructive? What does God know? What does He not know? React to Mark's response to Audra...when he finally understood what she had been telling him all along? Do you ever miss what someone else is saying when, in fact, it is exactly what you need to hear? Why is it so hard to hear sometimes? Why did Jesus say so often, "The one who has ears to hear, let them hear"? How often does someone who has ears to hear not hear?

What does "protector" signify? How does that change the perspective on Pastor Mark's cast? How does this fulfill Romans 8:28? How did God "work..." the cast..." for good" because Mark loves Him?

Which of these "consoling words" consoles best: "God is in control?" Or "He's got you. He's got this"? Why?

Look up 1 Corinthians 10:13 (This is the NET version) No trial has overtaken you that is not faced by others. And God is faithful: He will not let you be tried beyond what you are able to bear, but with the trial will also provide a way out so that you may be able to endure it. **How does this fit? How do you know the trial will be "worked for good"?**

Mark's summary. **Read the greetings below:**

Personal Greetings and Love

1I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant/deaconess of the church in Cenchrea. **2**Welcome her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her with anything she may need from you. For she has been a great help to many people, including me.

3Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, **4**who have risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. **5**Greet also the church that meets at their house.

Greet my beloved Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia.

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- 6**Greet Mary, who has worked very hard for you.
7Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow countrymen and fellow prisoners. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.
8Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord.
9Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys.
10Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ.
Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.
11Greet Herodion, my fellow countryman.
Greet those from the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.
12Greet Tryphena and Tryphosa, women who have worked hard in the Lord.
Greet my beloved Persis, who has worked very hard in the Lord.
13Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord, and his mother, who has been a mother to me as well.
14Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers with them.
15Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas and all the saints with them.
16Greet one another with a holy kiss.

All the churches of Christ send you greetings. ***Summarize what you just read. Who are these people? How do you imagine Paul's relationship with each? When he calls each friend out by name in a church to which he has not yet come, what does that tell you about Paul's method? How well did they know each other? What are the personal details he mentions? What do we know of Priscilla (Prisca) and Aquila? How well does Paul know them? How well does Paul know Rufus' mother? What matters most to Paul? What are these friends all doing in Rome? What do they have in common? What do you think they brought with them from their encounters with Paul? How warm is the greeting from "all the churches of Christ"?***

How does this connect to the book Paul has just written? How many Jews on the list? How many Gentiles? How many households are meeting? How many Churches? According to whose rules, Gentile rules or Jewish rules...or?

Avoid Divisions Now look:

17Now I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who create divisions and obstacles that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Turn away from them. **18**For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery, they deceive the hearts of the naive. ***On a scale of 1 to 10 how much do you love to debate? How much do you love to discuss various theories? In your case, to what degree do these verses apply?***

Have you seen debate in a church cause division in that church? What did you do?

Look up (Titus 3:9-11) **9**But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. **10**Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, **11**knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.

What is being debated in Titus' church? What is Paul's command? What good thing can be said of the debater, according to this and Paul's word to the Romans? Mark says when the conversation turns to people against people, and away from Jesus and His saving grace, and the work He has done in our lives, this is a moment of warning. **How easy is this to discern? Why is it important to note that these are Paul's last words to the Romans, and...after such a long list of personal greetings to united friends? What seems to be the greatest danger the church faces? How does a church focused on "reaching the lost, caring for the least and training the found" avoid this pitfall? Does this work? What does the focus do to a conversation when it strays?**

19Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I rejoice over you. But I want you to be excellent at what is good and innocent of evil.

20The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. **Pause here. Look at what Paul is saying. How did Paul hear of their obedience? What can we say about healthy, helpful "gossip?" What if we caught each other "doing something right," and spread the story? How would that change things?**

Now, think of your trials. Who does the crushing? Where does the crushing take place? God told Jesus, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." What will it look like when your trials are your footstool?

When you know He is "the God of peace" who SOON does this, what does that make you think? What does it mean to be "excellent at what is good and innocent of evil"? Concerning the news: Do you have to know the evils of this world system? What do you know of the successes of your brothers and sisters in Christ around the world? How can you find this out?

Greetings from Paul's Fellow Workers

(Colossians 4:7-14)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. **Pause here. This is not a "throwaway line" to end a religious discourse. What does an answer to this prayer look like?**

21Timothy, my fellow worker, sends you greetings, as do Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater, my fellow countrymen.

22I, Tertius, who wrote down this letter, greet you in the Lord.

23Gaius, who has hosted me and all the church, sends you greetings.

Erastus, the city treasurer, sends you greetings, as does our brother Quartus. **How many people are in the room as Paul is writing this? How many of these know those to whom Paul is writing? How many of the recipients of the letter know these? What does this say? (Scribe's curiosity: Do you think Paul knew that Tertius, the scribe who took Paul's dictation, sneaked his greeting in? Did Paul proofread the text after it had been transcribed?** He always signed his work by his hand, to authenticate each of his epistles.)

Doxology Read this out loud together to each other:

(Jude 1:24-25)

25 Now to Him who is able to strengthen you by my gospel and by the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery concealed for ages past **26** but now revealed and made known through the writings of the prophets by the command of the eternal God, in order to lead all nations to the obedience that comes from faith — **27** to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen. ***What does this doxology say? Pull out important phrases. How was the mystery concealed? How has it been revealed? How was it revealed in Rome to these friends? How shall it be revealed? What is the purpose of the revelation? What does the "obedience that comes from faith" look like? How does this connect to Paul's letter and his purpose for writing this letter?***

How do we now demonstrate that "we deeply care for one another" as Mark suggests we ought? What have you learned of this new family to which you now belong?

What is your biggest takeaway? Take time to share. What is your next step? Share with the group.

Take a moment to pray for Mark's neighbor, the hot dog chef.

Take time to pray for one another. Be blessed.

Follow the Truth wherever He leads you. He has a Name: Jesus. What is your next step? —the scribe