

ICE BREAKER

What is your go-to move when you are stressed? Stress baking, cleaning the whole house, a drive with the music way too loud, or hiding under a blanket with snacks?

LOOK BACK

- Where are you feeling squeezed right now? Gas prices, housing, time, relationships, health, family?
- Where do you fix your eyes most naturally? When you feel squeezed, how easy is it to focus on everything that is going wrong?
- Do you think what we focus on has the power to change how we see the pressure we are under? Why or why not?

LOOK UP

- Read 2 Corinthians 11:24-30, then 2 Corinthians 4:8-9. What stands out to you about Paul's story? How does knowing what he went through change the way these verses land for you?
- Look again at verses 8-9 and notice the four "buts." Which "but" do you most need to hear right now, and why?
- Read 2 Corinthians 4:6. God is light, and He is the one who shines that light into our hearts. When life feels dark, how have you seen God bring His light to you?
- Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. What we fix our eyes on shapes our reality. What would it look like this week to look up in your trouble and say, "God, I'm fixing my eyes on You"?

LOOK AHEAD

- Finish Paul's sentence for your own life: "I'm pressed by _____, but _____."
- Take the time to look up and read through the lyrics of "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus." If you "looked full in His face" this week, what would grow strangely dim?

WEEKLY CHALLENGE

Each morning this week, before you check your phone, read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 and hand one pressure over to Jesus.

SUMMARY

This series is about the pressure of life and the places we all feel squeezed. Price at the pump, housing costs, never enough time, relationship pressure, health issues. Paul knew that kind of pressure firsthand. He was flogged, beaten with rods, stoned, shipwrecked, hungry, cold, and in danger everywhere he went. From that perspective he writes, "We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed." Paul does not deny the pressure. He refuses to let it have the last word.

Paul says God made his light shine in our hearts, displayed in the face of Christ. The Greek word for light is *phōs*, the same root as photon, and even science describes light as invisible yet powerful, fully two things at once, and timeless. If the photon is like that, how much more the One who made it? We carry this treasure in jars of clay, a temporary physical body with a permanent spiritual nature. Like the law of conservation of mass, the pressure is not ending you, it is changing you. This is week one, step one: perspective. "So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen."

MAIN TAKEAWAY

We are pressed but not crushed. Turn your eyes upon Jesus, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

CONVERSATION TIPS

- **Listen Well.** Give others your full attention, and listen to understand rather than to respond.
- **Share Honestly.** Be open about your thoughts and questions; none of us have all the answers.
- **End with prayer.** Share requests around the group, then close your time together in prayer.