

Chapter 14

Relationship with Society: Suffering Persecution and Isolation

Opening Question: How has God entered into your times of suffering?

DEBRIEF

Have group members repeat the memory verse and share how they did with last week's Respond step. Open with prayer for the Spirit to illuminate the group during the study.

Editor's Note: The author of this chapter left her family in order to follow Jesus freely. God later reunited her with her family. She originally wanted to write about Joseph (Genesis 37-45) because of the family forgiveness she experienced, but learning that there was already a chapter on forgiveness, chose Romans 8.

Other individuals sometimes prayerfully choose a different path, postponing baptism in hopes of maintaining relationships and sharing Jesus with family. One Japanese believer postponed baptism until God provided a Christian fiancé, showing her parents God's power to provide and making them more open to her decision. Still others choose to be secret believers and use their positions of influence for Jesus, like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea (John 3:1-2 and 19:38-42).

If you are faced with such choices, seek the counsel of older Christians, especially those in your home country, if possible, and prayerfully ask the Lord to guide you.

Regardless, Geeta Mondol's experience of God's presence during her time of isolation will encourage you. Many Christians face isolation at some point in their lives, if not because of their faith, because of illness or other circumstances. God can use this isolation to grow us.

HEAR THE WORD

Old Testament Context:

In Genesis 3: 17-19, God placed the ground under a curse.

Creation is compared to a person in many places, for example Ps. 96: 11-13 and Isa. 55:12.

Psalm 44:22: "Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered" (NIV) is one of many verses that teach that God's people may have to suffer for no fault of their own.

Immediate Context:

In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul devotes chapter 8 to the living out of the Christian life through walking in the Spirit (1-17) and enduring suffering with the knowledge that there is glory in the future (18-30). Then comes the triumphant climax of the chapter, verses 31-39.

Romans 8:12-39 New Living Translation (NLT)

¹²Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. ¹³For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. ¹⁷And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.

²⁰Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, ²¹the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. ²²For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. ²⁴We were given this hope when we were saved. (If we already have something, we don't need to hope for it. ²⁵But if we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.)

²⁶And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. ²⁷And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. ²⁸And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. ²⁹For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn[b] among many brothers and sisters. ³⁰And having chosen them, he called them to come to him. And having called them, he gave them right standing with himself. And having given them right standing, he gave them his glory.

³¹ What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³² Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? ³³ Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. ³⁴ Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us. ³⁵ Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? ³⁶ (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") ³⁷ No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us. And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. ³⁹ No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

OBSERVE (What does the passage say?)

1. Read the verses slowly, thinking about each verse. Circle any words or ideas that you don't understand and underline the words that speak to you the most. Share those verses with the group. Answer each others' questions. Then have someone read the passage aloud.
2. Verses 15-16 state that believers are able to call God "Abba," the same term of endearment Jesus used in Mark 14:36 and that Paul says we use because we are adopted by the Father. What does being able to call God Abba do for us, according to these verses?
3. According to verses 20-23, why is creation groaning and why do believers groan? Who else is also groaning (verses 23 and 26) and how does this groaning help us pray? (This groaning is not the speaking of other languages as at Pentecost but something deeper and wordless). What are believers hoping for (verse 23)?
4. What are some of the difficulties that the passage says believers may face?

INTERPRET (What does the passage mean?) and APPLY (What does the passage mean to me and my community?)

5. The verb translated here as “chosen” in verse 29 is more literally “predestined.” But this verse is talking about predestination to become like Jesus, not for salvation. What does it mean to you to be chosen by God to become like Jesus? Ask the Lord to show you one area in your life where he wants to help you become more like Jesus.
6. How could the difficulties Paul lists (and other troubles) contribute to making us more like Jesus as Paul says they will in verse 29?
7. Look at verse 31. What does Jesus’ death for us show about God’s love for us?
8. Look at verses 32-33. What does Jesus’ death for us show about God’s love for us? Have you ever felt separated, alone and that no one cares for you? What are those feelings like? How does it make you feel that Jesus is at God’s right hand (a place of honor) praying for you and all his people...that not one thing in the whole universe can separate you from the love of God (verses 35-39)? When and where have you experienced this for yourself?

Memory Verse: Romans 8:38-39 (NIV)

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God’s love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God’s love. ³⁹ No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Write the verses in your heart language here:

RESPOND

Practice: Beginning this week, through the last week of this series, and possibly until the end of the school term, do the following:

Form a small (2-5 members with 3 being the ideal) support group to pray for one another in your challenges to live as a believer in a difficult world, whether it be persecution in the workplace or back home or isolation caused by illness or work schedules, God still intends for us to fellowship together and keep the fire of the Spirit

burning in us. Meet by phone or your favorite app for 20-45 minutes weekly. If you are about to graduate, continue with this group until you are able to locate fellow believers and find a similar group wherever God leads you.

Spend a moment in silent listening to the Lord about who in your group you could meet with. Close in prayer for group member needs, the formation of support groups and the needs of the world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Geeta Mondol was born and raised in a Hindu family. She came to know Jesus Christ as her Savior when she was in college. She did her Bachelors degree in History (Hons) from Delhi University and later completed a Bachelors in Religious Education from Reformed Bible College (now Kuyper College) in Grand Rapids, Michigan. After marriage she became involved with the Union of Evangelical Students of India, the Indian member of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, with her husband. After having two children, one of whom had autism, she got involved in the field of autism. This raised questions within her about the biblical response to those with disabilities. So she started the Ashish Foundation for the Differently Abled, which runs programs for both children and adults with autism. Her passion continues to be working with those from other faiths who are grappling with difficult situations, as well as training people on the impact of worldview on disabilities. She now has a good relationship with her parents and siblings. Several campus ministers from InterVarsity-USA, some with theological and discipleship training and others with experience with South Asian students, commented on this chapter.

Facilitator's Notes

Objectives of the Study

- Students will understand and experience more deeply their position as adopted children who can address God intimately
- They will rejoice that God is with us in times of persecution, isolation and suffering
- They will see how God can use those times to make us more like Jesus.
- Students will form a group to support them in difficult times

Notes on the Questions

Question 2: We are groaning and so is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is interceding for us, representing us to the Father, and the Father knows what we need. So, in our groaning we can rest because the Father now knows what we need.

Question 3: Being able to call God "Abba" gives us great intimacy with the Father and reminds us of the spiritual inheritance he has given us.

Question 6: Jesus experienced some of these difficulties: persecution, suffering, death. When the Holy Spirit inside us helps us to respond to troubles with faith and praise, we are drawn closer to Jesus and become more like Him.

Question 8: Facilitator, prayerfully ask the Lord to bring to your mind a situation where the Lord's presence and strength were helpful to you and be ready to share it if group members hesitate. That will encourage them and also give them time to think about what they might want to share.