

2 Corinthians 1:3–11 and Comforting One Another

Prayer

Introductory Questions

- Explain a situation in which you needed others to comfort you.
- How did they comfort you in and through your suffering?

Overview of the Lesson

2 Corinthians 1:3–11 records the apostle Paul’s praise to God for his comfort in Paul’s suffering. The following statements address the nature of suffering in this life—truths that shape how we comfort and encourage one another.

1. **We trace human suffering back to Adam’s fall into sin:** “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12; cf. Rom. 8:19–23).
2. **We suffer due to trials (such as sickness) that create physical and emotional pain (including anxiety, grief, and deep concern for those we love):** “For I wrote to you with many tears out of an extremely troubled and anguished heart—not to cause you pain, but that you should know the abundant love I have for you” (2 Cor. 2:4).
3. **Some of the suffering we experience is the direct result of our godly, mission-centered choices:** “But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear them or be intimidated” (1 Pet. 3:14; cf. 2 Cor. 4:7–12; 6:4–10; 11:23–29).
4. **The reasons we suffer are multifaceted and often mysterious:** “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways.” This is the LORD’s declaration. “For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:8–9; cf. Job 1:6–2:7; Rom. 1:24; Heb. 12:5–11).
5. **Jesus’s death and resurrection overcame the power of the devil, sin, and death, although believers will not be free from suffering until they are with Jesus in heaven:** “Now since the children have flesh and blood in common, Jesus also shared in these, so that through his death he might destroy the one holding the power of death—that is, the devil” (Heb. 2:14; cf. 1 Cor. 15:55–57; Col. 2:13–15; Rev. 20:14).

Not only does God proactively comfort us in our suffering, but he uses suffering in our lives to transform us into the likeness of his Son (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 1:3–4). He comforts us both directly and through others, so that we can comfort others with the comfort we received.

We organize 2 Corinthians 1:3–11 into two main sections: (1) Praise to God for his Comfort (vv. 3–7) and (2) An Illustration of God’s Deliverance (vv. 8–11). We conclude this lesson by summarizing ways we comfort (and encourage) one another.

1. Praise to God for his Comfort

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. 4 He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings that we suffer. 7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will also share in the comfort. (2 Cor. 1:3–7)

Paul began his letter with this greeting: “1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by God’s will, and Timothy our brother: To the church of God at Corinth, with all the saints who are throughout Achaia. 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 1:1–2). Paul identified himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus by God’s will” (in part because his authority was being challenged) and greeted the Corinthians with grace and peace (which God accomplishes through God’s written Word).

In verses 3–7, Paul offers praise to God for comforting his people. What is the nature of this comfort? “Throughout this letter God’s comfort is his consoling, strengthening, and refreshing of believers in the midst of adversity” (*NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, 2083). Regardless of the nature of our suffering, comfort comes *from God* as we focus our mind *on God and his promises*—promises that we find in the pages of Scripture.

When God “blesses” us, he affirms our favored position in his presence and grants us specific benefits (such as residing in his kingdom; Matt. 5:3, 10). When we bless God (as in 2 Cor. 1:3), we ascribe praise to God for his supreme worth and goodness to us. Here Paul praised him as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (which highlights God’s role and position of authority in relationship to Jesus) and “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort” (which identifies God as the source of mercy and comfort in our times of great need). God “comforts us in all our affliction,” whether that affliction arises from persecution for our faith or otherwise (v. 4). He comforts us not only to console us and refresh our souls but also so that we will comfort others with “the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” What God give us he expects that we will share with others. For example, we teach others because we have been taught, we encourage others because we have been encouraged, and, in this passage, we comfort others because we have been comforted.

In verse 5, “the sufferings of Christ” refer to the afflictions that followers of Jesus experience in this life (Col. 1:24), not to Jesus’s suffering on the cross to atone for sins (Rom. 3:25). As sufferings overflow *to God’s people*, so through Christ comfort flows *from God’s people* to others.

In verses 6–7, Paul clarifies the goals of his ministry in and through his suffering: the comfort and eternal salvation of the Corinthians. Paul’s “opponents maintained that Paul’s sufferings disqualified him as an apostle, but Paul maintains that his sufferings are the means God uses to strengthen other believers” (*ESV Study Bible*, 2223). Paul was confident that the Corinthians would share in his comfort, even as they shared in his sufferings. Comfort from God produces

“patient endurance”—the ability to stand strong under the painful trials of life. The alternative is to collapse under the pressure of our suffering and abandon our commitments.

- What is an example of how you were able to comfort others with the very comfort you received from God? In other words, who taught you how to comfort others?
- What is an example of how you have grown in Christian *endurance*? How do we develop that quality to a greater extent?

2. An Illustration of God’s Deliverance

8 We don’t want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of our affliction that took place in Asia. We were completely overwhelmed—beyond our strength—so that we even despaired of life itself. 9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death, so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a terrible death, and he will deliver us. We have put our hope in him that he will deliver us again 11 while you join in helping us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gift that came to us through the prayers of many. (2 Cor. 1:8–11)

Paul now provides a specific example of how God intervened during Paul’s severe trial. In the province of Asia, Paul was brought to the point of death (though we don’t know what caused this distress). In the process, he was utterly “overwhelmed” (weighed down or burdened) beyond his own strength, and he did not think he would survive (v. 8). For Paul, he thought he had received a verdict or sentence of death (v. 9). But Paul knew that God had a deep purpose through Paul’s suffering: so that Paul would not trust in himself “but in God who raises the dead”—both literally (raising dead people to life) and figuratively (reviving those who feel weak and lifeless) (v. 9). Paul also knew that he would face death again and hoped in God that he would deliver him (v. 10). He requested, therefore, for the Corinthians to pray for him. This would result in many others giving thanks for God’s gift (or gracious favor) of delivering Paul, which occurred through the prayers of many (v. 11) (Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*).

- What does it mean *to trust in ourselves* during trials? How does trusting in ourselves express itself in those moments?
- How should we pray for those who are undergoing significant trials?

Sound Doctrine: Comforting One Another

Below are seven ways to approach comforting one another in the body of Christ. While the biblical concepts of *comfort* (easing someone’s distress and refreshing their souls) and *encouragement* (strengthening others to press on in their faith) are not identical, they are closely related, and so we address both below.

1. **We listen attentively to understand the nature of one another’s suffering.** Listening communicates that we care and desire to understand. But since people react to trials differently, listening also allows us to discern the most helpful ways to comfort and encourage those who are suffering.
2. **We grieve with those who grieve.** Because we love others, we experience the highs and lows of Christian living together (Matt. 7:12; 22:39). Therefore, we will “rejoice with those who rejoice [and] weep with those who weep” (Rom. 12:15).
3. **We meet one another’s physical needs.** Providing financial support and sharing our possessions not only addresses specific needs, but doing so demonstrates our love for others. With the strength God provides, he enables us to be supernaturally generous when we see others in need (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37; 1 Tim. 6:18–19).
4. **We encourage one another to fight temptations to sin.** The world, our sinful nature, and the demonic realm consistently attempt to draw us away from God. However, we are particularly vulnerable to sin during severe trials, for we sometimes believe that sinning will provide relief from the pain. Therefore, we encourage one another to resist temptation and strive for personal holiness, despite the pain (1 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 11:25; 12:14).
5. **We pray with and for one another.** It is certainly appropriate to pray that God would bring others’ trials to an end (such as when we pray for their healing). But it is just as important to pray that God would grant others the character to endure the trials in a way that is pleasing to him (Acts 4:29–31; James 1:2–4, 12).
6. **We direct one another explicitly to God’s Word.** One of the best ways to comfort and to encourage others is to directly read aloud, explain, and apply God’s Word. For example, we share verses like Isaiah 41:10 and encourage others to cling to God’s promises: “Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you; I will help you; I will hold on to you with my righteous right hand.”
7. **We encourage one another to trust God and his character.** Ultimately, we direct people to God himself and his character. We encourage one another to remember that God is loving, good, wise, all-knowing, and all-powerful. For those and many other reasons, we trust him, particularly when we don’t understand what he is doing or why he is doing it. God works all things (including our most painful afflictions) together for good for those who love him (Rom. 8:28; cf. Heb. 12:5–11).

- When you are suffering, how do you want others to care for you?
- In what ways do you want to grow in your ability to comfort others?

Prayer

Applying God's Word

Use these two pages to reflect on and apply this lesson. Schedule a time to discuss your answers and pray with family members and friends during the week, and/or as part of your next group meeting.

1. Renew Your Mind

- a. What did you learn about **God the Father, God the Son, and/or God the Holy Spirit** (concerning their character qualities, words, and/or actions)?
- b. What did you realize about **your sinful tendencies** (concerning your desires, values, thoughts, words, and/or actions)? "I sin against God by _____."
- c. What did you learn about **God's will for your life** (concerning your desires, values, thoughts, words, and/or actions)? "God desires that I _____."

2. Memorize the Word

Identify one or more verses of Scripture from this lesson that you plan to memorize and write them out below.

3. Obey the Word

In response to this lesson:

- a. How do you want to grow in **your character**? “By God’s grace, I want to become more (or less) _____. I will work on that by _____.”
- b. How can you apply this information in **your words and/or actions** (with your family, church community, neighbors, and/or coworkers)? “By God’s grace, I will _____.”

4. Express Your Desires

- a. Write out one or more prayers to God in response to this lesson.
- b. What other prayer requests do you want to share with your family and friends?