# WHY SUFFERING?

**2 Corinthians 1:3-11**
10-4-2026

Introduction:

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**I.** ***God allows suffering so that***
**We might be <u>enabled</u> to <u>comfort others</u> (v. 3-7)**

A. Thank Him anyway (v. 3)

B. Comfort with comfort (v. 4)

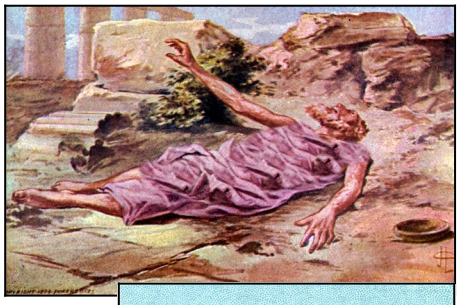
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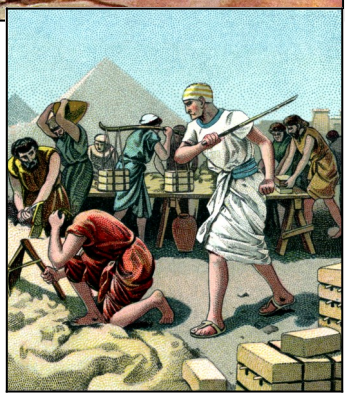
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**We might <u>not trust in ourselves</u> (v. 8-10)**

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While we gather to praise and worship God on a sunny Sunday morning with a cheerful light shining through our bright auditorium and heavenly music flowing from the piano and organ, many of our people stand to sing a congregational hymn such as "Great is Thy Faithfulness."

Despite the angelic sound of praise, "a discordant note plucks at the heartstrings of those in the audience who suffer. The pain maybe physical, marital, financial, or emotional . . . afflicting a friend, a relative, an immediate family member, or themselves . . . death, divorce, bankruptcy, cancer, heart disease, scandal, kidnapping, rape. . . No wonder we look up, straining to see some design, some purposeful pattern, and ask why." (Swindoll, p. 12-13).

The sufferings Paul alludes to in this context are primarily the troubles he faced in a hostile world (i.e. persecution in Asia 1:8), a world that is no friend of Christ.

***2 Timothy 3:12***

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

Paul says more about suffering, and more about comfort, than any other writer in the Bible. And it is here that he says the most about it. There is a reason for this, and it was to answer critics who held that the sufferings that characterized Paul's life were evidence that he was not an apostle, because if he was the real thing he wouldn't be experiencing so much trouble. Paul's answer was that abundant suffering and abundant comfort are in fact signs of apostolic authenticity." (R. Kent Hughes, 2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness, p. 22)

The theme of 2 Corinthians is "STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS." It is in our times of weakness that we find God's strength. In verses 3-7, we discover that times of suffering are opportunities for God to show His mercy and comfort.

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**"Blessed" =** Worthy of praise; lit. to say a good word about. God is worthy that we say good things about Him. In the midst of suffering, it is often a temptation to think wrongly about God. We are prone to think negatively about Him, perhaps questioning his love and faithfulness to us.

It is appropriate that Paul begins this section dealing with comfort by referring to **"our Lord Jesus Christ,"** for it is only through Him (Christ) that we experience the mercy and comfort of God.

God is the **"Father"** who shows to His children abundant (note the plural) **"mercies"**. He has compassionate pity on our miseries and troubles, just as a caring father does for his troubled child.

**"The God of <u>all</u> comfort" -** Any true comfort at all ultimately comes from God. He has all kinds of comfort for all types of suffering, but He is the exclusive source of all our comfort.

A breakdown of the word *parakletos* gives us the etymological meaning of the term:

"The prefix *para*, meaning "alongside," and the root *kaleo* meaning "to call." Comfort is given by someone called alongside to help – like a nurse called to a patient's bedside (Charles R. Swindoll, <u>A Ministry Anyone Could Trust, A study of 2 Corinthians 1-7</u>, p. 14).

**"Comfort" –** The words "comfort" and "consolation" are the same Greek root. The noun being *paraklesis* and the verb, *parakeleo*. *Parakaleo* literally means to call alongside. It speaks of the help of another who comes to your aid when you're troubled or lonely.

The "Holy Spirit" is the specific person of the Godhead who was promised to be our comforter.

***John 14:16-18***
And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; *Even* the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

In verses 3-7, the word "comfort" (also translated "consolation") occurs ten times.

In suffering, we don't need an alcoholic drink of "southern comfort" (whiskey); we need a heavenly dose of divine, spiritual comfort. (Note: In suffering, people often turn to <u>substances</u>—such as alcohol, drugs, or cigarettes—or other <u>people</u> or <u>things</u> as cheap substitutes for the answer found in God!)

B. Comfort with comfort (v. 4)

The Greek word translated here "tribulation" (*thlipsis*) occurs 12 times in 2 Corinthians.

It is translated "trouble" (1:4, 1:8, 4:8), "affliction" (2:4, 4:17, 6:4, 8:2), "tribulation" (1:4, 7:4), and "burdened" (8:13). In all cases it means to be pressured or to have a weighty burden pressing down upon you.

Tribulations should not come as a shock to us. We are promised tribulations while living in this world (John 16:33).

Why would God permit His children to undergo "tribulation?"

**--To <u>purge</u> us**
(to refine us, as the dross is melted away)
***Acts 14:22***
Confirming the souls of the disciples, *and* exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

Cp. ***Job 23:10***
But he knoweth the way that I take: *when* he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

**--To <u>test</u> us**
(to show us the genuineness of our faith)
***Revelation 2:10***
Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Cp. ***James 1:3***
Knowing *this*, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.

**--To <u>draw</u> us to Himself**
***John 16:33***
These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

**--To <u>distinguish</u> (<u>separate</u>) us**
The same heat that melts the wax, hardens the clay; the true believer will remain faithful; the unbeliever will defect under pressure)
***Matthew 13:21***
Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

**--To <u>mature</u> us**
That we might grow in faith and patience
***Romans 5:3***
And not only *so*, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience;

This verse (2 Cor. 1:4) teaches that God permits us to go through tribulation **to <u>use</u> us** (that we might be an instrument of comfort in the lives of others).

It's one thing to comfort others from <u>precept</u>; it's another thing to comfort others from <u>experience</u>.

Certainly all of us can offer comfort based on the truths that God has taught us in Scripture.

***Romans 15:4***
For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

But the one who has himself gone through the fire can add a personal illustration to really bring the truth to life! "I made it, my brother, and you can, too!"

Opening up and sharing the comfort we received through some particular form of suffering will require:

1) Honesty (not to embellish the story, but stay true to the facts)

2) Humility (sharing an embarrassing story)

3) Transparency (to open up)

4) Memory (recollection of a painful past)

5) Victory (we glory in the triumph and not in the dark sin, temptation or trial)

To bring comfort to the pressured soul, we can share from personal experience . . .

…the trials we faced
…the bridges we crossed
…the fires we endured
…the temptations we resisted
…the opposition we received
…the insult and injury we were subjected to
…the crisis we handled
…the storm we weathered
…the injustice we faced
…the abuse we endured

How has God comforted you?

What tribulation has He brought you through?

What victories has He wrought in your life?

What difficulties has He carried you through?

"Those who receive encouragement from God are qualified to enter sympathetically into the experience of others whose pathway leads them through a vale of tears (vv. 4,6,7). 'Sympathy is love perfected by experience,' adds Goudge" (Ralph P. Martin, 2 Corinthians, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 40, p. 11)

"He who has experienced one kind of affliction is particularly qualified to console others in the same" (Bengel, cited by Martin, p. 12).
"It's like a chain reaction: When we go through suffering, God comforts us. And when His comfort has done its work in our lives, then we, in turn, can comfort others. A perfect example of this is Joni Eareckson Tada. God has comforted her in her affliction, and she, in turn, has comforted thousands of other people with physical disabilities.

"The person who has suffered the shattering effects of a divorce can best comfort a divorcee. The person who has lost a child can best comfort another parent who has lost a child. The businessman who once was bankrupt can best comfort another person in the throes of financial disaster. Therefore, one reason God allows suffering is so we might have a well of experience deep enough to draw from it compassion and counsel to comfort others." (Swindoll, p. 14-15)

C. More pain, more gain (v. 5)

Just as Paul's life overflowed with much (abundant) suffering for Christ, so his life overflowed with much (abundant) comfort from Christ.

The more you endure for Him, the more He gives to you the energy and power needed for endurance.

"The truth is that God's comfort always exceeds our afflictions" (Hughes, p. 27).

Little suffering = little comfort
More suffering = more comfort
Much suffering = much comfort

The Lord's supply is sufficient, yea, more than sufficient.

***Philippians 4:13***
I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

"God's salve is dispensed in proportion to the extent of our wounds. And that salve is stored in us so at the appropriate time we might dispense it to others." (Swindoll, p. 15).

This verse reminds me of Romans 5:20 –
***Romans 5:20***
Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:

If the Lord calls you to a task, He will enable you for that task.

If He allows pressure to fall on your chest, He will give you the pectoral and triceps strength to lift it up and bear it.

In the great commission, He does not merely send us off to make disciples on our own, He promises His presence with us as we do His job (Mt. 28:20).

God's calling will be accompanied with God's supply.

He will provide the fuel for the race.
He will provide the weaponry (artillery) for the war.

D. Endure it for them! (v. 6-7)

**v. 6**

Whether Paul was afflicted or comforted, it was for the spiritual benefit and salvation of those He ministered to.

God may want others to see His working in your life and testimony so that He might bring them to Himself through you.

No doubt when Paul saw Stephen's faith as a martyr for Christ, this served as a "goad" to spur him to Christ (Acts 7:58).

Throughout history, the blood of the saints has been the seed of the church.

--Would you be willing to die as a martyr if it meant that others would come to salvation because of your testimony?

--Would you be willing to suffer tribulation patiently if it would serve as a testimony of God's power and grace in your life?

**v. 7**

Paul had a firm hope that since the Corinthians had shared in suffering for Christ, they would also share in the comfort He gives.

How to Have Comfort in Suffering. Remember:

1. In suffering, think good thoughts about God (v. 3)

2. In suffering, God comforts you so you can comfort others (v.4)

3. In suffering, the more pain you endure for Christ, the more comfort He gives (v. 5)

4. Our suffering for Christ is often instrumental in other people coming to His salvation

**II.** ***God allows suffering so that***
**We might <u>not trust in ourselves</u> (v. 8-10)**

**v. 8**
**"Not. . . have you ignorant"** –

Paul was not too ashamed to admit "problems" in the ministry. Though he was the great Apostle for Jesus Christ, yet he faced danger and violence in between his planting the Corinthian Church and the writing of this second book of Corinthians.

(Note: The Corinthians prayed for Paul during that time in Asia – 1:11).

**"Asia" –** modern-day Turkey; the land of the 7 churches of Revelation 2-3. Ephesus being the most prominent in terms of biblical significance and in terms of political significance, as it was the capital of the Roman province of Asia Minor.

**"Trouble" –** *thlipsis* – tribulation; intense pressure.

**"Above strength" –** beyond human ability or power.

**"Pressed out of measure" –**

**"Pressed" =** heavily burdened

**"Out of measure" –** lit. "a throwing beyond" (beyond throwing distance)

Paul describes himself as being burdened to an extreme degree. Far away from human ability to endure.

**v. 9**

**"The sentence of death" –** What we would call, the death sentence. It was as if the judge rendered the verdict of death. Paul felt within himself as if this was it; it's all over; my life is done.

**v. 8**

**"Despaired even of life" -** Paul was in situations where he saw no human way out of danger. He thought death was imminent.

He had given up natural hope.

**v. 9**

Do you have any seemingly impossible situations? God is the God of the impossible.

***Luke 1:37***
For with God nothing shall be impossible.

Cp. ***Matthew 17:20***
And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

***Luke 18:27***
And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God.

Why would God allow such a great tribulation to hit Paul and his ministry companions? Simple: That he would lean on nothing except God.

That no earthly help or hope would be sought. No amount of self-effort could free Paul from certain death. No human plans or power could undo the dire straights that Paul was in.

**"That we should not trust in ourselves" –**

**"That" –** *hina* – expressing purpose, not result (Rienecker, p. 393).

It was all part of God's master plan and design. He reigns sovereign; and He is in full control; God has a very specific reason for the various trials His children all face.

The hymnwriter said it best – "The arm of flesh will fail you, ye dare not trust your own."

Place no confidence in the flesh!

(VINNY SEE IN GOD WE TRUST SERMON)

**"But in God" –** self-trust is abandoned for divine trust. Depend on Him; rely upon Him!

Which God do we trust? The only God. The God who has power over death. Nothing is more seemingly impossible than raising the dead back to life. God…**"which raiseth the dead."**

**v. 10**

In verse ten, Pual gives 3 tenses of deliverance or rescue.

Past – **"delivered"**
Present – **"doth deliver"**
Future – **"he will yet deliver us"**

But physically and spiritually, God ahs delivered us.

Perhaps the added adjective **"So great a death"** – implies the spiritual and eternal death we have been delivered from.

"St. Chrysostom wrote: "Notwithstanding that the resurrection is a future event, he shows that it happens every day; for when God raises up again a man whose life is despaired of, and who has been brought to the very gates of hell, He shows nothing other than a resurrection, snatching from the very jaws of death the one who had fallen into them." So when we find ourselves in impossible circumstances as we follow Christ, remember that God, by nature, is a raiser of the death. This truth is as old as Genesis, as old as Abraham's God, "who gives life to the death and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Romans 4:17)." (Hughes, p. 32)

**III.** ***God allows suffering so that***
**We might <u>band together</u> in <u>prayer</u> (v. 11)**

**"For the gift" –** in context, the gift evidently refers to the gift of deliverance from death (v. 10); which was made available by God in response to the prayers of many.

Prayer is true help – **"Helping together"** (a joining together so as to form a team effort)

The flow of thought seems to be this:

--the Corinthians prayed
--God answered and gave deliverance
--Resulting in thanks to God

"Prayer is indeed a mystery, but it is stressed over and over again in the New Testament as a vital prerequisite for the release and experience of God's power. It is true that it is God who delivers, and that God stands in no need of human prayers before He can act on behalf of His afflicted servants. Yet there is the manward as well as the Godward aspect of such deliverance, and the manward side is summed up in the duty of Christians to intercede in prayer for their fellow-believers who are enduring affliction. . . In prayer, human impotence casts itself at the feet of divine omnipotence. Thus the duty of prayer is not a modification of God's power, but a glorification of it." (Philip Hughes, quoted in R. Kent Hughes <u>2 Corinthians Power in Weakness</u>, p. 34)

***Ephesians 6:19***
And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel,

***Philippians 1:19***
For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

***Colossians 4:3***
Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds:

***2 Thessalonians 3:1***
Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have *free* course, and be glorified, even as *it is* with you: