

When You Are Suffering

1 Cor 1:3 Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; 4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. 6 And whether we be afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation. 7 And our hope of you *is* stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so *shall ye be* also of the consolation. 1 Cor 1:3-7

Introduction:

1. Discouragement is no respecter of persons. In fact, discouragement seems to attack the successful far more than the unsuccessful; for the higher we climb, the farther down we can fall.
2. Paul could have escaped some of his burdens except that he had a call from God (2 Cor. 1:1) and a concern to help people.
 - a. He had founded the church at Corinth and had ministered there for a year and a half (Acts 18:1-18).
 - b. When serious problems arose in the church after his departure, he sent Timothy to deal with them (1 Cor. 4:17) and then wrote the letter that we call 1 Corinthians.
 - c. Unfortunately, matters grew worse and Paul had to make a "painful visit" to Corinth to confront the troublemakers (2 Cor. 2:1ff).
 - d. Still, no solution. He then wrote "a severe letter" which was delivered by his associate, Titus (2 Cor. 2:4-9; 7:8-12).

- e. After a great deal of distress, Paul finally met Titus and got the good report that the problem had been solved.
3. It was then that he wrote the letter we call 2 Corinthians.
4. One of the key words in this letter is *comfort* or *encouragement*.
 - a. The Greek word means "called to one's side to help."
 - b. The verb is used 18x in this letter, and the noun 11x.
 - c. In spite of all the trials he experienced, Paul was able (by the grace of God) to write a letter saturated with encouragement.
5. What was Paul's secret of victory when he was experiencing pressures and trials? His secret was *God*.
6. When you find yourself discouraged and ready to quit, get your attention off of yourself and focus it on God.
7. Out of his own difficult experience, Paul tells us how we can find encouragement in God. He gives us three simple reminders.

I. THE SOURCE OF OUR COMFORT - VS 3

3 Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

- Paul began his letter with a doxology.
- He could not sing about his circumstances, but he could sing about the God who is in control of all circumstances.
- Paul had learned that praise is an important factor in achieving victory over discouragement and depression.
- "Praise changes things" just as much as "Prayer changes things."

A. *God Can Comfort Us Because He is God*

3 Blessed *be* God....

1. You find this phrase "blessed be God" in two other places in the NT, in Eph 1:3 and 1Pet 1:3.

2. In Eph 1:3 Paul praised God for what He did *in the past*, when He "chose us in [Christ]" (Eph. 1:4) and blessed us "with all spiritual blessings"
3. In 1Pet 1:3 Peter praised God for *future* blessings and "a living hope"
4. But in 2Cor Paul praised God for *present* blessings, for what God was accomplishing then and there.
5. During the horrors of the Thirty Years' War, Pastor Martin Rinkart faithfully served the people in Eilenburg, Saxony. He conducted as many as 40 funerals a day, a total of over 4,000 during his ministry. Yet out of this devastating experience, he wrote a "table grace" for his children which today we use as a hymn of thanksgiving:

Now thank we all our God,
With heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done,
In whom His world rejoices!

B. God Can Comfort Us Because He is the Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ

3b ... even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...

1. It is because of Jesus Christ that we can call God "Father" and even approach Him as His children.
2. God sees us in His Son and loves us as He loves His Son (Jn 17:23).
3. We are "beloved of God" (Rom 1:7) because we are "accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:6).
4. We are dear to the Father because His Son is dear to Him and we are citizens of "the kingdom of His dear Son" (Col 1:13).
5. We are precious to the Father, and He will see *to* it that the pressures of life will not destroy us.

c. God Can Comfort Us Because He is the Father of Mercies

3c ...the Father of mercies...

1. To the Jewish people, the phrase *father of* means "originator of."
 - a) *Satan is the father of lies (J 8:44) because lies originated with him.*
 - b) *Gen 4:21, Jubal was the father of musical instruments because he originated the pipe and the harp.*
 - c) *God is the Father of mercies because all mercy originates with Him and can be secured only from Him.*
2. God in His grace gives us what we do not deserve, and in His mercy He does not give us what we do deserve.
 - a) *"It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed" (Lam. 3:22).*
 - b) *God's mercy is manifold (Neh. 9:19), tender (Ps. 25:6), and great (Num. 14:19).*
 - c) *The Bible frequently speaks of the "multitude of God's mercies" so inexhaustible is the supply (Pss. 5:7; 51:1; 69:13, 16; 106:7, 45; Lam. 3:32).*

D. God Can Comfort Us Because He is the God of All Comfort

3d ...and the God of all comfort;

1. The words *comfort* or *consolation* are repeated 10x 2 Cor 1:1-11.
 - a) *We must not think of comfort in terms of "sympathy," because sympathy can weaken us instead of strengthen us.*
 - b) *He puts strength into our hearts so we can face our trials and triumph over them.*
 - c) *The Greek word means "to come alongside and help."*
 - d) *It is the same word used for the HS ("the Comforter")*
2. When you find yourself discouraged because of difficult circumstances, it is easy to look at yourself and your feelings, or to focus on the problems around you.
3. But the first step we must take is to look by faith to the Lord and

realize all that God is to us.

4. In the late 1960s, while expecting their third child, Bill and Gloria Gaither were going through a traumatic time. Their firstborn, Suzanne, was 4, and her sister Amy was three months old. The timing for another baby wasn't ideal. On top of that, Bill was recovering from a bout with mononucleosis. The breakup of the marriage of Bill's sister, Mary Ann, had left his family devastated. What's more, a close friend's accusation that Bill and Gloria were using their ministry just to make a buck blindsided the couple and plunged Bill into a deep depression.

Gloria also remembers it as a time of fear and sadness. The educational system was being infiltrated with the "God is dead" idea, while drug abuse and racial tension were increasing. The thought of bringing another child into the world was taking its toll. But as they continued to pray they were assured that the future, left in God's hands, would be just fine.

In July, 1970, a healthy baby, Benjamin, was born. Inspired by the miracle of their son's birth, "Because He Lives" poured out of the Gaithers' grateful hearts. The song clearly affirms the hope believers have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Precious praise for God poured forth from the pen of Bill like treasured oil from West Texas sand, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know who holds the future, my life is worth the living, just because He lives."

The Source of Our Comfort....

II. THE SUBJECTS OF GOD'S COMFORT - PAUL'S EXPERIENCE

- Those who know tribulation are the subjects of God's comfort.
- A. *God Permits the Trials to Come***

4a Who comforteth us in all our tribulation....

1. There are ten basic words for suffering in the Greek language, and Paul used five of them in this letter.
2. The most frequently used word is *thlipsis*, which means "narrow, confined, under pressure"
3. Paul felt hemmed in by difficult circumstances, and the only way he could look was up.
4. We must never think that trouble is an accident.
 - a) *For the believer, everything is a divine appointment.*
 - b) *There are only three possible outlooks a person can take when it comes to the trials of life.*
 - (1) If our trials are the products of "fate" or "chance," then our only recourse is to give up. Nobody can control fate or chance.
 - (2) If we have to control everything ourselves, then the situation is equally as hopeless.
 - (3) But if God is in control, and we trust Him, then we can overcome circumstances with His help.
5. God encourages us in all our tribulations by teaching us from His Word that it is He who permits trials to come.

B. God is In Control of Trials - vs 8

8 For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

1. Paul was weighed down like a beast of burden with a load too heavy to bear.
2. But God knew just how much Paul could take and He kept the situation in control.
3. We do not know what the specific "trouble" was, but it was great

enough to make Paul think he was going to die.

4. Whether it was peril from his many enemies (see Acts 19:21ff; 1 Cor. 15:30-32), serious illness, or special satanic attack, we do not know; but we do know that God controlled the circumstances and protected His servant.
5. When God puts His children into the furnace, He keeps His hand on the thermostat and His eye on the thermometer (1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Peter 1:6-7).
6. Paul may have despaired of life, but God did not despair of Paul.

c. God Enables Us to Bear Our Trials - vs 9

9 But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:

1. The first thing He must do is show us how weak we are in ourselves.
 - a) *Paul was a gifted and experienced servant of God, who had been through many different kinds of trials.*
 - b) *Surely all of this experience would be sufficient for him to face these new difficulties and overcome them.*
2. But God wants us to trust *Him*—not our gifts or abilities, our experience, or our "spiritual reserves."
3. Just about the time we feel self-confident and able to meet the enemy, we fail miserably. "For when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).
4. The God who raises the dead is sufficient for *any* difficulty of life! He is able, but we must be available.
5. "Sentence of death" could refer to an official verdict, perhaps an order for Paul's arrest and execution.
6. Keep in mind that the unbelieving Jews hounded Paul's trail and wanted to eliminate him (Acts 20:19). "Perils by my own

countrymen" must not be overlooked in the list of dangers (2 Cor. 11:26).

7. In 1858, Scottish missionary John G. Paton and his wife sailed for the New Hebrides (now called Vanuatu). Three months after arriving on the island of Tanna, his wife died. One week later his infant son also died. Paton was plunged into sorrow. Feeling terribly alone, and surrounded by savage people who showed him no sympathy, he wrote, "Let those who have ever passed through any similar darkness as of midnight feel for me. As for all others, it would be more than vain to try to paint my sorrows... but for Jesus, and His fellowship, I would have gone mad and died." Paton's trials were terrible and formidable. He was able, however, to cope with his complications because God's comfort was accessible, available. Beloved, because our perils are not an obstacle to His comfort, our trials are bearable, tolerable, and we can be comfortable in His care. We not only enjoy comfort from the Lord through the Spirit of God who indwells us, but also through the Word of God. This is why it is so important to read the Bible.

D. God Can Deliver Us From Our Trials - vs 10

10 Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;

1. Paul saw God's hand of deliverance whether he looked back, around, or ahead.
2. The word Paul used means "to help out of distress, to save and protect."
3. God does not always deliver us immediately, nor in the same way.
4. James was beheaded, yet Peter was delivered from prison (Acts 12).
5. *Both* were delivered, but in different ways.

6. Sometimes God delivers us *from* our trials, and at other times He delivers us *in* our trials.
7. God's deliverance was in response to Paul's faith, as well as to the faith of praying people in Corinth (2 Cor. 1:11). "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles" (Ps. 34:6).

E. God is Glorified Through Our Trials - vs 11

11 Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift *bestowed* upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

1. When Paul reported what God had done for him, a great chorus of praise and thanksgiving went up from the saints to the throne of God.
2. The highest service you and I can render on earth is to bring glory to God, and sometimes that service involves suffering.
3. "The gift bestowed" refers to Paul's deliverance from death, a wonderful gift indeed!
4. God works out His purposes in the trials of life, if we yield to Him, trust Him, and obey what He tells us to do.
 - a) *Difficulties can increase our faith and strengthen our prayer lives.*
 - b) *Difficulties can draw us closer to other Christians as they share the burdens with us.*
 - c) *Difficulties can be used to glorify God.*
 - d) *So, when you find yourself in the trials of life, remember what God is to you and what God does for you.*

The Source of Our Comfort...

The Subjects of God's Comfort....

III. THE STEWARDSHIP OF OUR COMFORT - VS 4B-7

4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. 6 And whether we be afflicted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, *it is* for your consolation and salvation. 7 And our hope of you *is* stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so *shall ye be* also of the consolation.

1. God comforts us so that we can comfort others
2. In times of suffering, most of us are prone to think only of ourselves, and to forget others.
 - a) *We become cisterns instead of channels.*
 - b) *Yet one reason for trials is so that you and I might learn to be channels of blessing to comfort and encourage others.*
 - c) *Because God has encouraged us, so we can encourage them.*
3. Dr. George W. Truett, pastored the First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas for nearly 50 years. In one of his sermons, he told about an unbelieving couple whose baby died suddenly. Dr. Truett conducted the funeral and later had the joy of seeing them both trust Jesus Christ. Many months later, a young mother lost her baby; and again, Dr. Truett was called to bring her comfort. But nothing he shared with her seemed to help her. But at the funeral service, the newly converted mother stepped to the girl's side and said, "I passed through this, and I know what you are going through. God called me, and through the darkness I came to Him. He has comforted me, and He will comfort you!" Dr. Truett said, "The first mother did more for the second mother than I could have done, maybe in days and months; for the first young mother had traveled the road of suffering herself."

4. Paul made it clear that we do not need to experience *exactly* the same trials in order to be able to share God's encouragement.
 - a) *If we have experienced God's comfort, then we can "comfort them which are in any trouble" (2 Cor. 1:4b).*
 - b) *Of course, if we have experienced similar tribulations, they can help us identify better with others and know better how they feel; but our experiences cannot alter the comfort of God.*
5. But suffering can also help us to minister to others.
 - a) *In every church, there are mature saints of God who have suffered and experienced God's grace, and they are the great "encouragers" in the congregation.*
 - b) *Paul experienced trouble, not as punishment for something he had done, but as preparation for something he was yet going to do—minister to others in need.*
 - c) *Just think of the trials that King David had to endure in order to give us the great encouragement that we find in the Psalms.*
6. God has to work *in* us before He can work *through* us.
7. But as the sufferings increase, so does the supply of God's grace.
 - a) *"But He giveth more grace" (James 4:6).*
 - b) *This is an important principle to grasp: God has ample grace for our every need, but He will not bestow it in advance.*

Conclusion:

1. A husband lost his wife. They had a young daughter. After the funeral some of the close relatives noticed the pain and sorrow of the man and asked him, "Do you want us to take care of your daughter for a few days while you grieve?"
The man replied, "No, we are going to face this together."

So that night as the father was putting his daughter to bed she cried out, "Daddy, it is dark in her, can I sleep in your room?"

He replied, "Yes, you can sleep in my room."

As they went into the father's room, he turned off the light his daughter cried out again, "Daddy it is dark in here too." Then the little girl said, "Daddy, it is darker than it ever has been before."

The father replied, "Yes, baby, it is darker than it ever has been to me too."

In the darkness the little girl asked, "Daddy is your face turned toward me?"

The dad said, "Yes, honey, my face is turned toward you."

She said, "I can go to sleep now." The little girl soon fell asleep. The father was in such despair at the loss of his wife that he crawled out of bed and got down on his knees and prayed, "God, is your face turned toward me?" He thought that he heard the Lord say, "Yes, my face is toward you."

The father said, "OK Lord, now I can go to sleep."

2. It may be darker than it ever has been in your life, but you can go on when the Lord's face is turned toward you.
3. There is a "companionship" to suffering: it can draw us closer to Christ and to His people.
4. When Mitch Albom heard that his favorite college professor was dying of Lou Gehrig's disease, he visited him for the first time in over 20 years. He asked Morrie, the professor, why he bothered to follow the news each day since he was not going to be around to see how things turn out: "It's hard to explain, Mitch," Morrie said. "Now that I'm suffering, I feel closer to people who suffer than I ever did before.... I feel their anguish as if it were my own."

One of the reasons God lets us suffer in life is so we can understand the suffering of others and be able to comfort them--to do unto them what we would want others to do unto us. Paul lays out the progression of comfort in suffering by saying that God comforts us when we are hurting so we can comfort others with the same comfort by which we were comforted (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). When we suffer, we should receive the comfort of God and remember it so we can replicate that comfort for another.

We don't have to pray for suffering--it will find us easily enough. But we should pray for a spiritually-empathetic heart to feel the anguish of others and be prepared to comfort them as we ourselves would want to be comforted.

5. But if we start to wallow in self-pity, suffering will create isolation instead of involvement. We will build walls and not bridges.
6. The important thing is to fix your attention on God and not on yourself.
 - a. Remember *what God is to you*—"the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3).
 - b. Remember *what God does for you*—that He is able to handle your trials and make them work out for your good and His glory.
 - c. Finally, remember *what God does through you*—and let Him use you to be an encouragement to others.