

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Introduction: The situation has played itself out numerous times in numerous lives. Something like this has probably happened in every church in every city in every age since the time Paul first visited Corinth. A random believer, we'll call him Pete, was hurting. His older brother Larry had died about two years earlier – at age 30, of a slow, wasting rare disease. They were both Christians, and Pete prayed his heart out that Larry would be healed. The doctors couldn't do anything but ease the pain. When Larry died, Pete was devastated. Larry had always been his best and closest friend. People in his church tried to reach out to Pete, which was nice; it was thoughtful, but they couldn't bring Larry back. God was there too, Pete guessed, but what good was God when He didn't answer the most fervent prayers that Pete had ever prayed. Pete was never that much into the Bible, but he soon stopped reading it altogether. Prayer hurt, because whenever he tried to pray all he could think about were those unanswered prayers for Larry. Pete gradually stopped going to church and spent more time alone or with the crowd from work. A bunch of them always got together on the weekends. The guys loved sports and beer and the girls were, well, fun. When anyone from church would call, and maybe try to get together, Pete normally said he was busy. He wasn't that busy. He just didn't want to be around them that much because they made him feel unholy. It wasn't anything they said or did; it was just how Pete felt when he was around them. Two years after Larry's death Pete still called himself a Christian. He just didn't read the Bible, pray or go to church – or have any friends that did either. And Pete was still hurting.

In this first section of 2 Corinthians, we can learn a lot from Paul. When his life got tough which, as it turns out, for Paul was pretty often, he drew closer to God and other Christians.

In the times when life hits hardest, seek God's comfort and others' prayers.

Paul communicated repeatedly with the Corinthian church, mostly because this church needed his help perhaps more than any other. We don't know for sure how many letters Paul wrote to Corinth, but two of them made it into our Bibles.

The response in Corinth to Paul's previous communication was mixed. Some responded wholly and humbly to Paul's correctives, recognizing their need for repentance and bringing order into the church. Others responded with unwavering opposition. False teachers and their teachings had taken root in Corinth, forcing Paul, the man God used to get the church started, to defend his ministry and his credentials.

This is probably the least systematic and least doctrinal of all the letters we have from Paul to various churches. At the same time, it is the most autobiographical, most personal – the letter most full of feeling. Here we don't find the drier, more distant logic that we saw in the letter to the Romans. We see rather the heartfelt intensity of a father speaking to his children. We see less of Paul the theologian in 2 Corinthians. This is a friend talking to friends, a pastor addressing his flock – a church full of people he knows, loves and cares about deeply.

“Nowhere does Paul open his heart to his readers so completely as he does in his second letter [to the Corinthians] as he relates some of God's dealings with him in his inner life.” – Alan Redpath

“This book reveals the warm human character of Paul. Many have pictured Paul as the methodical logician of Romans or Galatians. ...This epistle, however, is emotional, full of tears and grief. It was written more with the heart than with the head.” – Robert G. Gromacki

In 2 Corinthians Paul openly reveals his weaknesses and struggles and readily admits his personal inadequacies to carry out the work that God has given him to do. Philip E. Hughes puts it like this:

“[Paul] sets himself before his readers as one who in himself is utterly weak and worthless, but through whose weakness the grace and power of Almighty God are magnified. In contrast to the self-esteem and self-interest of the false apostles is Paul’s self-effacement: all is of God and to the glory of God.”

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- 1:1 Paul was an apostle “by the will of God”. God ordains each of us for some particular ministry. He gives us certain responsibilities or tasks that he equips us to perform. We should be careful about *putting ourselves* into positions, always stepping forward carefully and prayerfully into whatever areas of ministry we may serve. Paul had the advantage, of course, of Jesus appearing to him in a flash of great light and knocking him down before telling him where to go and what to do. This was also kind of a disadvantage. When things got tough – people beating him up, throwing rocks at him, etc., he couldn’t just “step down for while” or “take a break”. He had a life calling and an undeniable personal mandate from the risen Christ. Not all the Corinthians were with Paul on that at this time – but at least he couldn’t deny his own ministry.
- 1:2 God the Father is the starting place of grace and peace. Jesus is the path or channel by which God’s grace and peace flow to us.

Grace (χάρις *charis*) is favor, God’s favor. In Christian understanding this favor is unmerited. Unmerited favor means God looks fondly upon us, not because of what we have done, but because of what Christ has done for us. Grace is God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense.

Peace (εἰρήνη *eirēnē*) Thayer Definition:

- 1) a state of national tranquillity
- 1a) exemption from the rage and havoc of war
- 2) peace between individuals, i.e. harmony, concord
- 3) security, safety, prosperity, felicity, (because peace and harmony make and keep things safe and prosperous)
- 4) of the Messiah’s peace

John 14:27 NKJV *Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.*

- 4a) the way that leads to peace (salvation)
- 5) of Christianity, the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and content with its earthly lot, of whatsoever sort that is
- 6) the blessed state of devout and upright men after death

1:3-4 **The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles**

These verses introduce a central theme of chapters 1-7. “Comfort” is *paraklesis*, a word that can mean “encourage” as well as “comfort” or “consolation.” The word occurs ten times in verses 3-7, with *thlipsis* (“trouble,” “affliction,” three times) and with *pathema* (“suffering,” four times). Life is filled with pressures and distress for Paul, but the encouragement he receives from God strengthens and enables. (See Victor Bible Background Commentary)

Every life has its share of troubles and distress. But only the Christian experiences divine encouragement in “all our troubles.”

When we experience God’s help and comfort during a time of trouble, we’re better prepared to minister to others who are going through various troubles.

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1:6 Paul saw an ultimate point to his sufferings. He could view his own afflictions, sufferings or trials as being for the sake of others. His comfort, therefore, was for others’ sake as well.

1:9-10 When Paul got to that place where he completely gave up on life itself, he found a deeper trust in God as a result. Think about how this measures up with what Jesus said:

Matt 16:24-27 NKJV *²⁴Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. ²⁵For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. ²⁶For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? ²⁷For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.*

1:11 Remember that the Corinthian church was not very spiritual. Some of them disliked Paul and thought he was, well, kind of dorky. And “dorkiness” was a serious hindrance to making friends in Corinth. Still, the prayers of the Corinthians were important to Paul, and so he points that out to them. Let’s not miss the lesson about praying together for things that he gives us here.

1. They were all praying together as a group for the safety of Paul and his companions. The Corinthians were “helping together in prayer” from a distance.
2. God answered the prayer that they were all praying.
3. Now thanks can be given together for the answer God gave – the “gift” that was granted through many.
4. It didn’t matter to Paul that the Corinthians were not very spiritual. He knew that God can answer the prayers of unspiritual people just as easily as the prayers of the godliest. He also knew that the Corinthians could grow by praying for Paul – so he liked to give them things to pray about. Paul always wanted other peoples’ prayers.

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Life Lessons from 2 Corinthians 1:1-11 (See *The Handbook of Bible Application*)

Dependence on God means counting on him for our most basic daily needs. Paul does not give the details here about their hardships in Asia, but the Bible gives us plenty of information about the many difficult trials he faced (Acts 13:2-14:28; Acts 15:40-21:17). He does write that they felt doomed to die, and realized that they could do nothing to help themselves—they simply had to trust in God.

We often depend on our own skills and abilities when life seems easy enough, but we turn to God when we feel unable to help ourselves. Depending on God is not defeat or weakness, but an honest realization of our own inadequacy without him and our need for his constant help. God is our source of power, and we receive his help by keeping in touch with him. With this attitude, problems will drive us to God rather than away from him. Learn how to rely on God daily, not by accident but by design.

Problems may be confirmation that we are living for Christ. As we live for Christ, we will experience troubles because we are trying to be God's people in a fallen and twisted world. Troubles are not always the result of sin or lack of faith, but Paul teaches that they may be a part of God's plan for believers. Our problems can help us look upward and forward, instead of inward.

Php 3:12-14 NKJV ¹²Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Trials and tribulations can build strong character; and they can provide us with opportunities to comfort others who also are struggling. Your troubles may even be a sign that you are taking a stand for Christ.

Rom 5:3-5 NKJV ³And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

God makes use of suffering in his plan for our life. Some people think that troubles are always caused by sin or a lack of faith. Job's friends held this point of view. Trials may be a part of God's plan for believers. Experiencing problems and persecutions can build character, patience, and sensitivity toward others who also face trouble. Problems are unavoidable for God's people. Your troubles may be a sign of effective Christian living.

Difficulties give us the opportunity to agree with one another in prayer. Paul's letters include repeated references to his prayers for other people and his requests for prayer for himself. Praying with one another and for one another is one of the means by which God helps the connections among his people to be made strong.

God offers us comfort even in the midst of our difficulties. Sometimes we err by thinking that when God comforts us, our hardships should totally go away. If that were always so, people would turn to God only to be relieved of pain and not out of love for him. We must understand that being comforted can also mean receiving strength, encouragement, and hope to deal with our hardships. If you are feeling overwhelmed, allow God to comfort you. Remember that every trial you endure successfully will help you comfort other people who are suffering similar hardships.

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