

# Comfort in Times of Trouble

2 Cor 1:3-11

SS Lesson for 08/03/2014

**Devotional Scripture:** Ps 119:49-56

## OUTLINE

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Comfort others by supplying their needs (2 Cor 9:12-13)

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*Jesus comforts us by suffering for us (5)*

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Jesus suffered to leave us an example (1 Peter 2:21)

Jesus suffered death for everyone (Heb 2:9)

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Jesus was pierced and crushed for our sins (Isa 53:4-5)

Jesus suffered to satisfy the requirements of the law for sins (Rom 8:3-4)

Jesus suffered and died for sins once for all (1 Peter 3:18)

*All Christians can expect sufferings but also should have hope (6-7)*

Hope during suffering because there is a reward in Heaven (Matt 5:11-12)

Hope during suffering because the future glory far outweighs the current temporary suffering (2 Cor 4:17-18)

Hope during suffering because of the greater value of suffering for Jesus (Heb 11:25-26)

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# Introduction

## Overview and Approach to Lesson

The lesson teaches about God's **Comfort in Times of Trouble**. The **study's aim** is to understand the cause and effect of suffering and how God can use these circumstances to bring consolation. The **study's application** is to set our minds on seeing this pattern in action as it appears in our own experience. (Adapted from *the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary*).

### Key Verse: 2 Cor 1:7

*7 And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.*

### Commentary from the Bible Knowledge Commentary

One of the many paradoxes of the Christian life is that the grace of God is most keenly experienced not in the best but in what seem to be the worst of times. However much a Christian longs for exaltation (cf. 1 Cor. 4:8), it is often in humiliation that he finds grace (cf. 2 Cor. 12:9). That theme pervades this letter and finds poignant expression in Paul's thanksgiving. Troubles (thlipsei, "pressures, distresses") are mentioned nine times by Paul in this letter (vv. 4 [twice], 8; 2:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2, 13; sometimes the word is trans. "troubles," other times "hardships"). Paul also used the corresponding verb thlibō three times in this epistle ("distressed," 1:6; "hard-pressed," 4:8; "harassed," 7:5). Troubles are experienced by all Christians. And the Apostle Paul probably endured more pressures than nearly all his readers. Troubles, Paul said, help Christians shift their perspective from the external and temporal to the internal and eternal (cf. 1:9; 4:17-18). The source of all comfort in the midst of troubles is God Himself, to whom Paul gave three titles: the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. identical wording in Eph. 1:3; 1 Peter 1:3), the Father (i.e., the Originator) of compassion, and the God of all comfort. This same God had sustained Paul through his suffering (2 Cor. 1:8-9) and delivered him from it (v. 10). "Compassion" translates the Greek oiktirmōn, used only four other times in the New Testament (rendered "mercy" in Rom. 12:1 and Heb. 10:28, and "compassion" in Phil. 2:1 and Col. 3:12). Just as spiritual gifts are not intended solely for the recipients' benefit but are to be used in turn for the service of others (cf. 1 Peter 4:10), so comfort received from God enables believers to comfort others. The comfort of God is channeled through people (cf. Acts 9:10-19; 2 Cor. 7:6) and by means of prayer (1:11). (Paul used a form of "comfort" five times in the Gr. [four are trans. in the NIV] in vv. 3-4, and five more times in vv. 5-7!). The sufferings Paul experienced were a consequence of his relationship to Christ (cf. Matt. 5:11; Col. 1:24). As Paul continued to preach the gospel, he suffered at the hands of men (e.g., 2 Cor. 11:23-26) and from privations which were a part of his task (11:27). But Paul's sufferings for Christ were accompanied by a comfort that overflowed. In referring to the sufferings of Christ (1:5), sufferings we suffer (v. 6), and our sufferings (v. 7), the apostle probably had in mind either the suffering he experienced in Asia which he referred to next (v. 8) or the pain brought to him by the problems of the Corinthian church (cf. 11:28-29). Both kinds may be in mind, but if it was primarily the latter to which he referred (cf. 7:5) then the Corinthians' own suffering was similar. Paul's severe letter (7:8) produced in them a profound sorrow as they understood how their reprehensible behavior had grieved Paul (7:9). It had certainly distressed him to write it (2:4) but he did it out of love for them, for their comfort and salvation (cf. 7:10). The aspect of salvation suggested here is their advance in sanctification, which in fact this letter produced (cf. 7:11). The Corinthians' response brought comfort to both themselves and Paul (7:13) and reaffirmed Paul's hope (1:7) that God indeed had His hand on their lives (cf. Heb. 12:7-8). In addition, the Corinthians' comfort produced in them patient endurance (hypomonē; steadfastness in the face of unpleasant circumstances; cf. 2 Cor. 6:4; Rom. 5:3; Col. 1:11; James 1:3). The hope in God which sustained Paul in his relationship with the Corinthians was also effective in his own life. An experience in Asia (see map between Acts and Rom.) had brought him to the end of himself. Apparently the Corinthians had some knowledge of this hardship, possibly communicated to them by Titus, but they did not appreciate its severity. Rather than gloss over his feeling of despair and helplessness in this situation Paul underscored it forcefully to illustrate how powerless both he and the Corinthians were apart from God and to stress how important is prayer as a means of effecting God's gracious intervention and aid. Just what the hardships were is debated. Commentators in the 19th century and earlier held that the phrase in the province of Asia referred to Ephesus. Paul's experience was linked with that mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:32, in which he mentioned fighting with wild beasts, a possible allusion to the contention instigated by Demetrius and his fellow silversmiths (Acts 19:23-41). However,

no mention is made in that account of any harm coming to Paul. Twentieth-century opinion seems more disposed to locating this experience somewhere in the outlying region of the province of Asia (in the western end of what is today Turkey). One such suggested area is the Lycus Valley, where Paul may have experienced a beating by the Jews (cf. 2 Cor. 11:24), which nearly killed him. Or perhaps he contracted a drastic illness with similar devastating results. All such views are merely conjectures. Being unable to be specific in identifying this experience permits believers today to apply this to themselves, especially when they find themselves in desperate circumstances where deliverance seems impossible. Paul believed he would die. He was under such great pressure (*thlipseōs*; cf. 1:4) far beyond his human ability to endure, so that he despaired even of life and felt the sentence of death (cf. 4:10-12, 16; 11:23-25). Certainly the Christian life was for him no bed of roses! Some suggest that this experience irrevocably altered Paul's perspective on his own destiny. Before this he expressed the hope that he might be numbered among those who would be alive at the coming of Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-52; 1 Thes. 4:15-17). Now his focus was on the resurrection (cf. Phil. 3:10-11). What was sure was Paul's trust that God would deliver him from the peril of death (cf. 2 Cor. 4:8-14) until his course was run (2 Tim. 4:7), and his task completed. Then later God, he knew, would deliver him from the dead (cf. 1 Cor. 15:55; 2 Cor. 4:14). Paul had a firm hope in the Corinthians (1:7) and also in the Lord (v. 10). The prayers (v. 11) of the Corinthians were part of this deliverance, a means ordained by God to fulfill His will among people.

### **Commentary from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator Commentary**

The whole letter of Second Corinthians is about suffering and consolation. Paul outlines God's promise that the consolation we receive in the Christian life will be equal to the suffering we are asked to bear. In this most personal of all of Paul's letters, he explained that he found this to be true in his own life. Paul suffered much in his life (cf. 2 Cor. 4:8-10; 11:24-28). He at times even despaired of life and felt he had a sentence of death on him (1:8-9). Yes, even the great apostle was brought low by his troubles! I guess we should not feel so bad if things get us down from time to time. Still, it is important that we learn to come through such seasons, experiencing the grace and consolation of the Lord. One of the ways we receive consolation in our suffering is through others in the body of Christ. We are to bear one another's burdens, and one of the ways we do that is to pray for each other as we experience difficulty, hardship, and suffering (2 Cor. 1:11). Paul expressed clear confidence that consolation equal to our suffering is available in the Christian life. We experience suffering. We shall experience consolation. What can we do to ensure this? First, we can make sure we are deeply involved in the body of Christ. Paul certainly was. He prayed for Christians and was prayed for by Christians all over the known world! We want to be locked in and known by our brothers and sisters in the body of Christ so that we can bear the burdens of others and they can bear ours. It is tempting to remain on the fringes these days and not commit ourselves to accountable relationships in the body of Christ, but that will not do in times of suffering. So let us be deeply connected in the body of Christ. Second, we have to be open about our troubles and difficulties. Each of us should have brothers and sisters we can share our hearts and burdens with. We have to be willing to love others. And there are times when we have to be willing to let others show love to us. There is consolation to be found in the mutual sharing and bearing of burdens. Finally, we have to pray for one another. Paul expressed confidence that consolation would come. He believed in a prayer-hearing and prayer-answering God. Much of our consolation comes mysteriously from God as He upholds us through things we never thought we could bear. Prayer, then, becomes a mighty source of consolation.

### ***Lesson Introduction and Background***

#### **From the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

Paul wrote letters to the church at Corinth in response to several problems. Our previous five lessons considered the first such letter, 1 Corinthians, written from Ephesus in about AD 56. That letter contains many strong statements about the church's failure to live out the gospel message. Paul then seems to have made a brief trip from Ephesus to Corinth to see how the church was responding to his instructions. Apparently, that visit was not a great success (see 2 Corinthians 2:1; compare 7:8; 13:2). At about the same time, Paul also faced great difficulties while in Ephesus. Acts 19:23-20:1 tells us of a massive protest—nearly a riot—against him and the gospel. This happened after Paul had sent two of his key assistants ahead of him to Macedonia (Acts 19:22), so he was left without the support of two of his most trusted associates during this trying time. All this meant that Paul was saddled with enormous mental and emotional burdens as he left Ephesus and traveled toward Macedonia (Acts 20:1). Along the way, Paul undoubtedly wondered about the fate of the great church in Corinth. What would he find there as a result of his diverting time and energy to Ephesus? Arriving at Troas, Paul expected to find his friend Titus, but he was not there—another setback (2

Corinthians 2:13). Paul was at best discouraged, at worst deeply depressed. "For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within" (7:5). But Paul eventually received good news. Arriving in Macedonia (AD 57), he at last met up with Titus, who informed him of the Corinthian church's positive regard for Paul and repentance (2 Corinthians 7:6-8). There was still more for that church to do, but the commitment of their faith was reaffirmed. Events and circumstances caused Paul to reflect deeply on what it means to face hardship in following Jesus. The results of Paul's reflections are found in several passages of 2 Corinthians. One such passage is our text for today.

### Introduction from Bob Deffinbaugh

On his second missionary journey, Paul comes to Corinth with the gospel of Jesus Christ. He stays there for 18 months, founding the church at Corinth (see Acts 18:1-18). After firmly establishing this church, Paul moves on, concluding this missionary journey by returning to Antioch (Acts 18:22). When Paul commences his third missionary journey, he travels first to Asia Minor, where he stays in Ephesus for some three years of ministry, resulting in the proclamation of the gospel to all who lived in Asia (Acts 19:10). While still in Ephesus, Paul begins to receive reports from Corinth of disunity and schisms in the church (1 Corinthians 1:11)—even immorality (1 Corinthians 5:1). Paul also receives a number of questions (1 Corinthians 7:1, 25), which prompt him to write his first preserved Epistle to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 16:8).

In his first epistle, Paul tells the Corinthians he intends to send Timothy to them (1 Corinthians 16:10). It is not certain whether he ever arrived there, and, if he did, we are not told what kind of reception he received. At some point in time, Paul finds it necessary to make a quick visit to Corinth, but we are given no details about this encounter (2 Corinthians 12:14; 13:1). Some refer to this as Paul's "painful visit," based upon inferences from some of Paul's statements in 2 Corinthians (see 2:1-11). Paul also refers to a letter written to the Corinthians which seems to have been lost (2 Corinthians 2:3; 7:8). In his second epistle, Paul expresses great concern for the Corinthians. Because he has had to deal firmly with these saints, Paul is fearful they might reject him and his rebuke. He therefore sends Titus to check on the welfare of the saints at Corinth, while he takes the longer route by land. Not finding Titus in Troas, Paul is deeply troubled and cuts short what could have been an even more fruitful ministry (2 Corinthians 2:12, 13; 7:5-9, 13-15; Acts 20:1-2). When Titus finally rejoins Paul somewhere in Macedonia, he has a most encouraging report. He tells Paul about the repentance of the Corinthians and of their love for him (2 Corinthians 7:5f.). Paul then writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia to express his great joy and to encourage them further in their faith, as well as to give instructions regarding the gift they had previously promised (chapters 8-9). This epistle we know as 2 Corinthians. Later on Paul visits Corinth again, at which time he receives their gifts and delivers these monies to the saints in Jerusalem.

It is my conviction that every book of the Bible makes a very unique contribution to the canon of Scripture, and Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians is no exception. Second Corinthians first serves to give us closure on some unresolved problems exposed and addressed in 1 Corinthians. This comes about in two different ways, as I understand 2 Corinthians. First, some of those rebuked by Paul have repented. Paul's words to them in the first nine chapters are very encouraging. However, there are others whose true colors become more evident in 2 Corinthians by their lack of repentance and their continued resistance to Paul and his teaching. These problem people are now unmasked as "**false apostles,**" who need to be rejected by the Corinthian saints. Paul focuses on this group in chapters 10-13.

Second, we find revealed in his second epistle to the Corinthians the most "human" Paul we shall find in the New Testament. Paul is one of those men who seems almost unreal in his devotion to Christ, to His gospel, and to pure doctrine. He is the picture of self-discipline and focus; he knows what he has been called to do, and he does it. He sometimes appears almost above and apart from other Christians, and certainly from us. Second Corinthians reveals a very human Paul with whom we can identify. This second epistle reveals not only Paul's circumstances but also his heart. Paul is more transparent here about his inward feelings and motivations than anywhere else in the New Testament:

While others of Paul's epistles may be more profound, scarcely any could be more precious than this second heart-outpouring to the Corinthians. It was written with a quill dipped in tears, from the apostle's 'anguish of heart,' and contains more of human pathos than any other of his letters. Yet there is a lovely rainbow shining through it all, for in his dire distress and deep disappointments he is discovering more than ever before that "**the Father of mercies**" is the "**God of all comfort,**" and that the heavenly Master's strength is made perfect in His servant's weakness.

“What an admirable Epistle,” he [George Herbert] exclaimed, “is the second to the Corinthians! How full of affections! He joys and he is sorry, he grieves and he glories; never was there such care of a flock expressed, save in the great Shepherd of the fold, who first shed tears over Jerusalem and afterwards blood.”

“Of all the Epistles, the second to the Corinthians is the one which contains the most intimate self-revelations, and few can read it without loving as well as honouring the author.”

The weakness in strength, and the strength in weakness, both so wonderfully displayed in the life and death of Jesus, were in a scarcely less wonderful manner reflected in the life of His apostle, who could say, “**Most gladly will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me**” and whose greatest paradox is expressed in the words “**When I am weak, then am I strong**” (xii. 9, 10). To enter therefore into the heart of Paul is to know Jesus and the power of His resurrection.

Some people seem to think suffering is detrimental, and they cannot fathom why a God who is both good and great could allow anyone to suffer. You may remember the book written by a Jewish rabbi, entitled *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People*.<sup>5</sup> The rabbi concluded that God could not possibly be both good and great at the same time. Suffering could be explained if God were great, but not good. A great God is able to do anything He wants, and thus He must enjoy watching people suffer. If so, God cannot be good; He can only be great. The other alternative is that God is good but not great. God wants the best for everyone and does not desire for anyone to suffer. But since men do suffer, God must be good but not great. God then must not be able to keep men from suffering. This latter conclusion is the solution reached by the rabbi.

Some Christians handle the problem of suffering in yet a different way. Knowing better than to lay fault at God’s feet for human suffering, they place the blame at the feet of the one suffering. Like Job’s “friends,” they reason that sin is the only reason why men suffer. If a saint is suffering, then it must be due to unconfessed sin. And so there are many today who assure us that God does not want us to suffer and that we need not suffer—if we but have the faith to be delivered from our suffering to the success, health, and wealth God wants to give us. This tragic error brings accusations and guilt upon the sufferer at the very time he or she most needs comfort and compassion.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul’s first words to the Corinthians address the matter of suffering in a way which corrects our thinking about the problem of pain. I have entitled this message, “Why Bad Things Happen to God’s People.” Listen closely to the Apostle Paul, and you will learn some of the reasons a good God uses suffering in the lives of His people.

*Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/why-bad-things-happen-god%E2%80%99s-people-2-cor-11-11>*

## Major Theme Analysis

*(Scriptural Text from the New King James Version; cross-references from the NIV)*

### **Comfort From The God Of Comfort (2 Cor 1:3-7)**

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

4 who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.

6 Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

7 And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.

### **God comforts us so we can comfort others (3-4)**

*Comfort others by having regard for the weak (Ps 41:1-3)*

41 Blessed is he who has regard for the weak; the Lord delivers him in times of trouble. 2 The Lord will protect him and preserve his life; he will bless him in the land and not surrender him to the desire of his foes. 3 The Lord will sustain him on his sickbed and restore him from his bed of illness.

*Comfort others by sharing possessions (Acts 4:32-35)*

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. 34 There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

*Comfort others through materially blessing and contributions to the poor (Rom 15:25-27)*

25 Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there. 26 For Macedonia and Achaia were pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 They were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in the Jews' spiritual blessings, they owe it to the Jews to share with them their material blessings.

*Comfort others by giving of self first to God (2 Cor 8:1-5)*

8 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

*Comfort others by supplying their needs (2 Cor 9:12-13)*

12 This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God's people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. 13 Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.

*Comfort others by continually being consistent in help (Heb 6:10)*

10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

### **Jesus comforts us by suffering for us (5)**

*Jesus suffered so that we could be holy through His blood (Heb 13:12)*

12 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood.

*Jesus suffered to leave us an example (1 Peter 2:21)*

21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

*Jesus suffered death for everyone (Heb 2:9)*

9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

*Jesus suffered to be a sympathetic help (Heb 2:18)*

18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

*Jesus was pierced and crushed for our sins (Isa 53:4-5)*

4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

*Jesus suffered to satisfy the requirements of the law for sins (Rom 8:3-4)*

3 For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, 4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

*Jesus suffered and died for sins once for all (1 Peter 3:18)*

18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit,

### **All Christians can expect sufferings but also should have hope (6-7)**

*Hope during suffering because there is a reward in Heaven (Matt 5:11-12)*

11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

*Hope during suffering because the future glory far outweighs the current temporary suffering (2 Cor 4:17-18)*

17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

*Hope during suffering because of the greater value of suffering for Jesus (Heb 11:25-26)*

25 He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. 26 He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.

*Hope during suffering because of looking forward to a better resurrection (Heb 11:35)*

35 Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.

*Hope during suffering because of a genuine faith (1 Peter 1:6-7)*

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

### **Comfort Through Trust And Prayer (2 Cor 1:8-11)**

8 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life.

9 Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead,

10 who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us,

11 you also helping together in prayer for us, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the gift granted to us through many.



## **Comfort through trust in God (8-9)**

*Trust God because God never forsakes those who seek Him (Ps 9:10)*

10 Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you.

*Trust God because He is our God (Ps 31:14-15)*

14 But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God." 15 My times are in your hands; deliver me from my enemies and from those who pursue me.

*Trust God that He will make us righteous and just (Ps 37:5-6)*

5 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: 6 He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

*Trust God so that we will not be afraid (Ps 56:4)*

4 In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal man do to me?

*Trust God because no one else can save us (Ps 146:3-6)*

3 Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. 4 When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. 5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, 6 the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them — the Lord, who remains faithful forever.

*Trust God because He guides us in the straight ways (Prov 3:5-6)*

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.

*Trust God so that we can be overflowed with hope (Rom 15:13)*

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

## **Comfort through prayer (10-11)**

*Comfort through prayer offered in faith (James 5:15-16)*

15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

*Comfort through prayer to the One who is worthy of praise (2 Sam 22:4)*

4 I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.

*Comfort through prayer when in trouble (James 5:13)*

13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

*Comfort through prayer because of obedience to God (1 John 3:21-23)*

21 Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God 22 and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. 23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

*Comfort through prayer in faith and the Holy Spirit (Jude 20)*

20 But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

*Comfort through prayer that waits in expectation (Ps 5:3)*

3 In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation.

*Comfort through prayer about everything with thanksgiving (Phil 4:6)*

6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

## Conclusion and Other Thoughts

### **Commentary Thoughts From Bob Deffinbaugh**

What should Paul's words say to the Corinthians to whom he is writing? For one, they put Paul's sufferings in a whole new light. From 1 Corinthians we know these saints are into success, not suffering. Paul's suffering is at least two strikes against him. Some see his suffering as Job's friends did—as proof of sin or carnality in Paul's life (see 2 Corinthians 10:2). They look down upon Paul for the very things which are a cause of rejoicing for Paul and are also proof of his apostleship. Paul's attitude toward suffering should take the wind out of the sails of those who point to his adversity as proof that his ministry should be disdained and disregarded. Paul's suffering is his badge of apostleship. Paul's words concerning his suffering should call into question a great deal of teaching popular today, teaching about health, wealth, and prosperity. Many tell us that God wants us to prosper, to have good health, and to have a trouble-free life. They tell us we can have this prosperity if we but have the faith to believe and claim God's promises. They rebuke us for our lack of faith and blame us for our suffering if we fail to achieve what they promise. The simple fact is that God did not promise believers prosperity and popularity and good times in this life. *He promised us adversity, rejection, and suffering because we have trusted in Jesus Christ.* As He suffered, we too will suffer. As He was rejected by men, so we too will be rejected and persecuted. Those who deny this simply choose to read the Bible selectively and avoid the many texts which tell us to expect hard times. Suffering is an indispensable part of the Christian life, but it is one of the **“all things”** for which we should give thanks (1 Thessalonians 5:18), because it is included in the **“all things”** which God will cause to work together for our good and His glory (Romans 8:28). We must pause here to ask ourselves whether we who reject the “health and wealth” teaching of some are guilty of the same kind of thinking. Do we not unconsciously fall into the practice of judging a person's piety by external benchmarks of success? When speakers are introduced from the platforms of evangelical churches and organizations, why are we told about their “successes” as proof that they are worth hearing? “Reverend so-and-so has the fastest growing church in ...” Such statements are predicated on the very premise our text challenges. Few are introduced by telling of their sufferings, rejection, opposition, or weaknesses. Maybe we should rethink our benchmarks of spirituality and “success.”

*Suffering for the sake of Christ is not a curse but a blessing, if we respond as Paul does and as many other saints of old have done. Suffering is a stewardship, which we may misuse and misappropriate, or which we may utilize for our good and God's glory. Suffering draws us closer to God and closer to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Suffering always comes with the promise of divine comfort and thus provides us with the fuel for worship and praise.*

*The key to seeing suffering as we should is found in the Person and work of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. From the outset of His ministry, Jesus made it clear that contrary to popular belief and teaching, suffering is indeed not a curse, but a blessing (Matthew 5:2-12). Jesus also made it clear that He had come to suffer for sinners so their sins might be forgiven and they might have eternal life. “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).*

*What a difference our Lord brings about regarding our perspective on suffering. The world abhors the thought of suffering and cannot imagine how a loving God can allow it. God uses suffering to teach us how evil sin is and how devastating its consequences. He used the suffering of our Savior to forgive our sins. He continues to employ suffering to draw us closer to Him and to one another. Suffering for Christ's sake is not an enemy but a friend. Suffering is not something we need to seek, but it is something we should accept, knowing it comes from our Heavenly Father, who is the **“Father of mercies,”** and the **“God of all comfort.”** (Philippians 3:8, 10).*

One last thing must be said before concluding this lesson. This lesson is directed toward believers in Jesus Christ, just as this passage is written to true believers (see 2 Corinthians 1:1-2). This is the reason I am able to use the title, “Why

Bad Things Happen to *God's People*." God's people are those who have trusted in Jesus Christ for salvation. These are the ones who can claim these words of Paul, written elsewhere, as their own (Romans 8:28-30). I dare not overlook the very likely possibility that you may be reading this message as an unbeliever. You may know about God. You may even believe in God and pray to Him at times. A true believer goes beyond this. A true believer is one who understands that he is a sinner, who deserves God's eternal wrath, and whose good works will never be sufficient to gain him or her entrance into the kingdom of God or to obtain God's favor (Romans 3:9-20; 6:23; 1 John 1:8-10). *A true believer understands that while there is no way man can ever earn eternal salvation, there is but one way which God has provided whereby we can be saved, and that is by faith in the sacrificial death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord, by which our sins are punished in Christ, and God's righteousness in Christ is given to us* (John 1:12; 3:16, 36; 14:6; Romans 3:21-26; 10:9-10; 2 Corinthians 5:17-21; 1 John 5:11-12). The true believer knows these things and casts his entire trust on Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of his sins and the assurance of eternal life. While it is not the point of our text in 2 Corinthians, it is nonetheless true that, often by means of suffering, God draws the unbeliever to Himself. If any unbeliever who is suffering asks the question, "Why me?" the answer is simple: "We deserve it." We deserve none of God's blessings and the worst punishment we can imagine. But it is often true that God graciously brings suffering into the life of the non-Christian as a means of drawing him or her to faith in Christ. All through the Gospels, we see the sick and the suffering coming to Christ for healing and deliverance. Many of those whom our Lord healed also came to faith in Him as their Savior. Suffering is a way of reminding us of the reality of sin and its consequences, of pointing out that we live in a world which suffers as a result of sin (see Romans 8:18-25). If your suffering has brought you to the point of acknowledging that you are helpless, and that your only hope is God, you are well on your way. Your sufferings will either harden you toward God, or they will soften you, turning you toward Him. If they do turn you to Him in saving faith, you can join with the psalmist, who wrote (Psalm 119:67; Psalm 119:73-77; Psalm 119:92). How tragic it would be for you to go through life, free from affliction and adversity, and never come to know the love and grace of God to be found only in the Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered more than you or I will ever be able to fathom, so that we might be forgiven and have eternal fellowship with God. How blessed our afflictions will be to us in heaven, if they have been a means by which we have come to the end of ourselves and have cast ourselves upon the mercy and grace of God in the Person of Jesus Christ.

*Adapted from URL: <https://bible.org/seriespage/why-bad-things-happen-god%E2%80%99s-people-2-cor-11-11>*

### **Concluding Thoughts from the NIV Standard Lesson Commentary**

Some may caricature the Christian life as dull and bland. Christians are known for what "thou shalt not" do. Christians are often characterized as withdrawn, timid, and fearful. Others may search for what they think should be the ideal Christian life: a life without difficulty. Are not God's promises of protection and blessing sure? Does not the presence of hardships in a Christian's life indicate a lack of faith? Paul shows us that neither characterization is true. The gospel begins with Jesus, with his death and resurrection. The power at work in him is also at work in us. Like Christ, we live under a sentence of death. But like him, we have God's resurrection power on our side. That power does not insulate us from suffering. Rather, that power enables us to overcome it. As it does, we can see that God himself is the one at work in us.

### **Practical Points from the Bible Expositor and Illuminator**

1. Ultimately, all true comfort comes from God, no matter what the intermediate means (2 Cor. 1:3)
2. God's comfort is not to be hoarded but shared (vs. 4)
3. Those who suffer for Christ shall ultimately be comforted by Christ (vss. 5-7)
4. Be careful of minimizing others' suffering; theirs is as real as yours (vs. 8)
5. God often uses suffering to cause us to lean upon Him even more (vss. 9-10)
6. Never underestimate God's use of your prayers in the deliverance of others (vs. 11)