

Comfort in All Our Troubles

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Turn to 2 Corinthians 1 please. This is a sermon about God's comfort, and our troubles, and how God's comfort and our troubles come together. We all have troubles, and some of them are severe. A child of God with troubles has an extra problem. The troubles themselves are one problem, and the extra problem believers have is God himself. What's God doing, why does God allow this, why does God not answer my prayers? This Scripture will help that.

2 Cor 1:3-7 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. If we are troubled, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort.

Paul usually begins letters to churches by praising God for what God is doing in that church. In 2 Corinthians, though, Paul praises God for what God does in Paul's own life. It's his testimony. He does this because the Corinthians need to know what life is actually like for a genuine apostle of Christ Jesus. And we need to know this, too.

What do you think it was like to be a real apostle? One way or another, most of this letter answers that. I tend to think about the powerful preaching of apostles, and all those converts, large numbers coming to Christ. And the miracles, people healed, a few raised from the dead, being in prison and miraculous escape. Things like that. But that is not how it was.

The Father of Compassions and God of all Comfort (Verse 3)

If we can get our heads around vv3-4, we've got the basic idea: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*

“The Father of compassions and the God of all comfort” is more than just saying God has compassion on people and he comforts them. Father of compassions – God is the originator of all compassion, and from that his comfort pours out.

When I have trouble, I usually think that God is far away and does not care. I don't experience God as the Father of compassions and the God of all comfort. But Paul had far more troubles than I have, and he's telling us the opposite. And Paul loves God for that. So he begins by praising that God.

Which Troubles are we Talking About? (Verse 4)

Vv3-4 again: *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*

“**All** our troubles.” All of Paul and Timothy’s troubles. Who can they bring comfort? “Those in **any** trouble.” This is not complicated, my brothers and sisters. All troubles, any troubles.

Christians have all kinds of troubles. The two Corinthian letters don’t tell us that they were being persecuted. The Corinthians were not a poor church. We don’t read anything about them being evangelists or preaching. They are just ordinary believers, part of a church with problems, not at all a model church. Believers have troubles, some severe and some not, then as now.

The original apostles had all kinds of ordinary troubles. Paul will say that the mark of real apostles is more troubles than the rest, more often and more severe. He does not mention relief from suffering. But comfort? Yes, lots of comfort. Endurance? Yes. Praise? Yes, lots.

The Purpose of God’s Comfort (Verse 4)

And why does God keep comforting us? **So that** *we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.* God compassionately comforts us in all our troubles, **so that** we can compassionately pass comfort on to others in all their troubles. Verse 6 says the same: *If we are troubled, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort.*

This sequence does not happen right away. It takes time for me being comforted in my troubles to bring about my care for others in their troubles. But God comforts me so it will lead to that.

How does God Comfort us? (Verse 4)

God comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

God usually pours out his compassion on you and me through other believers. God comforts me in my trouble *so that* I can bring that same comfort to you. God comforts you in your troubles *so that* you can bring comfort to me. That’s the purpose.

God does want you and me to be comforted, and encouraged. He’s compassionate and he wants to do that for us. But that is only the first stage. He does that so that, sooner or later, we can comfort someone else in the same way. In this process, we also learn how not to comfort people, we learn what kind of things don’t help. That way we can give better comfort ourselves.

Why Does Paul Begin this Letter this Way?

Paul opens his letter this way because quite a few in the Corinthian church think Paul is a loser, not a real apostle, because he has so many troubles and weaknesses, so much suffering. There are other ministers in Corinth who are far more impressive. They are prosperous and healthy, they are successful, they are better public speakers than Paul is, and they have no troubles.

Folks, this is still big business in the church. People who tell us how God rescued them from their troubles because they prayed the right way and trusted the right way and obeyed the right way, and if you go to their seminar or read their book and do it right, your troubles will end, just like theirs did. It never quite works like that, does it. Paul uses dark words about people like that. The mildest is that they are peddlers, peddlers of God's word.

The Corinthians had a victory and triumph theology, and in their minds Paul did not have nearly enough victory and triumph in his life, not like these others, so they thought Paul was a loser. And so Paul began his letter by talking about how God comforts him in all his troubles *so that Paul can pass this on to the Corinthians in their troubles and sufferings.*

He's telling them, "Don't reject me because of my troubles, my troubles are good for *you*, my troubles are God's way of bringing his comfort to *you*. My sufferings are for *your* good."

The Sufferings of Christ (Verses 5-7)

For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

What might the "sufferings of Christ" be? "Just as we share abundantly in the *sufferings* of Christ." And then he says, "so you Corinthians can have patient endurance of the same *sufferings* we *suffer*." So the Corinthians have the same sufferings, which means they also share in the sufferings of Christ. What are the sufferings of Christ? They are all troubles, any troubles.

Preachers get too lofty about "the sufferings of Christ." In v4 Paul speaks of "all troubles," or "any trouble," and then in v5 he calls them "the sufferings of Christ," then back to "troubles" in v6, and then in v7 he calls them "sufferings" again, and then back to "trouble" in v8 (which we will not read).

In this paragraph, "trouble" and "suffering" are two different words for the same kind of experience. And whatever is happening to Paul and Timothy is also happening to the Corinthian believers. In v6, "you Corinthians endure the same sufferings that we suffer," and in v7, "as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort."

In Paul's "thorn in the flesh" paragraph, in chapter 12, the painful tormenting thorn could be anything at all. Any trouble, every trouble.

So what kind of troubles and suffering are we actually talking about, that are the sufferings of Christ? Persecution, cancer, any disease, anxiety and panic attacks that paralyze us, car accidents, storms that wreck our house and business, the death of a loved one, any person who makes our lives miserable (whether they mean to or not), a dark temptation that plagues us that we are tired of fighting, we'd like to leave behind but cannot. Jesus was tempted in all the common ways, and this made him sympathetic. Compassionate. All of these are troubles that happen to the faithful everywhere, and always have. God comforts us in *all* our troubles so we can comfort those in *any* trouble with that same comfort. All these are the sufferings of Christ.

Why are these called the suffering of Christ, overflowing to us? Because Christ, in his life, shared in all the normal sufferings of humanity. And we his followers, because we follow Christ and are bound to Christ, we are the body of Christ, we also have all kinds of troubles. Christ's troubles were designed to discourage him and turn him away from his Father, and our troubles want to have the same effect. These sufferings bind us to Christ, all our troubles bind us to him.

In v3, Paul introduced God as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." That's not Paul's normal way of describing God. Why does Paul say that here, "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"? Jesus had a God who was also his heavenly Father, and here's the thing: we have the same God, and same heavenly Father as Jesus had.

In our troubles, our God treats us like he treated Jesus. If Jesus had troubles and sufferings so he could bring God's help to others, then God wants you and me also to be like Jesus, so God will bring troubles into our lives so we can bring God's help to others. Our troubles bind us to Christ.

Every one of you that has ever endured troubles, and from this suffering you have been able to bring God's comfort to someone else, you have experienced the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

Jesus lived a life of service and a life of troubles, and full of comfort from his Father, and he did this all so that others would benefit, including us in this room. In the same way, we all live a life of serving others and a life full of troubles and comfort from the Father through Christ, so that others will benefit, so others will be comforted and be able to patiently endure their sufferings.

When we endure severe troubles, we feel alone, separated from God and separated from each other. These words to us from God completely change that. Our suffering binds us to Christ. Our suffering always brings God's compassion and comfort. Always. And these troubles make us fruitful in the body of Christ, they turn us toward each other, to give and receive comfort.

Comfort and Endurance – verse 6

If we are troubled, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.

We need comfort from each other just so our faith will last. Troubles and suffering have an evil agenda. We know that from the book of Job. Apparently random troubles were designed by an evil power to turn Job away from God. Along the same lines, Paul calls his thorn in the flesh a messenger of Satan.

Troubles discourage us, they shake our faith in God, they persuade us that God is far away and they isolate us from each other. Apparently random troubles are not just random, they are always hostile to our faith. When we comfort each other in our troubles, we are not just helping each other feel better, though that is very good. We are helping one another to endure faithfully.

If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer.

When I am troubled, I need comfort from you so that my faith will endure what I'm suffering. When you are troubled, you need comfort from me so that you can endure what you're suffering.

Encouraging one other, when we are all troubled, is an essential piece of keeping faith and hope alive. Comforting each other produces endurance in each other.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassions and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

PRAYER: Our God and Father, thank you that you are the Father of compassions and the God of all comfort. What a good thing. We praise you that you are like this. Help us fight the lie in our minds that denies it. O God, may the comfort of Christ overflow from you to us, and may your comfort overflow between us, from one to another. May all our suffering be fruitful in others, God, may it all bring comfort to others. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and into Christ's perseverance. May the Lord of peace give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.

On suffering in 2 Corinthians 1: "More than abandoning its deciphering... such [Christian] understanding frees us from the solitariness of suffering and sets us in community, in which the suffering of each becomes fruitful for others. In suffering, believers understand themselves as members of the Body of Christ" (Rudolf Bultmann and Roy A. Harrisville, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians* [Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985], 26).