

SUFFERING WELL WITH OTHERS

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-7

MAIN POINT

God comforts us in our suffering so that we may be able to offer help to others who suffer.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had to walk with someone through a season of suffering, or has someone walked with you? Share that story.

What wisdom or counsel would you share with someone when it comes to dealing with suffering?

Suffering is life-altering. This is true whether the suffering is due to a personal tragedy or a national event that shocks and saddens. The Bible is not silent on the reality of suffering, acknowledging that we all will suffer in this life in varying degrees. Yet the Bible also speaks to the role we can play in imparting God's mercy to others in the midst of their suffering, as we will learn in our study today.

UNDERSTANDING

READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4 (CSB).

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort. ⁴ He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

Paul refers to God the Father as the “Father of all mercies”? What are some of the mercies that God the Father has shown toward us?

What is the difference between comfort and mercy? How might they be related?

A basic definition of mercy is God not giving us what we deserve for our sin. Sometimes, we deserve judgment because we have sinned, but God shows us mercy when we repent. Sometimes, others take advantage of us and we need God's mercy to relieve us of the pain we are in. Either way, our Father not only has mercy on us, but He also comforts us with His presence and the promises we have through Jesus Christ.

How do the promises that God has given us bring us comfort in suffering? How many promises can you name?

DISCUSSION GUIDE

How does personal suffering better prepare us for helping others?

Experience is a wonderful teacher. It is far easier to be sympathetic to others when we ourselves have suffered in similar ways. We are able to put up with irritable attitudes and even harsh words when we understand that they are coming from a place of pain, especially if we have been in that place ourselves.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:5-6 (CSB).

⁵ For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. ⁶ If we are afflicted, 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 that we suffer.

How does Christ comfort us in our affliction? Is it the same as how the Father comforts us? Explain.

What are the sufferings that we all share in common? How do both affliction and comfort result in positive things?

Jesus is able to comfort us in our sufferings because He Himself suffered. The writer of Hebrews teaches us that "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15, CSB). Jesus is sympathetic to our suffering, and He helps us by giving us the Holy Spirit, and by promising us forgiveness and resurrection. The promises of God in Christ are key to enduring suffering. We know that one day, we who believe will have immortal bodies that will no longer hurt (1 Corinthians 15:52-57). We know that, one day, we will see our loved ones again (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18). We also know that one day the Lord will "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4, CSB). Remembering these promises is crucial to enduring the many afflictions we will encounter in this life. Sharing these promises is crucial for helping others suffer well.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 2 CORINTHIANS 1:7 (CSB).

⁷ And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will also share in the comfort.

How do we know that if we share in Christ's sufferings we will be comforted? What will our comfort be?

Do you suppose Paul's confidence in the endurance of the Corinthian church was encouraging? How might your confidence in others, in their progress in the faith, be an encouragement in a difficult time? Has someone else ever encouraged you in this way?

The Book of Revelation includes many promises for those who overcome the temptations and afflictions of this world. Jesus promised the one who overcomes will have "To the one who conquers I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne"

(Revelation 3:21, CSB). He promises that “the one who conquers will be dressed in white clothes, and I will never erase his name from the book of life but will acknowledge his name before my Father and before his angels” (Revelation 3:5, CSB). Jesus’ words encourage us that no matter how bad things get here, one day He will restore our joy and our health. The Scriptures also encourage us by having confidence that we will endure to the end. Paul wrote, “I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6, CSB). Jesus will not abandon us. If Christ does not give up on us, then we should not give up on others. We have great confidence that the same hope we have for our own souls extends by grace to others.

APPLICATION

How much benefit do you think it would be to memorize the promises that God gives us in Christ? How might this be of benefit in times of suffering?

Could you make it a point to reach out to someone who is suffering? Perhaps you might write them a note or give them a call to let them know that you believe in them, and remind them that they are greatly loved by Christ?

PRAY

Offer a time for group members to pray aloud, thanking God for salvation through Jesus Christ. Thank God the Father that He has shown us all mercy and comfort by sending Jesus to save us. Ask the Father to comfort those who are suffering by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Spend some time thanking the Lord for the brothers and sisters in Christ who are there to encourage and help us in times of suffering.

COMMENTARY

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-7

1:3-4. Paul began describing his hardships on a positive, exuberant note. The formula praise be to ... God derived from the Old Testament (Ps. 41:13), but Paul modified it to express distinctively Christian praise. Not only is God praised, but he is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This modification demonstrates that Paul saw Christianity as one with Old Testament religion, but not precisely the same. Christ had become the center of true belief. New Testament believers relate to God as the one who sent Christ.

Paul added that the Father has compassion and all comfort. This praise also derives from the Old Testament (Isa. 51:12; 66:13). Compassion denotes God's mercy and his concern for the plight of those who suffer. Comfort is what God gives to those who suffer. These terms were appropriate because Paul was about to describe his own troubles in suffering for the gospel.

Paul suffered and was comforted partly so he could bring comfort to others in any trouble. His suffering in ministry was an act of service to the Corinthians. Having suffered and been comforted, Paul could comfort others with the comfort he had received from God. Paul's use of the first person suggests that he thought primarily about himself and his company in this passage, but the principle applies to all believers. God permits his servants to suffer, and then comforts them so they may in turn comfort others.

1:5. Paul explained how he knew this principle to be true. Christians are so intimately joined with Christ that experiences flow from Christ, to believers, through believers, and to others. The sufferings of Christ extend from Christ to his followers. Believers fill up ... Christ's afflictions because the church is his body (see Col. 1:24; cf. Phil. 3:10). This was plain enough from the hardships in Paul's own ministry. Yet, just as Christ received joy and glory in his resurrection, and sent the Holy Spirit of comfort, comfort also overflows to believers through Christ. In union with Christ, we face the hardships of sin and death, but we also receive compassionate encouragement from God.

1:6. Because the Corinthians benefited when the apostles were distressed, Paul's experiences had been the Corinthians' comfort. As he ministered at great personal cost, he brought comfort and salvation to those who heard his message. At the same time, when the apostles were comforted by Christ, they received the encouragement they needed to bring the Corinthians comfort.

Further, the comfort believers received from Paul's suffering produce[d] ... patient endurance in the midst of their own sufferings. Christians must remain faithful to Christ, no matter how difficult circumstances become. Endurance (hypomone) describes how believers must continue in faithful service to the end. Yet, endurance will not last unless it is patient. Patience is the ability to wait for Christ to return and end all suffering. Comfort enables believers to find energy, which in turn makes them patient as they endure suffering.

1:7. The Corinthians faced trials, disappointments, and conflicts. But Paul believed they had saving faith in Christ and that they would endure. He hoped this because he knew the Corinthians share[d] in the apostles' comfort as well as their sufferings. So long as Christ comforted the Corinthians, they would be able to endure their suffering to the end.