

2 CORINTHIANS

STUDY NUMBER ONE – 2 Corinthians 1:1-11

TEXT:

- v. 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is in Corinth with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia.
- v. 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- v. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassionate mercies and God of all comfort (encouragement),
- v. 4 Who is comforting (encouraging) us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort (encourage) those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are being comforted by God.
- v. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.
- v. 6 But if we are being hard pressed by reason of affliction, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are being comforted, it is for your comfort, which is operative in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also are suffering.
- v. 7 And our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.
- v. 8 For we are not desiring you to be unaware, brethren, concerning our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of living;
- v. 9 indeed, we have had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not be trusting in ourselves but in the God who is raising the dead,
- v. 10 who delivered us out of so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us.
- v. 11 You also joining in helping us through your prayers, in order that thanksgiving may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many.

10 ADVANTAGES OF GROWING OLD

- 1. Your joints are more accurate than the National Weather Service.
- 2. Kidnappers ignore you.
- 3. Sexual harassment charges against you just don't stick.
- 4. People no longer think you're a hypochondriac.
- 5. Your secrets are now safe with your friends because they can't remember them either.
- 6. Your eyes won't get much worse.
- 7. You're no longer expected to run into a burning building.
- 8. Whatever you buy now won't wear out.
- 9. In a hostage situation, you're likely to be released first.
- 10. There's nothing left to learn the hard way.

Cowboy Poetry Misc – 59

THERE ARE NO LIGHTS ON IN THE BARN

By Lewis Baumgarner,
Fulton, Mo.

Not so many years ago,
If you were to take a drive,
Across America's farmland
And thru the countryside;

If by chance your ride
Should happen,
As the day was nearly done,
Most every farmstead on the road.

Would have the barn lights on.
The farmer and a kid or two, Or maybe even more.
Each one busy with a task,
Doin' up the evening chores.

Milk the cow, feed the chickens'
And gather up the eggs.
Throw some hay down from the loft
And water the sow and pigs.

Sometimes my mind will wander back
And I'll recall those days, now gone,
Of peaceful winter evenings,
And the lights on in the barn.

The smell of all the cattle,
Mixed with the grain and hay.
To me it was a pleasing smell,
Though, to you, It may not sound that way.

And while filling up the water tank,
I'd watch the cats at play.
A nearly perfect ending,
To another busy day.

Then gazing toward the house,
I could see the kitchen light,
Momma's fixin' supper,
To feed us all tonight.

And the warm glow from the window,
 Made this country boy work hard,
 To get in to that apple pie
 And that chicken fried in lard.

But the trend today is larger,
 And fewer family farms.
 Now so many places left now,
 With the lights on in the barn.

They tell us that it's progress,
 And nothin' stays the same.
 We must look toward the future,
 And not the past from where we came.

And I know, that is true,
 But tell me, What's the harm?
 If I feel a twinge of sadness,
 Cause there are no lights on in the barn.

Everything is getting' big,
 And no one seems alarmed,
 That the chickens and the hogs now,
 Are mostly raised on factory farms.

We've taken out the fences,
 And...the barn...it's been torn down.
 It take a lot of room,
 To turn 16 rows around.

My favorite memories take me back,
 To the way we used to farm.
 To a peaceful winter evening,
 With the lights on I the barn.

(newspaper article, unknown)

INTRODUCTION:

Judith Viorst has written a classic children's book called Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.

I went to sleep with gum in my mouth and now there's gum in my hair and when I got out of bed this morning I tripped on the skateboard and by mistake I dropped my sweater in the sink while the water was running and I would tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

At breakfast Anthony found a Corvette Sting Ray car kit in his breakfast cereal box and Nick found a Junior Undercover Agent code ring in his breakfast cereal box but in my breakfast cereal box all I found was breakfast cereal.

I think I'll move to Australia.

In the car pool Mrs. Gibson let Becky have a seat by the window. Audrey and Elliot got seats by the window too. I said I was being scrunched. I said I was being smushed. I said, if I don't get a seat by the window I am going to be carsick. No one even answered.

I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

At school Mrs. Dickens liked Paul's picture of the sailboat better than my picture of the invisible castle.

At singing time she said I sang too loud. At counting time she said I left out sixteen. Who needs sixteen? I could tell it was going to be a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

I could tell because Paul said I wasn't his best friend anymore. He said that Philip Parker was his best friend and that Albert Moyo was his next best friend and that I was only his third best friend.

I hope you sit on a tack, I said to Paul. I hope the next time you get a double-decker strawberry ice-cream cone the ice cream part falls off the cone part and lands in Australia.

There were two cupcakes in Philip Parker's lunch bag and Albert got a Hershey bar with almonds and Paul's mother gave him a piece of Kelly roll that had little coconut sprinkles on the top. Guess whose mother forgot to put in dessert?

It was a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

That's what it was, because after school my mom took us all to the dentist and Dr. Fields found a cavity just in me. Come back next week and I'll fix it, said Dr. Fields.

Next week, I said, I'm going to Australia.

On the way downstairs the elevator door closed on my foot and while we were waiting for my mom to go get the car Anthony made me fall where it was muddy and then when I started crying because of the mud Nick said I was a crybaby and

While I was punching Nick for saying crybaby my mom came back to the car and scolded me for being muddy and fighting.

I am having a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day, I told everybody. No one even answered.

So then we went to the shoestore to buy some sneakers. Anthony chose white ones with blue stripes. Nick chose red ones with white stripes. I chose blue ones with red stripes but then the shoe man said, We're all sold out. They made me buy plain old white ones, but they can't make me wear them.

When we picked up my dad at his office he said I couldn't play with his copy machine, but I forgot. He also said to watch out for the books on his desk, and I was careful as could be expected for my elbow. He also said don't fool around with his phone, but I think I called Australia. My dad said please don't pick him up anymore.

It was a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

There were lima beans for dinner and I hate limas.

There was kissing on TV and I hate kissing.

My bath was too hot, I got soap in my eyes, my marble went down the drain, and I had to wear my railroad-train pajamas. I hate my railroad-train pajamas.

When I went to bed Nick took back the pillow he said I could keep and the Mickey Mouse night light burned out and I bit my tongue.

The cant wants to sleep with Anthony, not with me.

It has been a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day.

My mom says some days are like that.

Even in Australia.

This little book is a fitting introduction to our study of the Book of 2 Corinthians. I am sure if Paul were speaking from a human perspective he could say that he has had a number of "terrible, horrible, no good, very bad days." But that is not the way the Christian looks at life. Although the days may be bad, God is good and He has some purpose behind the circumstances that surround us.

It would be good for us to take just a brief look at the founding of the church in Corinth, and also why this letter was written.

After the first missionary journey ended and Paul was desirous to go once again, Barnabas made an issue over John Mark and the conflict was so great that he and John Mark set sail for Cyprus. Paul chose Silas and went back north and west to a lot of the areas they had visited on the first journey.

When they got to Lystra, they picked up Timothy and made him part of their team.

When the team arrived in Troas, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia appealing to them to come over to Macedonia and help them.

In Obedience to this vision, the apostle Paul set sail and landed at Neapolis and from there went to Philippi.

From Philippi it was to Thessalonica, from Thessalonica to Berea.

In Berea the apostle left Silas and Timothy and went some 250 miles to the south to the city of Athens. Being there alone, he preached that great sermon in Acts 17 on Mars Hill. After this he took a 40-mile trip to the city of Corinth.

It is in Corinth that he meets Aquila and Priscilla and begins a tent making operation with them and also begins a ministry that forms the foundation for the Corinthian church.

Timothy and Silas join him and they remain in Corinth for some eighteen months of ministry.

Athens and Corinth were the twin cities of culture and commerce. Athens was the cultural capital, and Corinth the commercial capital.

Naturally as being a seaport town, it was a center of pleasure. It was a city of great beauty with many, many temples. It had gained a reputation as the center of lascivious worship, the worship of the goddess of love. There were some ten thousand prostitutes attached to the temple of Aphrodite, and this city lived up, or perhaps I should say, down to its reputation as a place of sensual pleasure. It represented a SEX-SATURATED SOCIETY.

After 18 months of ministry, Paul and the team left the city of Corinth for the city of Ephesus on the Asian mainland. It is from here that he writes his first letter to the Corinthians. IT is a letter written to handle many things that had become problems in the church. It is easy to outline the letter because each problem is treated with the little phrase in Greek: "NOW CONCERNING"

The church was carnal – still remaining in its baby stage and somewhat divided into numerous parties. There were problems with members going to law courts and meat offered to idols. There was a real problem of immorality in the assembly that needed to be taken care of. There was a problem with spiritual gifts and the doctrine of the resurrection. All of these are treated in the chapter of 1 Corinthians.

After Paul wrote his first letter, the Jewish party that caused so much problem to the apostle Paul organized opposition to the apostle's teachings. They called themselves "The Christ Party." Paul makes reference to this in his first letter.

Apollos is a young man who meets up with Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus, and then is sent on to a ministry in Corinth and was mightily used of the Lord there.

Paul went back to Antioch to report and then began his third missionary journey. While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul came to Ephesus and began about a three years ministry in this place.

Paul, evidently, took a trip to Corinth and was rebuffed by the church there. So when he returned to Ephesus, he wrote a very short, stern letter rebuking and reproving the attitudes of the Corinthians. This letter has been lost to us. It obviously was written in a peak of passion. It may have said things that went beyond what the Holy Spirit intended so the letter was lost. That letter was sent by the hand of Titus and the apostle remained in Ephesus.

After some intense troubles and difficulties arose in Ephesus and he had not heard back from Titus, he went to Philippi in Macedonia.

It was there that Titus caught up with Paul and the majority of the Corinthians Christians had repented of the rejection of his ministry and had begun to live again a life of Jesus Christ. However, a minority was still unyielding and still rebelling against the authority of the apostle.

So from the city of Philippi Paul wrote the second letter to the Corinthians, which expresses so much of the anxiety and agitation of his heart.

(Explore the Book by J. Sidlow Baxter)

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.

p. 121

(The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians by Charles R. Erdman)

This passionate letter presents a fascinating and profound philosophy of life. Its phrases are measured by the throbbings of a great heroic heart. The author appears as the exemplar and defender of the noblest ideals and the supreme privileges of the Christian

ministry, while his human weakness, his sincerity, his struggles, and his tears evoke our sympathy, our admiration, and our love. His message impresses upon every reader the priceless value of loyal friendships, the imperishable influence of unselfish service, and the incomparable glory and power of the gospel of Christ.

p. 9

This epistle was written by Paul to the Christians in Corinth to prepare them for his approaching visit. He was on his third missionary journey. After a protracted stay in Ephesus, he was passing through Macedonia to Greece. Possibly at Philippi he met his messenger, Titus, who brought tidings from the Corinthian church. These were of such a character as to make necessary the following letter, with which Titus was sent back to Corinth. He was to carry out certain instructions of the apostle and to announce his near approach.

Paul had founded the church some five years before, when on his second missionary journey. It was this journey which resulted in bringing the gospel from Asia to Europe, and the Corinthian church was possibly the most abiding monument of that memorable tour.

p. 11

Yet it is not the events of his outward life which attract our supreme interest. It is rather the revelation which is here made of the apostle's soul. We look into his very heart. We see his motives, his anguish, his joys, his fears, his hopes, his wounded feelings, his ardent love. Evidently the whole letter was written under the stress of strong emotion.

p. 14

(Expository Studies in 2 Corinthians: Power Out of Weakness by Ray C. Stedman)

The second letter of Paul to the Corinthians is probably the least known of all his letters. First Corinthians is very well known, but many people consider 2 Corinthians to be such heavy reading that it has been called "Paul's unknown letter." It is too bad that we are so unfamiliar with it, because it represents that most personal, the most autobiographical letter from the apostle's pen. In 1 Corinthians we examined the church at Corinth. That letter is so valuable because the church today much resembles the church in Corinth; we live in "Corinthians" conditions now. But in 2 Corinthians we are looking at Paul; he is the one in focus as he lays himself open and reveals himself to the church. This, therefore, is a very personal letter from the heart of this mighty apostle. Here we see him more clearly, perhaps, than anywhere else in Scripture.

p. 7

(Be Encouraged by Warren W. Wiersbe)

One of the key words in this letter is comfort or encouragement. The Greek words means "called to one's side to help." The verb is used 18 times in this letter, and the noun 11 times. In spite of all the trials he experienced, Paul was able (by the grace of God) to write a letter saturated with encouragement.

p. 12

(II Corinthians by J. Vernon McGee)

Paul remained in Ephesus approximately three years. He didn't get to Corinth and the Corinthians were still disturbed. He had sent Titus to Corinth because he could not personally go there at that time. Timothy had been with Paul in Ephesus and these two left Ephesus and proceeded to Troas to wait for Titus to bring word from Corinth (II Corinthians 2:12, 13). When Titus did not come, Paul and Timothy went on to Philippi. It was there that Titus met them and brought Paul word about the Corinthians. He brought good news from Corinth – that the Corinthians were obeying the things that Paul had told them to do in his first answer to their questions, that is in I Corinthians.

At Philippi Paul sat down to write this second epistle. The Corinthians still wanted the great apostle to come and be with them. However, any breach between Paul and the Corinthian church was healed. In this epistle Paul opens his heart in a very wonderful way. To tell the truth, Paul lets us come to know him better personally in this epistle than in any other letter.

pp. 7-8

What an exciting adventure awaits us as we will be spending out time making a verse-by-verse study of this beautiful book.

Our first study will carry us through the first eleven verses of chapter 1.

In these verses Paul is going to tell us how to handle the tough times in our lives.

Psalm 34:19, A righteous man may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all;

I have outlined these eleven verses in the following way:

- I. THE GREETING –verses 1, 2
- II. COMFORT IN AFFLICTION – verses 3-7
- III. LEARNING TO TRUST GOD – verses 8-10
- IV. PETITION ISSUES IN PRAISE – verse 11

The word COMFORT occurs 10 times in this brief passage.

The words AFFLICTION, SUFFERING, HARD-PRESSED, SENTENCE OF DEATH, PERIL OF DEATH appear 11 times.

J. Grant Howard in his book Creativity in Preaching has his own biblical version of “A Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day”:

“Hi there, Tony!” Had a good day?

“Not really! Terrible, as a matter of fact.”

“What happened?”

“Well, I’ve been up with my little boy, Ebenezer, since three this morning. I think he has the Babylonian flu. It’s been going around the neighborhood. Then on the way to work, my right chariot wheel fell off and I sprained my back getting it on. That meant I got to work about an hour and a half late.

“And wouldn’t you know it – the camel caravan due in from Damascus at noon was over four hours late. I desperately need that shipment of Moab miniskirts and Assyrian socket wrenches this morning.

“Finally, I got home and was realizing in the front room and guess what – the paper boy threw the Jerusalem Journal right through the front window. And may I remind you – we take the Sandstone edition. What a mess! To top it off, while we were all cleaning up the living room, Claudia’s supper burned to a crisp and we ended up eating leftover, cold Chaldean casserole.

“All in all, it has been a terrible, horrible, no-good, very bad day!”

“What a day! How do you handle all those unexpected, unwelcome events?”

p. 42

I. THE GREETING – verses 1, 2

- v. 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy our brother, to the church of God which is in Corinth with all the saints who are in the whole of Achaia.

Paul begins his letter to the Corinthians in a standard way by using his title and also making reference to Timothy, whom they also knew well in Corinth.

I have often wondered why doesn’t he mention Silas since he too was involved in the early days of that church.

Paul uses his title “an apostle of Christ Jesus.” This is to lend authority to the message that he is giving in this letter.

This has come about by the will of God.

John 18:37, “Pilate therefore said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears My voice.”

“AND TIMOTHY OUR BROTHER”

Timothy is a brother because of his relationship with Christ. Paul and Timothy are members of the same family, having been born again by the Spirit into God's family. They are now spiritual brothers.

“TO THE CHURCH OF GOD WHICH IS IN CORINTH WITH ALL THE SAINTS WHO ARE IN THE WHOLE OF ACHAIA.”

Paul's ministry during those 18 months that he was there in Corinth not only touched that city but also the whole of Achaia, which is the whole surrounding area.

It is so exciting to see the gospel spread its tentacles around the world and touch lives in different lands and cultures.

v. 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a common greeting of the apostle. He never reverses this. You can never know peace until you know grace. And grace is an experience of God's unmerited favor toward us in the provision of Jesus Christ that provides the foundation of a relationship. And the result of that relationship is peace. This comes from the source of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(Expository Studies in 2 Corinthians: Power out of Weakness by Ray C. Stedman)

These days we hear teaching about how wrong Paul was in certain areas, that he cannot be trusted in part of his writing, that he even said things we must reject today. We need to understand anew that the apostle himself said his authority came directly from the Lord. What he had learned and what he taught was taught to him by Jesus himself. “The Lord appeared to me,” Paul says. “There were many visions and revelations from Christ,” he says in effect, so that he did not learn his doctrine or anything he wrote from the other apostles. He learned it from the Lord directly. When you read Paul you are reading what Jesus said to him; therefore it comes with the full authority of the Lord Jesus himself.

p. 10

“Grace is a word that gathers up all God is ready to do for us and give to us. All God's supply comes by grace. Therefore, anything God gives you – love, joy, peace, forgiveness, help, wisdom – is part of the supply of grace. The result of that supply in your life and mine is peace. When one's heart is resting and confident that God is at work, that person is calm within and is serene and untroubled of spirit. This is the way Christians are to live. The whole of the NT is addressed to that end. It is not only doctrine about how to go to heaven; it is also teaching on how to handle life, how to cope with pressures and stresses and how to face the difficulties and dangers of life. The constant gracious supply of God is to bring peace to our troubled hearts. We are to live at rest.

p. 11

I love to way Plummer in International Critical Commentary Series on 2 Corinthians translates these first two verses:

Paul, an apostle by divine appointment, and Timothy, who you all know, give greeting to the body of Corinthian Christians and to all Christians in the province. May the free and unmerited favor of God be yours, and the peace which this favor brings. May our heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ grant them to you.

(Second Corinthians: Where Life Endures by Roy L. Laurin)

Paul called the people saints. The title was not an artificial name given to a select few. All in Corinth and Achaia were saints.

God calls His children disciples because they are learners; believers because of their faith; saints because of their character; brethren because of their relationship; Christians because of their birth in Christ.

p. 24

II. COMFORT IN AFFLICTION – verses 3-7

- v. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassionate mercies and God of all comfort (encouragement).

The apostle begins this epistle in the same way David begins the Psalter:

Psalm 1:1, Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers.

The apostle begins this letter the same way the Lord Jesus begins His public ministry.

Matthew 5:3, 4, Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted.

Robert Schuller calls these the “Be-Happy Attitudes.”

The apostle begins by praising God. He starts by singing the Doxology.

A blessing ought to be given at the very beginning. It is a note of praise and thanksgiving.

Yes, he does begin his letter praising God. The question of “why” never seems to come up.

1 Thess. 5:18, In everything give thanks, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.

To be in this position of offering God praise in these circumstances, four things need to be true:

1. HIS WORSHIP MUST BE RIGHT.
2. HIS SUBMISSION MUST BE COMPLETE.
3. HIS ACCEPTANCE MUST BE TOTAL.
4. THE ULTIMATE VICTORY IS SURE.

As the letter opens, we know that he has not lost confidence in God. A man who has lost this has lost everything.

(Adventure in Adversity by Paul E. Billheimer)

In Hebrews 1:3 Paul says that “He (Christ) regulates that universe by the mighty power of His command.” What a relief! There can be no accidents in a universe like that.

No chance hath brought this ill to me;
 ‘Tis God’s own hand, so let it be,
 He seeth what I cannot see,
 There is a needs be for each pain;
 And He one day will make it plain,
 That earthly loss is heavenly gain.
 Like as a piece of tapestry viewed from the back,
 Appears to be naught but threads tangled hopelessly;
 But in the front a picture fair
 Rewards the workers for his care,
 Proving his skill and patience rare
 Thou art the workman, I the fram,
 Lord, for the glory of Thy Name,
 Perfect Thine image on the same.

Author unknown

pp. 59-60

(II Corinthians by H. A. Ironside)

“Blessed be God,” Does your heart often say that? Let the Lord be praised! Let Him be worshiped and adored! How much there is to praise Him for. “Blessed be God!”
 p. 14

It is a great thing to be able to bless the Lord whatever our circumstances are.

David says, “I will bless the Lord at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Ps. 34:1). I am afraid some of us do not know much about that. We bless the Lord when we have plenty, and growl when we have not. But David says, “I will

bless the Lord at all times.” Job was able to say, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). You know the devil said to God, “That man loves You only for what he gets out of You; he loves You for the gifts You give him.” So God said, “Take everything away, and see.” And Satan took everything away, and Job says, “Bless the Lord anyway!” God grant that He may fill our hearts with praise! “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me.” Think of that the next time you feel like growling and complaining.

p. 15

(II Corinthians by J. Vernon McGee)

The word for “blessed” is actually praise --- Praise be to God. I wonder how much we really praise Him. I found out that I am doing a better job of praising Him since I am retired than I did when I was a pastor.

David put it like this: “I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth” (Psalm 34:1). That ought to get rid of the complaining of the saints. We are to praise the Lord. “Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me” (Psalm 50:23).

p. 13

(How to Have a Creative Crisis by H. Norman Wright)

A book which has spoken to me each and every time I have read it is Lewis Smedes’ How Can It Be All Right When Everything Is All Wrong? His insights and sensitivity to life’s crises and God’s presence and involvement in our lives can answer many of our questions. He is a man who has been through life’s tough times. One of his own personal experiences describes how our theology helps us move through life’s changes.

The other night, trying to sleep, I amused myself by trying to recall the most happy moments of my life. I let my mind skip and dance where it was led. I thought of leaping down from a rafter in a barn, down into a deep loft of sweet, newly mown hay. That was a superbly happy moment. But somehow my mind was also seduced to a scene some years ago that, as I recall it, must have been the most painful of my life. Our first born child was torn from our hands by what felt to me like a capricious deity I did not want to call God. I felt ripped off by a cosmic artist. And for a little while, I thought I might not easily ever smile again.

But then I do not know how, in some miraculous shift in my perspective, a strange and inexpressible sense came to me that my life, our lives, were still good, that life is good because it is given and that its possibilities were still incalculable. Down into the gaps of feeling left over from the pain came a sense of givenness that nothing explains. It can only be felt as a gift of grace. An irrepressible impulse of blessing came from my heart to God for his sweet gift. And that was joy...in spite of pain. Looking back, it seems to me now that I have never again known so sharp, so severe, so saving a sense of gratitude and so deep a joy, or so honest.

pp. 22-23

Let's state a vital principle in the Christian life at this point: **DON'T LOSE YOUR CONFIDENCE IN GOD NO MATTER WHAT. KEEP ON PRAISING HIM.**

"BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THE FATHER OF COMPASSIONATE MERCIES AND GOD OF ALL COMFORT"

Paul characterizes God in two ways here:

1. He's the Father of compassionate mercies.
2. He's the God of all comfort.

How does Paul know this? How has he come to know God as the Father of compassionate mercies and the God of all comfort?

The only way he could come to this knowledge is through the school of affliction and suffering.

There are some things about God that you can only learn through suffering.

There are some things about yourself that you can only learn through suffering.

You get to know God and yourself in a new way through suffering.

Let's raise a question at this point: **HOW IS HE A FATHER OF COMPASSIONATE MERCIES?**

1 Corinthians 10:13

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able; but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

Hebrews 2:17, 18

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

He is a Father of compassionate mercies when He provides grace to endure, when He provides strength to go on.

He is a Father of compassionate mercies by providing **POWER** which is unlimited. His **PRESENCE**, which will never leave or forsake. A glimpse of His **PLAN** in which all

things fit together for good. And showing us our need for PATIENCE to learn what He is teaching us.

He becomes a Father of compassionate mercies when we recognize that the afflictions and difficulties that come into our lives are acts of love that are needful for our development, when we understand that he has forged a curriculum for our christlikeness.

Lamentations 3:22, 23

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
For his compassions never fail.
They are new every morning;
Great is your faithfulness.

In our verse thus far we have seen God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Father of compassionate mercies. The apostle then goes on to say:

“HE IS THE GOD OF ALL COMFORT”

He is it that He is the God of all comfort?

Isaiah 63:9

In all their distress he too was distressed,

He is the God of all comfort in that He comes offering peace.

Isaiah 26:3

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusted in thee.

Isaiah 32:17

And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you may have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

He comforts us with the revelation of His purpose.

Romans 8:28

And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

He is a God of all comfort when we recognize His power which has been beautifully displayed in the resurrection of Christ.

Romans 8:38, 39

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We see Him as the God of all comfort when we see Him acting in Job's behalf, that everything is under His sovereign control, that nothing happens to us until it passes over His desk.

He becomes the God of all comfort through numerous promises in His Word.

James 1:2-4

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials; knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

James 5:11

Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.

Hebrews 4:15, 16

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

1 Peter 1:5-7

Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

1 Peter 4:12, 13

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.

1 Peter 4:19

Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

1 Peter 5:10

And after you have suffered for a little , the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

He is the Father of compassionate mercies and God of all comfort. And this is only learned through suffering.

You will notice that He is the God of ALL comfort. It is futile to try and find comfort anywhere else.

“The Father of compassionate mercies” points to His WORKS, and “the God of all comfort” points to His WORDS.

Mercies are DEEDS which He does.
Comfort is WORDS which He says.

Luke 9:23

And He was saying to them all, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

(Blessings Out of Buffetings by Alan Redpath)

Oh tried and test Christian,
Beset on every hand
By storms of strife, remember
Thy Father holds command!
E'en though the tempest rages,
Thy chastened heart may sing,
For He doth purpose blessing
Through all thy buffeting.

Be strong and of good courage,
 Though foes thy soul assail.
 No weapon formed against thee
 Hath power to prevail;
 For thou shalt share the triumph
 Of Christ, thy conquering King,
 Who purposes a blessing
 Through all thy buffeting.

Rejoice to be found worthy
 Of suff'ring for His name,
 Who on the cross of Calvary
 Bore all thy weight of shame.
 When He shall come in glory
 His ransomed Home to bring,
 Thou'lt know in full the blessing
 Attained through buffeting!

Avis B. Christiansen
"Blessings out of Buffetings"

p. 6

(Adventure in Adversity by Paul E. Billheimer)

ADVERSITY IS PURPOSEFUL

If affliction does not come with a message from the heart of God, as Alexander Maclaren believes, then it has to be accidental and wholly without meaning. One of the principal lessons in the Book of Job is that adversity is neither accidental nor meaningless. Through Job God is telling us that adversity is purposeful and that purpose is good. Illustrating Romans 8:28, it verifies the truth that every affliction of the righteous is intended to be educational.

p. 7

This apparently was the view of Watchman Nee when he said, "We seldom learn anything new about God except through adversity." This is a neglected area in some of our teaching.

p. 8

(II Corinthians by H. A. Ironside)

There are two thins of which God is said to have the monopoly; He is "the God of all grace" and He is "the God of all comfort."

p. 17

(The Letters to the Corinthians by William Barclay)

But we are not left to face this trial and to provide this endurance alone. There comes to us the comfort of God. Between verses 3 and 7 the noun comfort or the verb to comfort occurs no fewer than nine times. The word comfort in the New Testament always means far more than soothing sympathy. Always it is true to its root meaning, for its root is the Latin word fortis, and fortis means brave. The Christian comfort is the comfort which brings courage, the comfort which enables a man to cope with all that life can do to him. Paul was quite sure that God never sends a man a vision without the power to work it out, that God never sends a man a task without the strength to do it.
p. 190

(Expository Studies in 2 Corinthians: Power Out of Weakness by Ray C. Stedman)

He praises God for the circumstances of his life even though there were afflictions. He calls God the “Father of mercies and God of all comfort.” He sees God’s hand as having sent these very things into his life; therefore he never prays to have them removed so that he might escape from them. He sees them as opportunities for the release of the strength of God.

This suggests the first reason why Christians go through suffering. Recently, a lady said to me, “I know we are supposed to suffer as Christians, but why does it hurt so much?” Well, there are four reasons given in this passage.
p. 12

(Be Encouraged by Warren W. Wiersbe)

God in His grace gives us what we do not deserve and in His mercy He does not give us what we do deserve. “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed” (Lam. 3:22). God’s mercy is manifold (Neh. 9:19), tender (Ps. 25:6), and great (Num. 14:19). The Bible frequently speaks of the “multitude of God’s mercies” so inexhaustible is the supply (Ps. 5:7; 51:1; 69:13, 16; 106:7, 45; La. 3:32).
p. 14

(Second Corinthians: Where Life Endures by Roy L. Laurin)

God, the one called alongside to help, bolsters the soul and strengthens the foundations. He rock-ribs the footings of life. He provides the balm of Gilead. And, in the midst of falling tears and a broken heart, we can say: “I will magnify the Lord.”
p. 26

“Great hearts can only be made by great troubles. The spade of trouble digs the reservoir of comfort deeper, and makes more room for the water of consolation.”
p. 27

(II Corinthians by J. Vernon McGee)

People turn to all sorts of things for comfort. There is a whiskey called “Southern Comfort.” Well, I’m a Southerner, but that is not a comfort, my friend. That will ruin a home. Others turn to drugs for comfort, but there is no comfort there.

p. 15

Dr. Harry Ironside used to tell the story of a friend of his who was in Vienna, Austria, on a sightseeing bus trip. As they were traveling, some sheep got in the way of his bus and they were held up. The man sitting next to his friend was annoyed by it all because there were only two sheep dogs that were herding those sheep. So this friend, a Christian, said to this man sitting next to him, who was annoyed, “Do you know the names of those two sheep dogs?” And he said, “Why, no, I don’t know the names. Do you know the names?” “Yes, I think I do.” “What are they?” His friend said, “One of them is named ‘Goodness’ and the other is named ‘Mercy.’” He said, “How in the world do you know that?” “Well, he said, I’ll tell you how. David said, ‘Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives.’”

You might not think it was goodness and mercy to have a couple of dogs yapping at you to keep you from going to the left or to the right, but it is God’s mercy that keeps us in the straight and narrow way, and He uses trial and difficulty for that very purpose. He is “the Father of mercies.”

p. 17

(Spiritual Awakening, Sherwood Eliot Wirt, editor)

Our dear Jesus was never more beloved of His Father than when He cried out, “My God! My God Why hast thou forsaken Me?” Never more beloved of His Father than when He was sweating great drops of blood, when He cried, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me.” I remember a dear minister of Christ, now in Suffolk, telling me that when he was in Scotland, going to receive the sacrament, he was so dry and dark and benumbed and tempted that he thought he would go away. As he was going, this word came to his mind: When was Jesus Christ most acceptable to His Father? When did He give the greatest trial of His love? When He cried out, “My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken Me?” “Why, then,” says he, “upon this I will venture; if I perish, I perish at Christ’s feet.” And he came away filled with comfort from his blessed God and Father in Christ.

-- George Whitefield

p. 37

Oh, poor, dear soul, whatever your trials are, our suffering times will be our best times. I know we had more comfort in Moorfields, on Kennington Common, and especially when the rotten eggs, the cats and dogs were thrown upon me, and my gown was filled with clods of dirt [so] that I could scarce move it. I have had more comfort in this ...than when I have been in ease.

I remember when I was preaching at Exeter, a stone came and made my forehead bleed. I found at that very time the Word came with double power to a laborer that was gazing at me, who was wounded at the same time by another stone. I felt for the lad more than for myself. I went to a friend [for help], and the lad came to me. “Sire,” says

he, “the man gave me a wound, but Jesus healed me. I never had my bonds broke till I had my head broke!”

-- George Whitefield

pp. 40-41

(Quality Friendship: The Risks and Rewards by Gary Inrig)

They were characteristics that had been forged in the furnace of adversity. The godly Samuel Rutherford once wrote with praise out of pain, “Oh, what I owe to the furnace, the file and the hammer of my Lord Jesus!” David also knew what it was to endure the discipline of the Lord and to come forth as pure gold.

p. 47

(Helping Those Who Don't Want Help by Marshal Shelley)

In one of George MacDonald's books, there is a woman who has met a sudden sorrow. “I wish I'd never been made!” she exclaims petulantly and bitterly: to which her friend quietly replies, “My dear, you're not made yet. You're only being made – and this is the Maker's process.”

James S. Stewart

p. 45

- v. 4 Who is comforting (encouraging us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort (encourage) those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are being comforted by God.

This Father of compassionate mercies and God of all comfort is comforting us in all our affliction.

The comforting is in the present tense, so this is something that is going on continually.

The fact that he is comforting us points to the temporary nature of this affliction. He is comforting us in all our affliction. In other words, He is aware of our every concern and understands and knows of our every affliction.

He is blessing us in the midst of the difficulty.

A question arises as to: Why not stop the affliction rather than provide the comforting? The answer, of course, to that is that affliction is a part of God's purpose to make us comforters.

Philippians 1:29

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake.

1 Thess. 3:3, 4

So that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.

1 Peter 2:20, 21

For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps,

We raised another question, and that is: How is Hw comforting us in all our affliction?

The answer to that is by His Word, by His presence, by prayer, and by peace.

Comfort is available while we are in the midst of it.

He has promised us His presence.

Isaiah 43:2

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.

Psalms 23:4

Even though I walk
through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;

Hebrews 13:5

Let your way of life be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"

I have been through the valley of weeping,
the valley of sorrow and pain.

But the God of all comfort was with me,
at hand to uphold and sustain.

-- Anonymous

The last part of verse 4 tells us the reason why He is encouraging us in all our affliction:

**“SO THAT WE MAY BE ABLE TO COMFORT (ENCOURAGE) THOSE WHO ARE
IN ANY AFFLICTION WITH THE COMFORT WITH WHICH WE OURSELVES
ARE BEING COMFORTED BY GOD.”**

The comfort is received to be shared or passed on.

The result of our comfort should be an increased sensitivity to the needs of others.

We can see the purpose in suffering to benefit others.

Suffering sensitizes you to the needs of others.

We in turn are made comforters to others who are in the midst of any affliction; and while they are going through it, we provide them comfort through the things that we have learned in the midst of our affliction.

How do we do this comforting? Well, by the insights that we have learned in the midst of our own suffering, the experiences we’ve had that are similar to theirs, the sharing of Scriptures that are applicable to the circumstances, by prayer both for and with them.

A. B. Simpson declared, “You will have no test of faith that will not fit you to be a blessing if you are obedient to the Lord. I never had a trial, but when I got out of the deep river, I found some poor pilgrim on the bank that I was able to help by that very experience. If you have received consolation from the Lord in time of tribulation, God wants you to share with others the lessons you’ve learned.

Along life’s pathway troubles comes
That God will help us bear.
Then we can look beyond the pain,
To those who need our care.

-- Branon

God does not comfort us to make us comfortable but to make us comforters.

(Expository Studies in 2 Corinthians: Power Out of Weakness by Ray C. Stedman)

Two words, “Affliction,” and comfort,” stand out repeatedly in this passage; and the two belong together. Affliction is what we today would probably call pressure, or stress. It is what many of you, perhaps feel when you think about going to work tomorrow. It is whatever ties knots in your stomach and makes you feel anxious or troubled about what

lies ahead. It is what makes for hectic days and sleepless nights. It gnaws continually at your mind and threatens your well-being; it refuses to go away and leave you alone; it depresses you and darkens the future with forebodings of disaster. That is pressure, stress, and we all live with it. People were no different in the first century. They lived under pressure and stress just as we do. Paul experienced it as well, but along with it he experienced the comfort of God.

p. 11

(Spiritual Awakening, Sherwood Eliot Wirt, editor)

Wednesday, May 18 – My circumstances are such that I have no comfort of any kind but what I have in God. I live in the most lonesome wilderness; have but one single person to converse with that can speak English [his Indian interpreter, John Wauwaumpequunnaunt]. I live poorly with regard to the comforts of life. Most of my diet consists of boiled corn, hasty-pudding, etc. I lodge on a bundle of straw, and my labor is hard and extremely difficult, having no land to live on but what the Dutch people lay claim to and threaten to drive them off from. They [the Dutch] have no regard to the souls of the poor Indians, and by what I can learn, they hate me because I come to preach to them [the Indians].

-- David Brainerd

p. 127

(Help, I'm having a Baby by H. Norman Wright and Marvin Inmon)

“Like Jesus with the sisters of Lazarus in the crucible of grief, be real (He wept), be quiet (He took their angry rebukes), be supportive (He was deeply moved), be available (He stood by their side). No big sermons, no leaflets, no attempts to correct their misunderstandings, not even a frown that suggested disapproval. Killing this giant takes time! Our Lord believed, as we should, that we are healed of grief only when we express it to the full.

“Perhaps this explains why so many are grieving and so few are comforting.”

p. 188

(The Be (Happy) Attitudes by Robert Schuller)

How wise were her words. Carol needed comfort, not pity, and comfort came not by drying her tears, but by lifting her attention beyond the present pain to the future victories.

God comforts. He doesn't pity. He doesn't commiserate. He picks us up, dries our tears, soothes our fears, and lifts our thoughts beyond the hurt.

How does God comfort us so masterfully? Five ways: (1) He gives us courage; (2) He gives us a sense of calm; (3) He gives us companionship; (4) He gives us compassion; and (5) He gives us a new set of commitments.

p. 64

(How to Get Along with Difficult People by Florence Littauer)

The following words from a little pamphlet “This Is From Me” put these questions in perspective.

Are you in difficult circumstances, surrounded by people who do not understand you, who never consult your taste, who put you in the background? “This thing is from Me. I am the God of circumstances. Thou camest not to thy place by accident; it is the very place God meant for thee.” Have you not asked to be made humble? See, then, I have placed you in the very school where this lesson is taught; your surrounding and companions are only working out my will.
p. 95

Remember, TOUGH TIMES never last but TOUGH PEOPLE do.

Turn a MILLSTONE into a MILESTONE.

v. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

Here now in verse 5 we have the reason for the statement in verse 4.

“FOR JUST AS THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST ARE OURS IN ABUNDANCE”

We recognize that the apostle Paul is not over exaggerating because of what we are going to be reading in verse 8.

They are the sufferings of Christ.

Colossians 1:24

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ’s afflictions.

We have lots of suffering; we have lots of comfort.

The source of our comfort is through Christ.

Our suffering is not only to break us but to broaden our capacity as channels of comfort.

(The Example of Jesus by Michael Griffiths)

The disciple is to ‘take up his cross and follow me’ as Jesus said. The African missionary Dr. Helen Roseveare tells of her experience in the Congo trembling, crying, blood flowing down her cheek having been struck by Simbas raiding the missionary

hospital, when she was suddenly comforted by a sense of the presence of the Lord Jesus alongside her, saying: 'What you are suffering is my suffering too.'

p. 58

- v. 6 But if we are being hard pressed by reason of affliction, it is for you comfort and salvation; or if we are being comforted, it is for you comfort, which is operative in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also are suffering.

Whether we suffer or are comforted, it's all for your benefit.

What we are going through is for your benefit.

Suffering or comfort are both for you.

To have comfort we must have suffering.

Paul understands a two-fold purpose for his afflictions:

1. It is for you comfort.
2. It is for your salvation.

Suffering opens the door for ministry to others: comfort for believers and salvation for the unsaved.

The reason for suffering is to give comfort and salvation to others.

Paul could say, What I'm going through is for someone else's comfort or salvation.

How does salvation fit into this picture? It is more by what they SEE than what you SAY that makes an impact upon the unsaved.

1 Peter 3:1,2

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to you own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

1 Peter 3:15

But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to every one who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

We can share the lessons learned in tribulation. We are BRUISED TO BLESS. The HURTS come to make us HELPERS.

Paul concludes the 6th verse by saying, “OR IF WE ARE BEING COMFORTED, IT IS FOR YOUR COMFORT, WHICH IS OPERATIVE IN THE PATIENT ENDURING OF THE SAME SUFFERINGS WHICH WE ALSO ARE SUFFERING.”

There must be a patient endurance of what comes. We must remain under the stress of the circumstances.

It is PATIENCE WITH THE PROCESS in forming Christ in us.

You’ve got to hang in there if you’re going to experience God’s comfort.

The fruit of God’s comfort is the patient enduring of the same sufferings.

Paul is saying, There needs to be PATIENCE WITH THE PROCESS.

Hebrews 10:36

For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised.

Our comfort will intensify your endurance.

(Quality Friendship: The Risks and Rewards by Gary Inrig)

William Barclay captures the sense of the word in this way:

It is not the patience which can sit down and bow the head and let things descend upon it and passively endure until the storm is passed....It is the spirit which can bear things not simply with resignation, but with blazing hope; it is not the spirit which sits statically enduring in the one place, but the spirit which bears things because it knows that these things are leading to a goal of glory; it is not the patience which grimly hopes for the end, but the patience which radiantly hopes for the dawn. It has been called a “masculine constancy under trial”...It is the quality which keeps a man on his feet with his face to the wind. It is the virtue which can transmit the hardest trial into glory because beyond the pain, it sees the goal. George Matheson, who was stricken in blindness and disappointed in love, wrote a prayer in which he pleads that he might accept God’s will, “not wit dumb resignation, but with holy joy, not only with the absence of murmur, but with a song of praise.” Only hupomene (endurance) can enable a man to do that.
pp. 198-99

(The Be-Happy Attitudes by Robert Schuller)

In the book, Gone With the Wind, we read about the Southern gentlemen who broke down under the tragedies involved in the Civil War. Observing his collapse, another character in the novel philosophizes, “He could be licked from the inside. I mean

to say that what the world could not do, his own heart could.” Then the simpler philosopher concluded, “There ain’t anything from the outside that can lick any of us.” p. 59

Hebrews 10:24

And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds,

v. 7 And our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.

The AND connects us with the previous verse.

Paul is speaking words of affirmation here. “Our hope for you is firmly grounded.”

1 Cor. 3:9-11

For we are God’s fellow-workers; you are God’s field, God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise masterbuilder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Matthew 7:24, 25

Therefore every one who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall; for it had been founded upon the rock.

Our hope for you is firmly grounded. We are believing the best. It is because of your past performances. We have a lot of confidence in you.

Paul then gives the evidence for this hope in the latter part of verse 7: “**KNOWING THAT AS YOU ARE SHARERS OF OUR SUFFERINGS, SO ALSO YOU ARE SHARERS OF OUR COMFORT.**”

The picture that we get here is: They are firmly grounded, sharing suffering and comfort together.

(How to Disciple Your Children by Walter Henrichsen)

For most of us the absence of pain is more important than the presence of character. For God the presence of character is more important than the absence of pain. Trials and tribulations can be an expression of God’s love and not His neglect.

p. 54

To illustrate that this is not unique to the New Testament, note what God says through Isaiah. As you read it give special attention to the fact that God says “when,” not “if.”

p. 55

III. LEARNING TO TRUST GOD – verses 8-10

- v. 8 For we are not desiring you to be unaware, brethren, concerning our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of living;

I love the way Phillips translates this:

At that time, we were completely overwhelmed. The burden was more than we could bear. In fact, we told ourselves that this was the end.

Plummer in his commentary translates it:

When I speak of our sufferings, I mean something very real. I do not wish you, my brothers, to be in any uncertainty about that. Affliction so intense came upon us in Asia that it prostrated us beyond all power of endurance, so much so that we despaired of preserving even life.

When Paul spoke earlier in verse 5 of their sufferings being in abundance and therefore their comfort being in abundance, he is now verifying that fact with what actually happened.

Something took place while they were in Asia that nearly took their lives.

It must have been the riots and opposition that they experienced in Ephesus, recorded in Acts 19.

The satanic activity was very strong during this ministry in Ephesus. A real riot was stirred up by a man named Demetrius, who was a silversmith there, making silver shrines of Artemis, and this was making them a lot of money.

Paul with his ministry was practically running them out of business by presenting the living God.

When the riot was at its height, we read in verse 29:

And the city was filled with the confusion, and they rushed with one accord into the theater, dragging along Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions from Macedonia.

Paul is restrained from going into the theater at that time but I'm sure that subsequent events led to some of these dire circumstances that are described here in this verse.

There are three things that are said about his emergency:

1. They were burdened excessively.
2. It was beyond our strength.
3. We despaired even of living.

Philippians 4:13

I am ready for anything through the strength of the One who indwells me.

The hymnwriter says it right:

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
 He sendeth more strength when the labors increase,
 To added affliction He addeth His mercy.
 To multiplied trials His multiplied peace,
 When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
 When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
 When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
 Our Father's full giving is only begun.

Paul says they literally had their backs against the wall. It was a terminal situation. They nearly bought the farm. They were convinced that they were going to the house.

(II Corinthians by J. Vernon McGee)

When I was in the hospital for my initial cancer surgery, someone sent me this little poem:

I NEEDED THE QUIET

I needed the quiet so He drew me aside,
 Into the shadows where we could confide.

Away from the bustle where all the day long
 I hurried and worried when active and strong.

I needed the quiet tho at first I rebelled
 But gently, so gently, my cross He upheld,

And whispered so sweetly of spiritual things
 Tho weakened in body, my spirit took wings

To heights never dreamed of when active at play,
He loved me so greatly He drew me away.

I needed the quiet. No prison my bed,
But a beautiful valley of blessings instead-

A place to grow richer in Jesus to hide.
I needed the quiet so He drew me aside.

Alice Hansche Mortenson

My friend, I today you are on a bed of pain, and you are in the will of God, that bed can become a greater pulpit than the one I stand behind.
pp. 19-20

(No More Mr. Nice Guy by Stephen Brown)

Did you hear about the man who went to his doctor and the doctor told him that he had some bad news and some very bad news? The man asked to hear the bad news first, and the doctor said, "The bad news is that I have examined your tests and you have twenty-four hours to live."

"Man!" exclaimed the man. That is really bad news. What in the world could be worse than that?"

"The very bad news is," said the doctor, "I should have talked to you yesterday."
p. 195

(Balancing Life's Demands by J. Grant Howard)

If life can be viewed as a battle, then here is the latest most appropriate communiqué:

We are completely surrounded and totally outnumbered.
p. 13

v. 9 indeed, we have had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not be trusting in ourselves but in the God who is raising the dead.

Paul comes forth with an exclamation, INDEED. He then shares the purpose behind the terrible circumstances that he faced in Asia.

Comforting involves James 1:5

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

When we see the totality of God's plan and everything in it is for one of three things:

1. Either for our growth.
2. For His glory.
3. Or for us to experience His grace.

Then we search for the purposes of God's plan so that we might fully cooperate with His endeavors in our lives.

“INDEED, WE HAVE HAD THE SENTENCE OF DEATH WITHIN OURSELVES”

Paul then gives the purpose behind all of this: **“IN ORDER THAT WE SHOULD NOT BE TRUSTING IN OURSELVES BUT IN THE GOD WHO IS RAISING THE DEAD”**

This purpose is stated negatively and positively.

Negatively: “not trusting in ourselves”

Positively: “trusting in God”

The apostle Paul saw the hand of God in these circumstances.

Trials come to teach us to trust in God.

We are being taught to trust God in the midst of the circumstances.

This is exactly what Jesus was trying to do with the disciples in Mark chapter 4 as they were being tested with regard to these matters and they were not even aware of it.

Mark 4:35-41

And on that day, when evening had come, He said to them, “Let us go over to the other side.” And leaving the multitude, they took Him along with them, just as He was, in the boat; and other boats were with Him. And there arose a fierce gale of wind, and the waves were breaking over the boat so much that the boat was already filling up. And He Himself was in the stern, asleep on the cushion; and they awoke Him and said to Him, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?” And being aroused, He rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Hush, be still.” And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm. And He said to them, “Why are you so timid? How is it that you have no faith?” And they became very much afraid and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?”

This all happened so that we might not be trusting in ourselves but that we might be trusting in the God who is raising the dead.

Life and death are in His hands.

This is in the PRESENT TENSE, and so it is not just a reference to the resurrection of Jesus. We would say that it is a reference to the RAISING OF JESUS from the dead, but it is also a reference to the RAISING OF PAUL from the dead in Lystra and the RAISING OF EUTYCHUS from the dead in Troas when he fell out of the window at midnight.

It must delight the heart of God to put us into situations where we have no alternative but to trust Him if we are going to survive.

(Adventure in Adversity by Paul E. Billheimer)

There was a new revelation of God first and then there was disillusionment with self. Spiritual pride and arrogance cannot coexist with a new vision of the ineffable God. We need to remember that no matter how mature we may be, there are new heights and new depths of grace, new graces and virtues that await a new revelation of God. If you live long enough and seek God earnestly enough, you may make this discovery for yourself. If we want God's best we will not allow imperfections to continue in our lives that will hinder His purpose for us.

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(II Corinthians by H. A. Ironside)

It is hard for us to realize, but it is true that God can do far more with a broken man than with a man who seems strong in his own strength and power. And so He permits trouble to come upon His people, and even upon His chosen vessels, in order that they may be humble and broken in spirit before Him.

p. 27

(Expository Studies in 2 Corinthians: Power Out of Weakness by Ray C. Stedman)

That is, I think, the major reason for suffering. It is the pressure designed to destroy our determined stubbornness. But do you see how Paul comes to a knowledge of the true Christian life style? "God delivered us" – in the past; "he is delivering us" – in the present; "he will deliver us" – in the future. Paul has learned to trust God to take him through whatever life throws at him, no matter what it is. Now that is a Christian life style. It is time some of us Christians quit complaining, murmuring and griping about everything that comes our way. We should see these as opportunities to display an alternative life style, to release in our lives a quiet power that will keep our hearts at peace, because we know our adequate God is handling the situation; he will take us safely through.

p. 16

- v. 10 who delivered us out of so great a peril of death, and will deliver us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us.

There are four things we see about God here:

1. As we saw in verse 9, He is the one who is RAISING THE DEAD.
2. He is the one who DELIVERED US, pointing to the past.
3. He is the one who WILL DELIVER US, that is, in the immediate future.
4. He is the one who WILL YET DELIVER US, in the indefinite future.

Romans 4:17

(as it is written, “A father of many nations have I made you”) in the sight of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

He will yet deliver us:

1 Cor. 15:52-57

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, “Death is swallowed up in victory? O death, where is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy 4:17, 18

But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion’s mouth. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

For Israel – it is deliverance from the land of Egypt.

For the church – it is deliverance that took place at Calvary.

(II Corinthians by H. A. Ironside)

“Soon we’ll pass this desert dreary,
 Soon we’ll bid farewell to pain;
 Nevermore be sad or weary,
 Never, never sin again.”

What a deliverance that will be! When we will never have to bow the knee again to say, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive others,” when we will never have to wipe away tears of penitence, for throughout endless ages we shall be free from the presence of sin in the joy of everlasting communion with our blessed Lord.

p. 33

IV. PETITION ISSUES IN PRAISE – verse 11

- v. 11 You also joining in helping us through your prayers, in order that thanksgiving may be given by many persons on your behalf for the favor bestowed upon us through the prayers of many.

Make no mistake about it – when people pray, God responds.

John 16:24

Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

2 Chron. 7:14, 15

And My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now My eyes shall be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered in this place.

In verse 11 we have the CORINTHIANS CONTRIBUTION TO THE CAUSE. “You Corinthians also joining in helping us through your prayers.”

The instrument for helping is through your prayers.

The purpose is: “IN ORDER THAT THANKSGIVING MAY BE GIVEN BY MANY PERSONS ON OUR BEHALF FOR THE FAVOR BESTOWED UPON US THROUGH (THE INSTRUMENT OF) THE PRAYERS OF MANY.”

The petition will turn to praise as God bestows favor upon the apostle Paul and the others through the prayers of many.

(Second Corinthians: Where Life Endures by Roy L. Laurin)

By this statement Paul established the connection which one Christian’s prayers have to another Christian’s need. It is the vital connection of aid and assistance. Called here “helping together by prayer,” it is an effectual and necessary means of assistance which we render each other.

The effect of prayer accrues not only to the benefit of the one prayed for, but results in blessing to the one who prays.

p. 33

(Be Encouraged by Warren W. Wiersbe)

God does not always deliver us immediately, nor does He deliver each of His children in the same way. James was beheaded, yet Peter was delivered from prison (Acts 12). Both were delivered, but in different ways. Sometimes God delivers us from our trials, and at other times He delivers us in our trials.

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).

p. 17

The important thing is to fix your attention on God and not on yourself. 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). 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. Finally, remember what God does through you --- and let Him use you to be an encouragement to others.

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CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons that we can learn in this particular study?

LESSON #1: We can learn how to handle the tough times. There are four steps to the Christian way to TRIUMPH IN TROUBLE:

1. Don't lose confidence in God. Keep praising Him.
2. Patient endurance of what comes.
3. Trusting God in the midst of it.
4. Thanksgiving for favor bestowed.

LESSON #2: There are four key words in this passage:

1. BLESSED – verse 3
2. PATIENT ENDURING – verse 6
3. TRUSTING – verse 9
4. THANKSGIVING – verse 11

We praise Him for who He is.
We patiently endure what He allows.
We trust Him in the midst of it.
And give thanks for the deliverance.

LESSON #3: You get to know God in a newer and deeper way through suffering.

LESSON #4: Suffering sensitizes you to the needs of others.

LESSON #5: God's comfort is always adequate for our suffering.

LESSON #6: Our suffering can be for another person's benefit.

LESSON #7: What I am going through is for someone else's comfort or salvation.

LESSON #8: Trials come to teach us to trust God.

LESSON #9: God delights to put us in situations where we have no alternative but to trust Him if we are going to survive.

LESSON #10: When people pray, God responds.

(The Pursuit of God by A. W. Tozer)

God let the suffering old man go through with it up to the point where He knew there would be no retreat, and then forbade him to lay a hand upon the boy. To the wondering patriarch He now says in effect, "It's all right, Abraham. I never intended that you should actually slay the lad. I only wanted to remove him from the temple of your heart that I might reign unchallenged there. I wanted to correct the perversion that existed in your love. Now you may have the boy, sound and well. Take him and go back to your tent. Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me."

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Father, I want to know Thee, but my cowardly heart fears to give up its toys. I cannot part with them without inward bleeding, and I do not try to hide from Thee the terror of the parting. I come trembling, but I do come. Please root from my heart all those things which I have cherished so long and which have become a very part of my living self, so that Thou mayest enter and dwell there without a rival. Then shalt Thou make the pace of Thy feet glorious. Then shall my heart have no need of the sun to shine in it, for Thyself wilt be the light of it, and there shall be no night there. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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