

# Enjoying God's Comfort

Believers find comfort in knowing that others benefit from and God is honored through their trials.



The Transformation for Adult LifeGroups

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-11

February 24, 2019/ February 27, 2019

## TODAY'S TEXT

Text: **2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-11**

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. <sup>5</sup> For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. <sup>6</sup> If we are distressed, 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. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. <sup>9</sup> Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. <sup>10</sup> He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, <sup>11</sup> as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many.*

## FIRST THOUGHTS

° When you have faced a difficult time, give examples of how God used any or all of these to bring you comfort:

- Scripture Verses
- Music
- Encouraging words, cards, messages from friends
- Nature
- Prayers of others
- Other books, magazines, blogs, etc.

## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Paul lived outside his comfort zone as a traveling church planter. He was called by God to take the gospel where it had never been proclaimed. Helped by God's Spirit, he gladly faced unbelievable risks. As we'll see in this week's study, he had recently been so overwhelmed that he thought he would die (2 Cor. 1:8).

Paul, however, was not beyond needing comfort in the midst of these trials. He knew that comfort can come both from God and from others. He began Second Corinthians by praising God for the comfort He had given him. Further, Paul explained to the believers that divine comfort extended both from him to them and from them to him. Christians can find comfort in knowing that others benefit from their trials and that God is honored through such trials.

The opening chapters of this letter reveal quite a bit about the relationship between Paul and the Corinthian church, as well as some issues that had been going on since he wrote 1 Corinthians. The reminder that he was an apostle of Christ by God's will (1:1) serves as an important prelude to a larger defense of his apostleship in this letter.

False apostles had made inroads into the church and cast doubts on Paul's authority because of his continual hardships. These false apostles became the target of Paul's rebuke. His sufferings for Christ did not invalidate his status as an apostle. On the contrary, Paul indicated that all believers can expect affliction (1:7). Enjoying God's comfort is the larger theme of the first chapter that flows from Paul's suffering.

Paul's travel schedule (2 Cor. 1:15-2:3,12-13) is not incidental but necessary to understand the context for the letter as a whole. After Paul founded the church, problems arose quickly, which he wrote about in a letter we do not have (see 1 Cor. 5:9). While in Ephesus, he heard about additional problems in the church and wrote 1 Corinthians to deal with them as well as other issues the Corinthians asked him to address. Apparently, the false apostles arrived during this time and caused more problems for Paul. In response, Paul left Ephesus for a brief visit to Corinth that didn't go well, so he wrote a severe letter rebuking the church (see 2 Cor. 2:4; 7:8-9), which also we do not have. Paul postponed his plans for another visit, although still had it in view (see 2 Cor. 12:14; 13:1).

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### COMFORTED

Define the word "Comfort"? What does it mean? What does it feel like? Why do we need it?

**> Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7**

- This passage is not meant as a defense for suffering, yet many look for that. We may never know all the reasons we face trials—sometimes they are through our own choices, sometimes they are because of the evil of the world we live in, and sometimes they are tests sent from God. What we do know is God allows and uses all three of these things. According to this passage, how does God use our suffering to help us? How does He use it to help others?
- What hope did Paul offer those who are suffering?

**TESTED****> Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11**

- What type of attitude did Paul demonstrate while he was suffering? Are you surprised by this? Why or why not? Do you think the Corinthians were surprised to hear this from Paul?
- How were the Corinthian believers involved in Paul's experience?
- Have you ever felt the prayers of others in the midst of suffering? What was that like?

A powerful story of how God uses suffering occurred in 2005 between Brian Nichols and Ashley Smith. You may remember Brian Nichols as the man who escaped from an Atlanta courthouse by murdering 4 people (including a judge and several law enforcement officers) then forcing his way into Ashley Smith's apartment and holding her hostage for 7 hours. The story has been made into a book "Unlikely Angel" and a movie "Captive". Ashley's life was full of trouble already—her husband was murdered in a fight over drugs, she struggled with an ongoing addiction to meth, and had to give up custody of her daughter to an aunt to raise her. Although she attended church occasionally and tried to give her problems over to God, she still dealt with them daily. As she was held captive, she began to open up to Brian and share with him her struggles and the hope she had found by reading "The Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren. She told him she believed God had a purpose for her life and for his as well. Brian asked Ashley if she had any drugs and she gave him the last of her stash. When he asked her to do them with him, she refused. Eventually she convinced Brian Nichols to let her go and she called 911. After some standoff with police, Brian peacefully turned himself in to face trial. Since then Ashley has accepted Christ, remarried, got her daughter back, kicked her drug addiction and begun a new life. She believes the turning point was her encounter with Brian Nichols. God used the hurts in Ashley's life to connect her to Brian. God used the terrible experience of fearing for her life as a hostage to bring about a life transformation in Ashley's life. Ashley now speaks all over the country about the life-changing power of God.

You can learn more here: <https://abcnews.go.com/US/captive-ashley-smith-describes-held-escaped-courthouse-shooter/story?id=33865875> <http://www.historyvshollywood.com/reelfaces/captive/>

**SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE**

If you've been at Chets very long, you've probably heard this quote from Rick Warren, "God never wastes a hurt."

- In today's passage, how did God use the hurts of Paul to help the Corinthians? In the story above, how did God use the hurts of Ashley Smith's life to bring about life change in her life and Brian Nichols' life? Has God ever used a hurt in your life to help someone else? How?
- At some time or another, everyone will need comfort due to suffering. What truths can believers draw on while experiencing suffering?

**Personal Challenge:** Resolve to turn to God rather than your own skills and abilities when life gets difficult. Remember that God is faithful and has the power to heal and restore us. He is our source of strength.

**PREPARING FOR NEXT WEEK**

- Read 2 Corinthians 4:5-18
- What dangers do Christians today face in sharing the gospel (both real and perceived)?
- What dangers did Paul face in sharing the gospel?

**READ THROUGH THE BIBLE**

**24th** – Numbers 14-16; Mark 3 | **25th** – Numbers 17-18; Psalm 29; Mark 4 | **26th** – Numbers 19-20; Psalm 28; Mark 5 | **27th** – Numbers 21-23; Mark 6-7 | **28th** – Numbers 24-27; 1 Corinthians 13 | **1st** – Numbers 28-29; Mark 8 | **2nd** – Numbers 30-31; Mark 9