

The Book of 2 Corinthians, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 1: The God of All Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:1-24

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Second Corinthians 1 is the doorway into the most personal of Paul's letters, and it sets the emotional and theological key for everything that follows. Doctrinally, several weighty truths surface in these verses. God is revealed as "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort," which says something about His very nature, not merely His actions. Paul grounds Christian hope in "God who raises the dead," tying our endurance in suffering to the resurrection. And in verses 20 through 22 he gives a compact and important statement about assurance: all God's promises find their Yes in Christ, and God has sealed believers and given the Spirit as a guarantee. The teacher should be ready to handle the seal and guarantee of the Spirit with care, presenting the real and steadying assurance the Christian has in Christ while guarding against the error of "once saved, always saved," since Paul will warn this very church to examine themselves (13:5) and not to receive God's grace in vain (6:1).

At the same time, this chapter was written to bind up wounds. Paul writes to a congregation that has known real affliction, and to a relationship that has known real strain. Every doctrine here is aimed at the heart. The comfort of God is meant to steady frightened people. The lesson of Asia, where Paul despaired of life itself, is meant to teach self-reliant people to lean on God. The integrity Paul defends is meant to call all of us to a more truthful life. The teacher's task is to let these truths do their forming work, so that students leave not only understanding the comfort of God but actually receiving it, and becoming the kind of people who carry it to others.

So aim at both targets. Help your students grasp clearly what Scripture teaches about God's comfort, the resurrection hope that holds us in trial, and the genuine assurance we have through the sealing of the Spirit. And help them become softer, steadier, more honest disciples, the kind of people who, having been comforted by God, become a comfort to everyone around them.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul begins by blessing God as "the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction" (vv. 3-4). What do these verses teach us about God's character and the way He meets His people in their suffering? Why does it matter that Paul grounds comfort in who God is rather than in changed circumstances?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by slowing down on the titles Paul gives God: “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.” These are not throwaway phrases. Mercy and comfort are presented as belonging to God’s very identity, not as moods He occasionally falls into. He is their source and their Father. When Paul blesses God this way, he is teaching the Corinthians, and us, to begin with who God is before we ever get to what we want from Him.

Notice the sweep of verse 4: God “comforts us in all our affliction.” Not after the affliction is over, and not only in certain approved kinds of suffering, but in all of it. The Greek word for comfort carries the sense of coming alongside, of being called to someone’s side to strengthen them. God does not always remove the trouble. He comes near in it. Help students feel the difference between a God who stands at a distance shouting advice and a God who climbs down into the pit to be with His child.

Press home that Paul grounds comfort in God’s character rather than in changed circumstances. This matters enormously for how we suffer. If our comfort depends on the trial ending, we are at the mercy of our circumstances. If our comfort rests on the unchanging mercy of God, then we can be steadied even while the trial continues. This is the bedrock the whole chapter is built on.

You might invite students to contrast this with the thin comforts the world offers, distraction, denial, the promise that everything will work out. Those comforts evaporate when things do not work out. The comfort of the Father of mercies does not depend on the outcome, because it depends on Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The character of God as Father of mercies and God of all comfort, a truth about His nature, not merely His behavior
- Comfort defined as God drawing near in affliction, not necessarily removing it
- The difference between assurance grounded in God’s unchanging character and false comfort grounded in circumstances
- The pastoral truth that God meets His people in all affliction, not only in certain approved trials

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference, in everyday life, between God removing a trial and God comforting us within it?
- Why is it so tempting to base our peace on our circumstances rather than on God’s character?
- When has someone simply being present with you in a hard time been more comforting than any advice they could have given?

Question 2

Student Question:

Be honest about where you instinctively run when life presses in on you. What “first comforts” do you reach for before you reach for God, and what has that pattern cost you? Name one specific burden you are carrying right now that you have not yet brought honestly to the Father of mercies.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first of the self-examining questions, and the goal is honesty rather than information. Most of us have a reflex, a place we run before we run to God. For one person it is food, for another it is a screen, for another it is control or busyness or the reassurance of a friend. None of these is necessarily evil, but when they become our first comfort, they quietly take the place that belongs to God.

Help students see that naming these substitute comforts is not about heaping on guilt. It is about diagnosis. Jesus meets us where we actually are, not where we pretend to be. The question gently asks them to tell the truth about their own hearts, which is the first step toward letting God become their true refuge.

Then move toward the second half of the question, the specific burden they have not yet brought honestly to God. Many believers carry things in silence, half-hoping God will not notice. Encourage them that the Father of mercies already knows, and that bringing the burden to Him is not informing Him of something new but entrusting it to someone who already cares.

Keep this discussion safe. Vulnerability here builds the kind of fellowship in which God’s comfort actually flows from member to member, which is exactly where Paul is heading in the next verses.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The human tendency to seek comfort in good gifts rather than in the Giver, which is the root of idolatry
- Honest self-examination as a healthy spiritual discipline, not morbid introspection
- The invitation to cast our burdens on God rather than carry them in secret (1 Peter 5:7)
- The role of the church as a place where burdens are shared rather than hidden

Discussion Prompts

- What is your usual “first comfort” when life gets hard, and what does it actually deliver?
- Why do we so often carry burdens silently instead of bringing them to God and His people?
- What might change this week if you brought one hidden burden honestly to the Father of mercies?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says God comforts us in affliction “so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (v. 4). According to the passage, what is one of God’s purposes in our suffering, and how does this reshape the way we understand what we go through?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 4 contains one of the most important little words in the chapter: “so that.” God comforts us in our affliction so that we may comfort others. The comfort is not given as a private possession to be hoarded. It is given to be passed along. This reframes our suffering entirely. The trial we endure today becomes the very training that equips us to help someone else tomorrow.

Draw out the picture in verses 5 through 7. Paul says that as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so we share abundantly in comfort, and that his own affliction is for the Corinthians’ comfort. There is a fellowship here, a holy circulation of comfort flowing through the body of Christ. No one suffers in a vacuum, and no one is comforted merely for themselves.

This guards us against two errors. The first is despising our suffering as meaningless. The second is wasting it by keeping the lessons to ourselves. The student who learns to receive God’s comfort and then to give it away has discovered one of God’s deepest purposes in pain.

You might note how often the most effective comforters are those who have suffered. A person who has buried a child can sit with another grieving parent in a way no one else can. God wastes nothing. The comfort He pours into us in our affliction becomes a well that others can drink from.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Suffering as God-permitted training that equips us to serve others
- The fellowship of comfort within the body of Christ, a holy circulation from member to member
- The rejection of the idea that suffering is random or meaningless for the Christian
- Comfort as a stewardship to be passed on, not a private possession to be hoarded

Discussion Prompts

- How does knowing that God can use your pain to help others change the way you face it?
- Why are people who have suffered often the best comforters?
- What is one lesson God taught you in a hard season that you could pass on to someone else?

Question 4

Student Question:

Think of the comfort God has given you in a past trial. Who has He placed in your life right now, in your family, your congregation, or your neighborhood, that you are uniquely able to comfort because you have walked a similar road? What is one concrete step you could take this week to bring them that comfort?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns the previous truth toward action. It is easy to agree in theory that our comfort should overflow to others, and much harder to name an actual person and take an actual step. Push students gently toward the concrete. Who, specifically, is God placing in front of them right now?

Help them see that they are uniquely positioned. The very road they walked, the illness, the loss, the doubt, the broken relationship, has given them a credibility and a tenderness that others lack. They do not need to be experts. They need to be present, having been there themselves.

Encourage one concrete step. A phone call. A meal. A visit. A note. Comfort is rarely delivered in grand gestures. It usually comes in small, faithful acts of showing up. The goal of this question is not a warm feeling but a name and a next step.

This is also a good place to remind students that comforting others is part of how the local congregation is meant to function. We are not a building or an audience. We are a body, and the comfort of God is meant to move through us to one another.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The Christian calling to actively comfort others, not merely to be comforted
- Ministry that flows out of personal experience of God's grace
- The local congregation as a body where members carry one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2)
- Love expressed in concrete action rather than sentiment (1 John 3:18)

Discussion Prompts

- Who has God placed in your life that you are specifically equipped to comfort?
- What small, concrete act of comfort could you offer this week?
- How can our congregation get better at carrying one another's burdens?

Question 5**Student Question:**

Paul writes that the burden in Asia was so crushing that he "despaired of life itself," and that it came "to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead" (vv. 8-9). What does it

mean to rely on “God who raises the dead,” and how does the resurrection give a Christian hope that reaches even into the darkest trial?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here Paul lets the Corinthians see how close he came to the edge. He was “so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.” He “felt that we had received the sentence of death.” This is striking honesty from an apostle. He does not pretend to a serene detachment he did not feel. He tells the truth about how crushing it was.

Then he tells us why God allowed it: “to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.” This is the hinge of the chapter. The purpose of being brought to the end of himself was to teach Paul to lean entirely on God. Self-reliance is a hard habit to break, and sometimes God loves us enough to let us reach the bottom so we will finally let go and trust Him.

Make much of the phrase “God who raises the dead.” Paul does not say God who improves circumstances or God who arranges good outcomes. He reaches for the strongest thing he can say about God’s power: He raises the dead. That means there is no situation so final, so hopeless, so much like a grave, that God cannot bring life out of it. The resurrection is not just a doctrine about the future. It is the ground of hope in the present darkest trial.

This is also where the gospel anchors our endurance. Because Christ was raised, we know the God we trust is the God who conquers death itself. The worst the trial can do is kill us, and even death is no longer the end for those who are in Christ. That truth can hold a person steady when everything else gives way.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The resurrection of Christ as the foundation of Christian hope in present trials, not only in the life to come
- God’s loving purpose in allowing us to reach the end of our own strength
- Reliance on God versus self-reliance as a central mark of mature faith
- Honest lament as compatible with deep trust, seen in Paul’s candor about despair

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean, practically, to rely on “God who raises the dead” in the middle of a trial?
- Why does God sometimes let us reach the end of ourselves before we truly lean on Him?
- How does the resurrection of Jesus give you hope in a situation that feels like a dead end?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where are you still quietly relying on yourself, your own competence, your own planning, your own strength, rather than on God? What would it look like, this week, to deliberately transfer your weight from your own ability onto the God who raises the dead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the lesson of Asia into the student's own life. Self-reliance rarely announces itself. It hides under competence, planning, and hard work, all good things in themselves. But there is a difference between working diligently and trusting in our own ability rather than in God.

Help students locate the specific places where they are still carrying their own weight. It might be a financial worry they are trying to manage alone, a relationship they are trying to fix by force, a reputation they are trying to protect. The question is not whether they are capable, but where their trust actually rests.

Encourage a deliberate transfer of weight. This is more than a feeling. It can look like prayer that actually hands the matter over, like seeking counsel from elders or mature believers, like obeying God's clear command and leaving the outcome with Him. Reliance is something we practice, not just something we feel.

Remind them that learning to rely on God is usually a slow, repeated lesson, not a one-time decision. Paul himself learned it through a near-death experience. We learn it through the ordinary trials God walks us through, again and again, until leaning on Him becomes our reflex.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The subtlety of self-reliance, which often hides beneath good qualities like diligence and competence
- Faith as the deliberate transfer of trust from self to God
- Sanctification as a repeated, lifelong process rather than a single decision
- Prayer as the practical handing over of our burdens to God

Discussion Prompts

- Where in your life is self-reliance most likely to disguise itself as something good?
- What is the difference between working hard and trusting in yourself rather than God?
- What would it look like this week to deliberately hand one specific burden over to God?

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul points to his "behavior in the world... with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God" (v. 12), and to the fact that his word to them was not "Yes and

No” at the same time (vv. 17–18). What do these verses teach about the integrity and trustworthiness that should mark a servant of Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In verse 12 Paul appeals to his conscience: he has behaved “with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God.” His critics had accused him of being fickle and self-serving. Paul answers not with clever rhetoric but with integrity. His life has been transparent, and his conscience is clear.

This sets up the matter of his changed travel plans in verses 15 through 18. Paul had intended to visit, then changed course, and his opponents seized on this as proof that he could not be trusted, that his word was “Yes and No” at the same time. Paul insists his word, like the God he serves, was not a wavering double-talk. His integrity reflects the faithfulness of his Lord.

Draw out the principle for students: a servant of Christ should be trustworthy in word and motive. We live in a world of spin, of carefully managed images, of saying whatever advances our interest. The gospel calls us to a simpler and harder way, to be the same person in private that we are in public, and to let our word be reliable.

Note that Paul ties his sincerity to “the grace of God,” not to his own natural goodness. Integrity is not self-generated. It is the fruit of grace at work in a life. This keeps the call to integrity from becoming mere moralism. We become trustworthy people as God’s grace shapes us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Integrity and sincerity as marks of a faithful servant of Christ
- The clear conscience as a witness to a life lived transparently before God
- Truthfulness in speech, reflecting the faithfulness of God Himself
- Christian character as the fruit of God’s grace rather than mere self-effort

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to live with “godly sincerity” in a culture of spin and image management?
- Why is a clear conscience such a valuable thing, and how do we keep one?
- How does God’s grace, rather than willpower, produce real integrity in us?

Question 8

Student Question:

Jesus said our “yes” should be yes and our “no” should be no. Where have you let your word become unreliable, making promises you do not keep or saying what is convenient rather than what is true? What would it look like for your everyday speech to reflect the faithfulness of the God you serve?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question turns Paul's integrity toward the student's own speech. Jesus taught that our "yes" should be yes and our "no" should be no, that anything more comes from the evil one. Our words are meant to be reliable, so that people can build on them.

Help students examine the gap between their words and their follow-through. Many of us make promises lightly, agree to things we never intend to do, or shade the truth to make ourselves look better or to avoid conflict. These small unreliabilities erode trust and dishonor the God of truth.

Encourage one specific area where their word needs to become more dependable, a commitment they keep avoiding, a habit of exaggeration, a tendency to tell people what they want to hear. The aim is not crushing guilt but a recovered seriousness about our speech.

Tie it back to God's character. We serve a God whose every promise finds its Yes in Christ. As His people, our truthfulness is meant to be a small reflection of His great faithfulness. When we keep our word, we make the faithfulness of God a little more believable to those around us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Truthful speech as an expression of the believer's likeness to the God of truth
- The danger of careless promises and habitual exaggeration
- Reliability of word as a witness to the watching world
- Integrity in small things as the training ground for faithfulness in large things

Discussion Prompts

- Where has your word become unreliable, even in small ways?
- How does keeping our promises reflect the faithfulness of God to those around us?
- What is one specific commitment you need to either keep or honestly renegotiate?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul declares that "all the promises of God find their Yes in him," and that God "has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee" (vv. 20–22). What do these verses teach about the assurance a Christian can have in Christ, and how is this confident assurance different from the false security of "once saved, always saved," given that Paul will later warn this same church to examine themselves and not receive God's grace in vain (13:5; 6:1)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, and it deserves the most care. In verses 20 through 22 Paul makes a rich and compact statement: “all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.” Every promise God has ever made is confirmed and fulfilled in Christ. When we say “Amen,” we are saying yes back to the God whose every yes is secured in His Son.

Then Paul piles up the language of assurance. God “establishes us with you in Christ,” He “has anointed us,” He “has put his seal on us,” and He has “given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” A seal in the ancient world marked ownership and authenticity. A guarantee, or down payment, was the first installment that pledged the full amount to come. The Holy Spirit living in the believer is God’s own pledge that He intends to finish what He started and bring us safely to glory.

Teach this assurance fully and warmly. The Christian is not meant to live in constant terror of losing salvation with every stumble. God has marked us as His own and given us His Spirit as the down payment of our inheritance. This is real, solid, God-given confidence, and students should be encouraged to rest in it.

At the same time, handle this carefully so it is not twisted into “once saved, always saved.” The seal and the guarantee speak to God’s faithfulness and His sure intention to save all who remain in Christ. They do not teach that a believer can abandon Christ, persist in unrepentant sin, and still be saved against his will. Paul wrote this very letter, and he will warn this same church not to receive the grace of God in vain (6:1) and to “examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith” (13:5). The Spirit is a guarantee for those who continue to walk in faith, not a magic insurance policy for those who walk away. Hold the two truths together: genuine, God-given assurance for the faithful, and a real call to remain faithful. The same Bible that says God seals us also warns that a person can “fall away” (Hebrews 3:12–14; 6:4–6) and be “severed from Christ” (Galatians 5:4).

The pastoral sweet spot is confidence without presumption. The faithful Christian can be deeply assured, resting on God’s pledge, while still taking seriously the call to abide in Christ. That is not a contradiction. It is the normal Christian life: secure in God’s love, and therefore eager to remain in it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- All God’s promises fulfilled and confirmed in Christ (v. 20)
- The sealing of the Holy Spirit as a mark of God’s ownership and authenticity
- The Spirit as the guarantee or down payment of the believer’s full inheritance (Ephesians 1:13–14)
- Genuine, God-given assurance for those who remain faithful in Christ
- The error of “once saved, always saved,” corrected by warnings to remain faithful (6:1; 13:5; Hebrews 3:12–14; 6:4–6; Galatians 5:4)

- The balance of confidence without presumption, security in God's love alongside the call to abide

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that the Holy Spirit is God's "guarantee" or down payment in our hearts?
- How can a Christian have real assurance without falling into the error of "once saved, always saved"?
- Why are confidence in God's faithfulness and the call to remain faithful both true at the same time?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across this whole chapter, the comfort, the despair turned to reliance, the integrity, the sealing of the Spirit. Name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to form you right now. What is the single change He is inviting you to make, and what is your first step toward it this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question asks the student to gather the whole chapter and let it land in one specific place. Resist the urge to let it stay general. The aim is a single, nameable change and a first step.

Walk back through the movement of the chapter. God is the Father of all comfort. Paul despaired and learned to rely on the God who raises the dead. He lived with integrity. He rested in the sealing of the Spirit. Ask which of these truths is pressing most directly on each student's life right now.

Encourage them to name both the change and the step. The change might be receiving God's comfort instead of numbing the pain, or relying on God instead of themselves, or comforting a specific person, or recovering integrity in their speech. The step is the small, concrete thing they will actually do this week.

Close by reminding them that formation is the point. We are not gathering information about 2 Corinthians. We are being changed by the God of all comfort, becoming people who, having been held by Him, learn to hold others. That is the disciple this lesson is trying to form.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Spiritual formation, not mere information, as the goal of Bible study
- The Holy Spirit's work in conforming the believer to the image of Christ
- The importance of concrete obedience in response to truth (James 1:22)
- Ongoing transformation as the normal Christian life

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this chapter is pressing most directly on your life right now?
- What single change is Jesus inviting you to make as a result of this passage?
- What is your first concrete step toward that change this week?