

The Book of 2 Corinthians

Lesson 1: The God of All Comfort -- 2 Corinthians 1:1-24

A man sits down to write a letter to a church he loves, and the first thing that spills out of him is not a strategy or a scolding but a doxology. Paul has just come through something in the province of Asia that nearly killed him. He will say a few sentences later that he was “so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself.” He had felt the sentence of death in his own bones. And yet the opening words of this letter are not a complaint. They are praise. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.” Here is a man who has been to the bottom and discovered that the bottom is not the bottom, because underneath are the everlasting arms.

Second Corinthians is the most personal letter Paul ever wrote. The relationship between the apostle and this congregation had been strained, painful, full of misunderstanding. He had changed his travel plans and been accused of being unreliable. His motives had been questioned. Rivals had crept in to undermine him. So Paul opens his heart, and the theme he sets at the very front of the letter is comfort. The word shows up again and again in these first verses, like a bell rung over and over so no one can miss it. God is the God of all comfort, who meets us in our affliction, not to explain it away, but to come near and hold us through it.

You know something about affliction. Maybe it is a body that is failing, or a marriage that is fraying, or a worry that wakes you at three in the morning and will not let you go back to sleep. Maybe you have prayed a prayer that heaven seemed to leave unanswered, and you have wondered whether God was paying attention at all. Paul does not write to people who have it all together. He writes to the pressed, the perplexed, the ones who have despaired. And he tells them that the very God who let him be brought low is the God who comforted him, and that the comfort was not for him alone. It overflowed, so that he could turn and comfort others with the same comfort he had received.

Read these verses slowly, and notice that Paul never pretends the trouble was not real. He names it. He felt the sentence of death. But he also tells us why he was not crushed: he had learned to rely not on himself but on God who raises the dead. That is where this study begins, not with a promise that you will be spared every hardship, but with a God who meets you in the hardship and will not let you go. Let Paul lift your eyes to the Father of mercies.

Group Discussion: Paul calls God “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort” who comforts us “in all our affliction” (vv. 3–4). When people go through a hard season, where do they usually look first for comfort, and what does that comfort tend to do for them over time? How is the comfort God gives different from the comfort the world offers, and why does Paul say it overflows to others?

Personal Reflection: Paul says he was so burdened that he “despaired of life itself,” and that this happened so that he would “rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” (vv. 8–9). Think of a time you came to the end of your own strength. Looking back, can you see ways God was teaching you to lean on Him instead of yourself, and how might that memory steady you the next time you reach the end of your rope?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1–24

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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.
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?

9. 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)?
10. 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?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Romans 8:18–25, present sufferings and the glory and hope that await us; Isaiah 40:1–11, the God who comforts His people and gathers them like a shepherd; 1 Corinthians 1:8–9, God who will sustain you to the end and is faithful; Ephesians 1:13–14, sealed with the promised Holy Spirit as the guarantee of our inheritance; Philippians 1:6, confidence that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion