

## 2 Corinthians

*But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus...  
(2 Cor. 7:6 ESV)*

*I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and your staff, they comfort me...  
(Psalm 23:4 ESV)*

### The God of All Comfort

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2 Corinthians 1:3-7

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### INTRODUCTION

Turn with me to the book of 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 1.

Today, we are going to look at the first few verses in this incredible letter.

As we do that, I want to ask you a question.

#### **Here it is - where do you find comfort?**

When things get tough, what do you run to? When hardship comes, where do you go?

#### **This isn't a rhetorical question.**

We are living in dark days, with fresh trials it seems every week.

Take a second, what has the pandemic revealed to you that you find comfort in?

Where did you go for comfort?

Netflix? Alcohol? Video games?

This is an important question because suffering is synonymous with Christianity.

The path of Jesus is the narrow path of suffering and hardship.

Throughout the Scriptures, start to finish, we see that following God, submitting our lives to Jesus and living according to His way, results in great blessing but requires us to endure great hardship.

-Jesus warned His disciples in **John 16:33** that, *"In this world you will have tribulation,"* and in **John 15:19**, he says, *"because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."*

-Paul will say in **Phil. 1:29** that, *"It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in Him but also suffer for His sake."*

-The apostle Peter will also tell us in **1 Pet. 4:12**, *“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”*  
So, where we find comfort when the fiery trial comes is a matter of GREAT importance, for the fiery trial WILL indeed come!

Paul was no stranger to suffering, as we will see, but what Paul will tell us is that there are just as many comforts available to us, just as many graces pouring out from the heart of God above, as there are trials.

***So if God has called His people to a life of suffering that results in blessing, what provision has He given us that we might endure?***

***Well, in our text today, we are going to learn what God’s comfort towards His suffering people looks like.***

Let’s turn to our text. Hear now the inspired, inerrant word of the Lord.

*“3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our 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. 5 For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. 6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. 7 Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.”*

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

So, what do we learn about the comfort of God?

**The first thing we learn about God’s comfort is this...**

### **1. Comfort Flows From Your Heavenly Father**

Paul begins his letter with an explosive start – he breaks out in praise!

“Blessed be God! Praise to God! Glory to God!” Craig’s passage last week began the same!  
Eph. 1:3

**Why? Because God is full of mercy, compassion and comfort ready to overflow to us.**  
Let me ask you, *what do you believe about the very heart of your Father in heaven?*

**For some us, we have a view of God that ignores this verse.**

**Many of us often fall into the trap of emphasizing certain aspects of God.** If you grew up in a Reformed tradition, you will primarily see God as wrathful against sin, full of justice. I did for most of my life.

I tended to underplay God's mercy and kindness for many years, because I did not want to appear soft towards sin and soft towards our need for repentance before a Holy God.

But what Paul says here, and what the Scriptures elsewhere affirm, is that it is in God's very nature, it brings Him the utmost delight, to pour out compassion and mercy on His people. It is in God's **character**, it is part of His **very essence**, to be merciful and to have compassion.

Paul in **Ephesians 2:4** will say this, *"But God, being rich in mercy..."*

**The Lord is wealthy, the Lord is affluent, the Lord is opulent – in mercy.**

He overflows with mercy! **Ephesians 1:7** says the Lord is rich in grace as well!

In **Exodus 34:6**, we read this story of **Moses asking God to show him His glory**. It says that the Lord passed by Moses and revealed Himself to Moses. God puts Himself on display for Moses.

*"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness..."*

To see God, to behold God, is to behold not only His holiness and His wrath for sin, but His mercy, His graciousness, His patience, and His love.

Church, you will never break forth in loud praise unless you first understand this truth – ***Your Father is abundant, is rich, is lavish in mercy and comfort towards you!***

I know some of you are here today, and you grew up with fathers who were not this. You grew up with a father who was abusive, angry, hostile, withholding love and affection.

Let me tell you, by the authority of God's word, that is not your Father in heaven.

As an aside, there is a powerful application here for you dads.

**Fathers, do you reflect the mercy, compassion, patience and comfort of God to your children?**

**Psalm 103:13** says, *"As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him."*

Part of what it means to be a father is to be compassionate! Is to be gentle, gracious and kind. YES, It is to teach, to be discipline, but discipline FLOWS out of a gentle compassionate desire to help our children become more like Christ!

**Col. 3:21** says, *"Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged."*

**Fathers, when your children stand before their Father in heaven, they ought to recognize Him because they have spent their lives being loved by you.**

Church, great mercies and comfort flows from the very heart of God.

**Deuteronomy 4:31**, says, *“For the LORD your God is a merciful God.”*

Comfort flows from God’s very heart. He has comfort for you today.

**Which leads us to our second point...**

## **2. There Is Comfort For Every Kind of Suffering**

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our 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.”*

**Do you see the variety in this passage?**

The God of “all comfort”

He comforts us, “in all our affliction.”

Comfort for those, “in any affliction.”

All comfort, all affliction, ANY affliction.

This passage anticipates affliction, but it also anticipates comfort.

The Apostle Paul was no stranger to affliction.

Look with me a few chapters later, **2 Cor. 11:24-29**.

Paul will list the many examples of his sufferings to show how he does not boast in what makes him look good, but in what reveals his weaknesses.

*“**24** Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. **25** Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; **26** on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; **27** in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. **28** And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. **29** Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? **30** If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.”*

See the litany of suffering the Apostle endured! This is the man who says, “God comforts us in ALL our afflictions.” The man who suffered greatly was comforted greatly.

Paul Barnett, in his commentary on 2 Corinthians, says, *"Afflictions are the portion of the messianic people, but so too, is the divine comfort."*<sup>1</sup>

As much as you are promised affliction as a Christian, you are promised comfort in ANY affliction. To suffer is to be Christian, but as well to be comforted is to be in Christ.

**Too often, people believe that their particular pain, their specific suffering, their unique condition is inconsolable.** Satan convinces us that there is no relief. He gets us to believe that there is no grace for us. This hopelessness, this discouragement, is what leads us into sin.

Satan wants you to believe that, "God has abandoned you in your situation."  
He wants you to believe that there is no comfort on the way for you.

But Jesus says, *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."*<sup>2</sup>

God is overflowing with comfort for ANY affliction.

### **What is your affliction this morning?**

What is your hardship?

What is causing you tears?

Is it infertility? Are you dealing with sickness? Are you lonely? Do you feel abandoned?

Do you believe that your Father in heaven does not see you?

Do you feel that there is no comfort for you in your pain?

**Psalm 23** tells us that God is like a shepherd who comforts us with His rod and staff. He leads us, He walks with us, and He guards us – even in the valley of the shadow of death.

There is comfort in ANY and ALL affliction through the presence of our Shepherd King.

**This leads us to our third point...**

### **3. Comfort Comes Through Christ**

Look at **vs. 5**, *"For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too."*

<sup>1</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1997), pg. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 5:4

Part of the reason Paul begins his letter this way is because Paul is trying to show the unity he has with the Corinthians. False apostles were trying to divide Paul from his own church!

**Paul is trying to demonstrate his unity with the Corinthians, and he does this by showing them how they share together in both the sufferings of Christ AND the comfort of Christ!**

Paul, as an apostle of Jesus, was called to a life of suffering.

In **Acts 9**, we read of Paul's conversion, and how God appeared to a man named Ananias and told him to go to Paul and lay hands on him for Paul had lost his sight.

Listen to what God says to Ananias about Paul's ministry, vs. **15-16**.

*"But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."*

Jesus had called Paul to suffer.

Barnett is again helpful here.

*"Just as the One whom God sent suffered in and for a world alienated from God, so, too, the apostle of the Sent One and the community of the Sent One experience the pain of rejection in that same world as they bear witness to Christ."<sup>3</sup>*

*"Just as Christ suffered in his ministry and death from forces hostile to God, so, too, the apostle, in continuity with Christ, suffered in the course of his ministry and proclamation."<sup>4</sup>*

Just as Paul was called to a life of suffer, so Christ's people share in Christ's sufferings.

Paul will make this abundantly clear to the church in Philippi.

**Phil. 1:29**, *"For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake."*

But we do not simply share in Christ's sufferings, but we also share His comfort. Yes, Christ leads us into suffering, but He does not abandon us in it.

**Christ calls us to deny ourselves, to pick up our cross, to leave behind worldly passions and pleasures for a narrow path of hardship and trial – but He also promises us His presence in that.**

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<sup>3</sup> Barnett, pg. 67.

<sup>4</sup> Barnett, pg. 75.

So therefore, we do not experience the comfort of Christ without the sufferings that He calls us to.

Listen to what **Romans 8:16-17** says, *“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,<sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, **provided we suffer with him** in order that we may also be glorified with him.”*

**See, you don’t get blessing without testing.** We are only comforted in pain!

**Some out there would have you believe that the way of Christ is not marked with suffering.** Some would say that comfort in THIS life (health, wealth, happiness) ought to be your experience.

But the Bible says that comfort is not something that comes to us WITHOUT suffering, it comes to us IN suffering. To follow Christ is to suffer because Christ suffered, and Christ mediates grace to His suffering people because He understands!

***Christ leads us in the paths of suffering which run alongside the streams of comfort.***

Many of us try to ease our suffering with all kinds of things. Pornography, social media, entertainment. These are all empty wells of comfort.

So Cornerstone, what well of comfort do you drink from? There are those of you here today who keep searching, keep looking, keep trying to find a well that can satisfy you in your suffering. You keep going back, trying to comfort your pain.

Spurgeon, in one of his sermons on this text, makes this point so powerfully,

*“But, blessed be God, we have consolation, we have joy in the Holy Ghost. We find it nowhere else. We have raked the earth through, but we have discovered nought a jewel; we have turned this dunghill-world over and over a thousand times, and we have found nought that is precious; but here... here in the religion of the blessed Jesus, we the sons of God have found comfort and joy; while we can truly say, ‘As our afflictions abound, so our consolations also abound by Christ.’”<sup>5</sup>*

Netflix is no comfort like Christ.  
Alcohol is no comfort like Christ.  
Drugs are no comfort like Christ.  
There is no comfort like Christ.

**There is no other comfort for a people suffering for the gospel than the giver of the gospel himself.**

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<sup>5</sup> Delivered on Sabbath Morning, March 11, 1855, by the REV. C. H. Spurgeon.

**Christ has an abundance of comfort for His people!  
He has provided for us in many ways!**

**He comforts us through the Scriptures** – **Psalm 1** tells us that the person who delights in the law of God, who meditates on it day and night, is like a tree planted by streams of water that bears fruit and never withers.

Do you run to the Scriptures in affliction? Do you meditate on God's promises through them? Do you study them daily? Are you filling your heart and mind with God's truth. Christ comforts us through them!

**Christ comforts us through His Spirit and prayer** – **Romans 8** tells us, *"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."*

When faced with trials, do you pray? Or do you shut your brain off through entertainment and distraction? Christ will comfort you through His Spirit in prayer.

**But this leads us to our fourth point...**

#### **4. Comfort Unites Christ's People**

*"6 If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer."*

Paul says that the suffering and afflictions he has experienced is for their benefit.

Paul endured plenty of sufferings as Christ's apostle, and thus he experienced much comfort. Because of this, Paul knew the comfort of Christ and was able to therefore comfort others with that very comfort.

**Suffering is a master's course in empathy. It's an education in edification.**

When we endure hardship for Christ, and experience Christ's comfort, we are uniquely equipped to help comfort others!

Have you ever wondered, "Why is this hardship happening? Why am I in this season of suffering? What purpose could God have for this sickness, for this hardship, for this trial?"

**One of the many purposes God has in suffering is that He equipping you to bless other believers. The Lord knows that one day, someone else will need comfort, and He is using your suffering for their comfort.**

There is a glorious unity that we can experience through suffering, and Paul knew this comfort very personally.

The comfort Paul had received had come not only through Christ, His Word, His Spirit, but it was mediated by Christ through the person of Titus. Paul had been so beaten and battered in Asia, so much so that Paul tells us in **vs. 8-9** that he had despaired of life itself and believed he had received a sentence of death. Paul's suffering was so bad that he had renounced all hope of survival!

### **Wow. How many of us have ever felt that?**

However, later on in the book, Paul says the coming of Titus was a fresh wind of comfort, for he came with news that the Corinthians had responded well to his "severe letter".

*"<sup>5</sup> For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within. <sup>6</sup> But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, <sup>7</sup> and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more."*

The presence and friendship of Titus brought Paul great comfort, which Paul recognized as coming from God himself. It wasn't only Titus, it was God who comforts the downcast, working THROUGH Titus to comfort Paul.

Barnett says,

*"God comforted Paul by Titus, who had been comforted by the Corinthians, enabling Paul in turn (by means of these words in this letter), to comfort the Corinthians – and indeed members of other churches – with the comfort of God."<sup>6</sup>*

### **Comfort brings comradery. Adversity is an adhesive.**

#### **There is a wonderful unity that ought to be experienced between God's people in suffering.**

As trials crash against the church, one of the ways God comforts us is that He gives us one another. We can turn to one another for comfort and encouragement, and from that shared experience of suffering and comfort we experience unity in Christ.

#### **What a shame that this pandemic has done the opposite.**

#### **What an embarrassment to God's people that we have not gotten this.**

The pandemic was a perfect opportunity to unite God's people. It was the perfect chance for us to learn this, to experience share the comfort of Christ with others.

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<sup>6</sup> Barnett, pg. 73.

But you know what the pandemic actually revealed?

**The pandemic revealed that the North American church has ZERO CONCEPT of a theology of suffering and comfort. We have lived in such worldly peace and prosperity, we have been so blinded by the illusion of comfort, we have ZERO CONCEPT of what this text means.**

**Because the moment suffering came, we started lobbing grenades, accusing, devouring and dividing against the VERY PEOPLE who God intended to bring us comfort.**

But God longs to use our sufferings to make us into a people unified by comfort.

**Listen – your suffering has purpose. These trials have purpose. They are intended to drive you deeper into the heart of Christ and the fellowship of the saints, not to drive you away from it.**

Our world is FULL of suffering people. God has equipped you, in your pain, to help bring unity and community to those who are alone and desperate.

Listen to what Paul says at the end of the letter, in **13:11**, *“Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.”*

So comfort flows from God’s heart, comfort abounds in every kind of suffering, comfort comes through Christ, comfort unites Christ’s people, and finally...

## 5. Comfort Produces Hope

Look at **vs. 7**,

*“Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.”*

Paul ends by saying, “Because I know that even though you share in our sufferings, you also will share in our comfort, we have hope.”

Paul has an intimate knowledge of the sufferings of the Corinthians. There is cultural pressure to forsake Christ, there is temptation to adopt a false gospel, there is persecution, hardship – and yet Paul has hope!

He has hope that his comfort will be their comfort.

Paul is saying, “I’ve tasted all the hardship you are enduring, and I have experienced comfort. So I KNOW that you will too. I believe that God is faithful. I KNOW that Christ will comfort you in your affliction.”

Later on in **2 Cor 4**, Paul will speak of the pains and sufferings of this life, and how our bodies are wasting away daily. But Paul says,

*“<sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”*

**Do you hear the hope?**

Yes, we suffer, but there is renewal day by day!

There is comfort now, knowing that Jesus is renewing us, but there is also comfort thinking about our eternal glory!

As the great hymn says, “Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessings all mine with ten thousand beside!”<sup>7</sup>

**When the seed of suffering is sown, the waters of comfort fall, and hope comes to life.**

**I think, there are probably two types of people here today:**

There are those of you who are suffering today. You are deep in the valley of pain, and you have no hope. You are blinded by suffering and pain and you cannot see any hope of comfort.

Hear this, “Don’t lose hope. Comfort will come. Christ has comfort for you, so do not lose heart. Lean in to Christ. Lean into His people.”

There are others who know loved ones who are suffering. Perhaps they are sitting next to you?

Hear this, “Comfort will come to those you love, and God longs to use YOU to comfort them.”

**A church that is sharing in suffering, experiencing comfort, encouraging one another, will be a church that shines bright in the world.**

It will be a beacon of hope to the suffering.

It will be a place where the suffering find comfort, the lonely find a home, and the person of Christ will be made visible through the comfort of His people.

**Maybe you have grown discouraged that the church can be this.**

Maybe I am naïve, but I still have hope.

I believe Jesus can do this in us.

I believe the Canadian church isn’t done.

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Obediah Chisholm | William Marion Runyan, “Great is Thy Faithfulness”.

I believe Cornerstone can be an example of unity and hope in a time of division and adversity. What Paul says here is that kind of community comes when the heat dial is turned up.

## CONCLUSION

The Christian life IS to suffer.

**Acts 14:22** says, *“through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”*

I don’t know your specific affliction, or your specific suffering, but I know the solution.

**Come experience the comfort that God has for you in Christ.  
There is comfort, there is fellowship, there is unity and there is hope.**

God has not forsaken you. God has not abandoned you in your pain.  
He offers you hope this morning.

Charles Spurgeon, in his sermon ‘A Faithful Friend’ says it so powerfully,

*“Christ loved you before all worlds; long ere the day star flung his ray across the darkness, before the wing of angel had flapped the unnavigated ether, before aught of creation had struggled from the womb of nothing, God, even our God, had set his heart upon all his children... You have often left him; has he ever left you? You have had many trials and troubles; has he ever deserted you? Has he ever turned away his heart, and shut up his bowels of compassion? No, children of God, it is your solemn duty to say ‘No,’ and bear witness to his faithfulness.”<sup>8</sup>*

Cornerstone, behold your God!

He is faithful. Amen. Let’s pray.

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Spurgeon, “A Faithful Friend,” in *Sermons of C. H. Spurgeon* (New York: Sheldon, Blakeman, 1857), 13-14.