

Message #3

II Corinthians 1:3-7

You and I live in a world that does not, for the most part, see the value of suffering. None of us actually want to suffer or like to suffer. In fact, most people do not ever expect to suffer and most people have a hard time coping and tolerating it when it hits them. We live in a time when most people not only want, but they expect instant relief and instant cure. If they don't get instant relief some people think of suing someone else or killing themselves.

The Apostle Paul had an entirely different perspective of suffering. **He believed that suffering was actually part of the plan of God for our lives and it enabled us to experience firsthand His comforting grace.** Suffering should draw each of us closer to Christ and suffering should cause us to grow in our faith. Suffering should make us better Christians. God has a purpose for suffering. When we suffer we should actually expect to see God comfort us in the suffering.

There is no one on this earth who has a life that is free from all trials and hardships. I don't care how much one has or how carefree the person is, the fact is all people suffer. People get sick or suffer some family tragedy. This is true for one who loves God and this is true for one who doesn't.

For the believer, suffering is part of the Christian life. It affords us the opportunity to experience the comforting grace of God. Martin Luther once said that one reason why God permits us to suffer is so that we would realize this isn't heaven, so we long for heaven. He said if there weren't any hardships or suffering, we would never want to leave this world.

The opening of II Corinthians is different from the opening of I Corinthians. **In I Corinthians, he began by thanking God for something, but in this one he begins by blessing God for something.**

Blessing God was a form of worship that was used in the Old Testament. It was the typical way that one would begin a worship service by offering praise to God. In fact, the word "blessed" (εὐλογητός) that begins **verse 3** is a word that means to speak well of something by offering praise (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 187).

The Apostle Paul wanted these Corinthians to speak well of God and offer praise to God. Paul specifically wanted the Corinthians to praise and speak well of the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now when we look down through these verses there are some words that keep showing up. The word "comfort" shows up eight times, the word "affliction" (θλιψις) shows up three times, the word "suffering" (παθημα) shows up three times (**v. 5, 6, 7**) and the word "suffering" (πασχω) shows up one time in **verse 7**. Just by way of observing these facts, it is quite clear that the point for which **Paul says we can praise God is for the comfort He gives when we are suffering affliction.**

When we look down through these verses we cannot help but notice the use of the first person pronouns—“we” “our” “us.” The Apostle Paul was personally suffering, had suffered and would continue to suffer. He was being criticized because everywhere he went, he suffered something. He was afflicted and burdened beyond anything that even he was capable of humanly handling (1:8). One of the things he learned during these experiences was that God was a comforting God who gave His comforting grace in difficult situations. This is why he begins by praising God.

PAUL BEGINS HIS LETTER TO THE CORINTHIANS BY PRAISING GOD FOR HIS COMFORTING GRACE THAT HE GIVES IN THE MIDST OF DISTRESSING CIRCUMSTANCES AND AFFLICTIONS THAT CAUSE BELIEVERS TO SUFFER .

Now the reason he brings this subject up is that he wanted to show that his life was intimately connected to their lives. His hardships were connected to them and all of their hardships were connected to a comforting God. Paul begins this epistle by offering two praises to God:

PRAISE #1 – Praise God for His fatherhood . 1:3

The first thing Paul does is to establish and identify who God actually is. I want us to think about this for a moment. God is a Father. He is a real Father and if you have believed on Jesus Christ, He is your Father. Fathers care about their children. Fathers love their children and fathers want what is best for their children. We may assume that is true of God. So if we are suffering or hurting, we may assume it comes from God who knows what is best for us. There are three Divine Fatherhood realities Paul brings out about God.

**(Divine Fatherhood Reality #1) - He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ .
1:3a**

Now there is one article “the” which stands before God and Father, which means God is not only the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, but He is also the comforting God of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now how is it possible for God the Father to be a father and God to another member of the Godhead? How is it possible that God the Son could have a God, who is His Father? The theological answer to this question is that Jesus Christ has two natures; one that is Divine and one that is a human, sinless nature. God the Father is God the Son’s Father and when He was functioning as our mediatorial representative, He could cry out “My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me?” God the Son looked to God the Father for comfort when He was on earth.

Any praise and worship to God is only allowed through Jesus Christ. In other words, God the Father allowed His Son to come to this world to die on the cross and He will only accept the praise and worship of one who acknowledges this reality.

(Divine Fatherhood Reality #2) - He is the Father of mercy . 1:3b

The word “mercy” (οικτιρμων) is one that refers to having pity and compassion on someone helpless and chooses to do what is merciful (*Ibid.*, p. 314). That is how God sees us—as helpless children who need His pity and compassion. **You will notice that the word is plural, not singular.**

What that means is that God gives His compassion to His people many times and many ways. God is a compassionate God who is mindful of the fact that we are but dust. He is a gracious and generous and compassionate father; not a harsh, severe, unloving, uncaring father who has no compassion. This point is good for us fathers to remember. God is not some harsh, rigid ogre who yells and screams and beats His children. He is a merciful and compassionate Father. We need to be too.

Understand this point; the God of the Bible is the One who fathered mercy. In other words, He is the God who originated mercy.

(Divine Fatherhood Reality #3) - He is the Father of all comfort . 1:3c

It is quite clear that this word “comfort” is a key word because it shows up here and then it shows up four more times in **verse 4**, three times in **verse 6** and one time in **verse 7**.

The actual word “comfort” (παρακαλεω) is a compound word comprised of two Greek words—a preposition and a verb. It is a word that refers to God coming alongside someone to aid and assist and encourage. So this word reveals that God is the source of that which can encourage, aid, help and assist us and that we have a right to call on Him to do that (*Ibid.*, p. 340).

The verb καλεω carries with it the idea of calling out to someone. It has two applications. When we are suffering God calls out to us and comes along side us to give us His comfort, and when we are suffering we need to call out to Him for His help. He is right there beside us and when we call out to Him we will experience His comforting grace.

We need to grasp this point. The God of the Bible is the One who originated “all” comfort. What this immediately tells us is that there is no circumstance that is beyond the sufficiency of God’s ability to give comfort. God is able to give comfort in any situation. In fact, without God there would be no comfort. There would be no comforting thoughts, words, or actions. He is the source of all of it.

PRAISE #2 – Praise God for His comfort to us . 1:4

To the Apostle Paul, times of trouble and trial and hardships were not times of despair, but rather they were opportunities for us to experience the great comfort and grace of God.

God comforts us in all our affliction. Murray Harris, who has written a great Greek Commentary on II Corinthians, says that all throughout II Corinthians the comfort developed by Paul depicts a “consolatory strengthening” (*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 143).

As we mentioned, there are a series of Greek words that Paul uses in this context to describe negative things that can hit a believer.

- 1) The word “affliction” (θλιψις) refers to things that put us under great pressure. Things that press upon us and make life difficult (*Ibid.*, pp. 207-208).
- 2) The word “suffering” (παθημα) specifically has to do with things that hit you, that affect your emotions. This word refers to negative things and pressures that emotionally drain you (*Ibid.*, p. 332).
- 3) The word “suffer” (πασχω) refers to misfortunate things that happen against you (*Ibid.*, p. 348).

By using these different words, Paul is saying if you are a Christian you will go through negative things in your life. Things will pressure you, things will press upon you and misfortunate things will hit you that will emotionally drain you.

But here is what believers need to know. In those very times and moments, God is very near to you and Personally offers you His comforting grace and strength. No matter what the affliction, no matter what the pressure, no matter what the misfortune, no matter what the pain, your God is waiting to display His comfort to us and all we need to do is to call out to Him for it.

Now the “so that” in **verse 4** (which construction in Greek is εις-το-plus an infinitive) introduces the intended and expected result of God’s comfort to us (Dana & Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 215).

The result that God expects in giving us His comforting grace in various difficult situations is so that we may be able to comfort others who suffer the same kinds of affliction. We will be able to point others to the same God who comforted us.

In other words, we suffer to receive comfort from God and this comfort is a stewardship that we are expected to pass on to others. We are supposed to be conduits or channels who know how to comfort others because we ourselves have experienced the comforting grace and strength of God.

Some people in the church, not just Corinth, have never learned this very important principle. They believe it is their job to be depressed all the time and share that depression with others. They believe it is their job to pass on their whining and moaning and complaining.

They never pass on any comfort because they are not walking with God in such a way that they experience it. I have known of Christians who are so depressing you wonder if they even know Jesus Christ or have ever experienced any of the comfort of God. Some people are so depressed they promote the idea that comfort comes from anti-depressant pills or some group therapy cry group, and not from God.

This is a slap in the face of a Holy God. God wants to comfort His people when they are low and God's people need to look to Him for comfort so they can share that reality with others. According to **verse 5**, we should expect that we will suffer because Jesus Christ suffered. If we would have lived during the days of Jesus Christ and actually traveled with Him through a day, we would not go through the day expecting only positive things are going to happen to us today. But we also should expect that we will be comforted just as He was comforted. **All comforting grace of God is connected to Jesus Christ.**

No matter what suffering we will ever go through, no matter how much suffering we will ever experience, Jesus Christ, Himself, has been there and done that far more than us. Whether it be physical suffering, financial suffering, emotional suffering, relationship suffering, our quota of suffering will never equal His.

When we track Paul's ministry through the book of Acts we know that life for him was not easy. He was one of the most afflicted men to ever live. He was insulted (13:45); chased out of cities by people who hated him (17:8-10); he was beaten and thrown into jails (16:22-23); he was stoned and left for dead (14:19-20) and there were plots to kill him (14:5). He suffered cold, shipwreck, betrayal, loneliness, desertion and hurt. God did not protect even His apostles from suffering.

He allowed them to experience hurt, hardship, ridicule, abuse and rejection. But He also allowed them to experience His comfort firsthand. **God did not comfort Paul in some of his afflictions, he comforted Paul in all of his afflictions.** They in fact turned around and shared this with others.

As Paul said in **verse 5**, "our comfort is abundant." That word "abundant" (περισσευω) is a word that means God's comfort is way over and above and superior to any other comfort conceivable or possible (*Ibid.*, p. 357).

So the Apostle Paul is saying what we discovered when we were suffering is that God, through Christ, comforted us way above and beyond anything that was human. Paul's sufferings enabled him to experience God's comfort through Jesus Christ and he in turn became a mediator to help others realize this.

Can you imagine for a moment if the apostles had thought like most people in this world think. Well, we are hurting, but we have learned that if you get on the phone for hours or go to a therapy group and talk to others you can feel a little better. We learned that if you go to a doctor and get on some medication your depression will be somewhat better.

We learned that if you go down to a bar and order one drink after another, you can drown your sorrows. That is how most people in this world think.

But never should that be the thought of the people of God. What we should learn and know is that when I am hurting I can go to my God and I can experience His comforting grace. When pressures box me in, when I worry, when I sin, when I fret, when I am depressed and hurting, I have learned that my God is right there and I can go to Him and He will help me and comfort me and then I can eventually tell others about His amazing comforting grace.

Now Paul does not stop there. In **verses 6-7** he brings out a profound point about suffering: **suffering is not accidental or incidental to the Christian life. Suffering is for the specific purpose of the development of our character.**

Suffering makes a very real contribution to our lives. God permits us to suffer for specific reasons:

Reason #1 - Suffering enables us to experience God's comfort . **1:6a**

Reason #2 - Suffering enables us to develop in our salvation . **1:6b**

Reason #3 - Suffering enables us to develop patient endurance . **1:6c**

Reason #4 - Suffering enables us to develop in our hope . **1:7**

Suffering teaches us to turn to God. Negatives cause us to look to Him for help.

God is a God who cares deeply about you. If you are struggling or hurting, call out to Him and you will discover you can praise God because He is the God of all comfort.

The most intimidating pressure and threat we will ever face will be the moment we die. There is only one Person who can give us comfort at this moment—Jesus Christ. Without Jesus Christ there is no hope and there is no help. But with Jesus Christ, death is our gain.