



SESSION 4

A CHANNEL OF COMFORT

▶ **The Point**

I can be a channel of God's comfort to others.

▶ **The Passage**

2 Corinthians 1:2-7

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

After a hard day, we know certain things will help us relax—a hot bath, soft music, ice cream. Some things just bring us comfort. I used to be a poor source of comfort. When someone faced sickness or death, I'd offer sympathy because that's what you're supposed to do. I might even offer a prayer, but seldom would I visit the person or attend a funeral. What good would it do for me to be there? I would have nothing to offer. I'd be more nuisance than help.

Then my niece died. It happened suddenly and without warning, and something changed inside me. Now, when I hear someone is sick, I pray with them instead of *for* them. I try to help in any way I can, even if that means just sitting with them in the hospital or funeral home. I have learned just what a comfort my presence can be to others.

The apostle Paul also highlighted the comforting role we can play in the lives of others. We can make a difference that's better than any comfort food.

▶ **The Setting**

Paul wrote 2 Corinthians from Macedonia in about A.D. 56. He wrote to the church in Corinth in response to false teachers who had infiltrated the church. In the process of promoting themselves, these false apostles had sought to discredit Paul in the eyes of the Corinthian believers and questioned his position as an apostle. In writing 2 Corinthians, Paul sought to both defend his apostleship and expose his accusers as false teachers.

What does the Bible say?

Comfort (v. 5)—Occurring 10 times in verses 3-7 (including “receive” in v. 4), the Greek term means to stand alongside someone and encourage that person as he or she undergoes severe trials.

2 Corinthians 1:2-7

² **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

³ **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.**

⁴ **He comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any kind of affliction, through the comfort we ourselves receive from God.**

⁵ **For just as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.**

⁶ **If we are afflicted, 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 that we suffer.**

⁷ **And our hope for you is firm, because we know that as you share in the sufferings, so you will also share in the comfort.**



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

2 Corinthians 1:2-3

² *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort.*

READ: 2 Corinthians 1:2-3 on page 107 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

GUIDE: Use the first two paragraphs on page 133 of this Leader Guide to offer additional insight on Paul's use of the words "grace" and "peace."

SUMMARIZE: Help group members engage the main themes from page 107 of the PSG:

1. "Paul followed the Greco-Roman practice of beginning his letter with a greeting, but he used two words that made this greeting unique: 'grace' and 'peace.'"
2. "We all need the grace that comes through the saving death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ."
3. "God's grace is an amazing gift we neither deserve nor fully comprehend. When we experience pain and loss, God showers His grace and mercy upon us. He redeems us and restores us in His timing and through His grace."

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 107 of the PSG: **"How does God comfort us in our troubles?"**

Note: Another way to approach this topic would be: "What are some specific methods God uses to bring comfort into our lives during times of trouble?"

TRANSITION: Read the final paragraph on page 107 of the PSG to conclude your group's discussion on Question #2:

As we'll see in the next portion of 2 Corinthians 1, however, God has another way He brings His comfort to others—one that may not seem so comforting at first glance.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
When have you been comforted by God?

2 Corinthians 1:2-3 Commentary

God is the source of comfort.

[Verse 2] Since Paul usually wrote to people from Jewish as well as Gentile backgrounds, it was common for him to include the dual greeting—**grace** and **peace**—in his letters. “Grace” was a variation on the typical Gentile greeting while “peace” was a typically Jewish greeting. Both words together represent all it means to have a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. “Grace” refers to the undeserved kindness and forgiveness we receive from God that saves us from sin and allows us to become part of God’s family. But the word also refers to the ongoing strength that enables us to live for Christ.

The Hebrew word for “peace” referred to wholeness and prosperity, especially in a spiritual sense. In the New Testament, the greatest peace is peace with God—what we experience in Christ when, as a result of His grace, we are no longer enemies of God. This peace is a result of both Christ’s work of salvation on our behalf and the presence of the Holy Spirit living in us (see Phil. 4:7).

Paul noted that both grace and peace come from **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. Paul experienced and emphasized God as a forgiving and merciful God who gives grace so we can experience abundant and eternal life. We experience this life when we accept the salvation freely offered to us because of the death and resurrection of God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Verse 3] Later in this letter, Paul reminded the Corinthians of the hardships he had experienced because of his commitment to Christ (see 2 Cor. 11:23-27). Those physical and emotional trials were such that anyone who heard about them would have wondered how a person could even survive. But Paul not only survived, he actually thrived despite the difficulties because of the **mercies** he received from God, his **Father**.

The Greek word for “mercy” means to relieve a person’s sorrows and/or to meet his or her needs. Paul presented our Heavenly Father as **the God of all comfort** who gives us what we need to continue our journey through this life when we think it’s impossible. “Comfort” in the New Testament refers to the actions of one who stands beside another who is going through pain or trouble. This partnership brings encouragement and especially strength to keep going regardless of the hardship. Comfort does not end the difficulty; rather, it gives a person the necessary strength to endure it. While any person can show comfort, it is most perfectly seen in the actions of God.

Paul blessed God because of the Lord’s continuing mercy and comfort. A word of blessing or praise to God would have been common for Paul and others with a Jewish background (see Ps. 41:13). But the ultimate reason Paul praised God was that **Jesus Christ** was his **Lord**. God the Father sent Jesus Christ His Son to earth to bring about salvation for all who will repent and believe, placing their faith in Jesus. It was through his relationship with Christ that Paul could experience the fullness of mercy and comfort that comes from God.

2 Corinthians 1:4-5 Commentary

We are called to be channels of God's comfort.

[Verse 4] God cares about us, His children, especially when we experience **affliction**. The Greek term pictures great pressure being exerted on something or someone. This affliction could be either physical or emotional. Though all believers will experience such struggles, we don't go through them alone. God is with us to encourage and strengthen us so that we can continue even in the midst of these afflictions.

Paul emphasized that God comforts us **so that we may be able to comfort** others who experience **any kind of affliction**. Notice that this comfort we give to others doesn't come from ourselves. Rather, it comes from God. We don't have to provide the strength or encouragement others need in their times of distress. We only need to **receive** it from God and then be available so He can provide His comfort **through** us to others.

In our culture, comfort is often thought of as achieving freedom from pain, suffering, and anxiety—accompanied by an emotional sense of relief and well-being. However, the comfort that comes from God is “a stiffening agent that fortifies one in heart, mind, and soul. Comfort relates to encouragement, help, exhortation. God's comfort strengthens weak knees and sustains sagging spirits so that one faces the troubles of life with unbending resolve and unending assurance.”¹

[Verse 5] Different people have different definitions of hardship. For some, having the Internet go out at home is considered a hardship, while others would reserve this term for a major illness, the loss of a job, and so forth. While this confusion is more likely a modern issue, Paul clarified for the Corinthians what he meant when he referred to afflictions.

Commentators have differing views on exactly what Paul meant when he referred to **the sufferings of Christ**. One possible explanation is that they refer to the difficulties believers face because of their commitment to follow Christ. And Christians today are still persecuted for confessing Christ. Consider the believer in South Asia who loses his job because he is a follower of Christ, the Middle Eastern Christian whose home is burned because of words she spoke for Christ, or the African believer who is tortured because he was publicly baptized into the faith. Of course, there are other ways Christians suffer because they proclaim the name of Christ, and there are other areas (including in the United States) where believers are oppressed because of their faith.

Paul emphasized that Christ's sufferings will **overflow to us**—that is, we will have an abundance or surplus of them. Paul went on to explain that these sufferings will be balanced out by the **comfort** we receive **through Christ**. Such comfort also **overflows** to us through Christ, thus we receive a surplus of His encouragement, strength, and motivation. For Paul, the surplus of comfort far outweighed that of the sufferings. Part of that comfort was the final, future promise and hope of God in Christ (see Rom. 8:18). Because of this abundance we receive, we, like Paul, are able to serve as channels of God's comfort to others.

2 Corinthians 1:6-7 Commentary

We can use our difficulties to comfort others.

[Verse 6] The Corinthians may have been among those who thought suffering was inconsistent with the Christian life. Apparently, they had questioned Paul's claim to apostleship because of his sufferings. Paul sought to correct this wrong thinking as he emphasized that God had a purpose for his suffering. He noted that his afflictions were for the Corinthians' **comfort and salvation**. Paul was willing to endure pain and hardship to fulfill God's mission for his life. The Corinthian believers were among the many who had benefited from Paul's sufferings, in that through those sufferings they had heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and received salvation. But rather than being grateful for the part Paul played in their salvation, they had turned away from him and embraced false teachers.

Because they had seen and heard of Paul's faithfulness despite his sufferings, they could learn from his example and remain faithful when they suffered. Often we forget that others are watching us when we go through difficulties. When we trust God is with us in our sufferings and believe He will work in them for our good (see Rom. 8:28), we can have a powerful impact on those who are watching us.

The **patient endurance** Paul mentioned does not refer to a reliance on some type of self-determination to get through a hard task or difficult situation. In the pagan world, the Greek term was used of a type of courage that was dependent solely upon oneself, which faced trouble without the expectation of receiving help from anyone else. However, in Scripture the Greek term translated "patient endurance" refers to an unwavering confidence (usually directed toward God) that help is coming from someone else. Here it means trust in God—patiently waiting on His promised strength and help. This divine empowerment is what the Corinthians would need as they followed Christ, because as they lived for Him they would undergo the **same sufferings** Paul had experienced.

[Verse 7] From Paul's words in 1 Corinthians, it often seems the Corinthians weren't really living for Christ. Their lives showed little contrast to the lives of pagans in Corinth, and it doesn't appear the Corinthian believers were actually experiencing any significant difficulty or opposition from unbelievers as a result of following Christ. Even so, Paul's **hope** for them was **firm**. This hope was based on God's work in them. Just as he emphasized to the Philippian believers (see Phil. 1:6), Paul was certain God would finish what He had begun in the Corinthian believers—the completion of their salvation. This would certainly include the **sufferings** of Christ.

With the closing words of this section Paul again emphasized the connection between **comfort** and **sufferings**. Only when believers experience the sufferings of Christ can they likewise experience the comfort of Christ. It is through these sufferings and the comfort God provides that believers are conformed into the image of Christ (see Rom. 8:28-39; Jas. 1:2-4). And when believers receive comfort from Christ, we not only have strength and endurance to keep going through our sufferings, but also are able to both comfort others who suffer as well and serve as examples to a watching world.

1. David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 60.

